

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to today's ceremony and thank you for attending. First of all I would like to say it is both an honor and privilege to be invited to speak here today on such an important occasion. I would like to thank the Burgemeester Jos Heijmans and the Comité Bevrijding en Herdenkingen Weert for inviting me here today. Of course, the reason we are all gathered here today is to commemorate and honor those many fallen soldiers and civilians that paid with the ultimate sacrifice of their lives in order to maintain the peace and freedom that we and our children enjoy each and every day here in the Netherlands. I believe we should also take this time and opportunity to celebrate and to realize how fortunate we truly are to have that freedom. Here, in the Netherlands, you have now had the luxury of freedom and peace for more than two generations. The freedom and peace that many people throughout the world crave but still do not enjoy the same way we do.

A great example of this is the people of the communist state of North Korea. As you are all well aware, the peninsula of Korea has burst back into the global headlines with North Korea and its dictator Kim Jong Un threatening the use of nuclear weapons on its southern neighbor South Korea and even my country the United States of America. I just left the Korean Peninsula about 3 months ago, after having lived there for 4 years, and being part of the US /South Korean Military Alliance that was formed more than 60 yrs ago. I can safely attest to the fact that the North Koreans do not enjoy the same freedoms we do.

Korea is still a divided nation at war and Seoul, where I lived, is only about one hour away from The Most Heavily Militarized Border in the World, and a nation without freedom.

North Korea: The hermit kingdom has taken the curbing of people's freedom to unimaginable levels with people having to watch every word they speak in public lest they offend some higher ranking official or worst, the president. For 50 years the country has been ruled by the Kim family with a kind of terror which seldom can be compared. Try to imagine IF the following examples, which are practiced daily in North Korea were applied here in your country today.

Any sort of intolerance or negative words towards the govt. or president is punished by the purging of three generations of the family of the offender. Punishments include torture, rape, murder and confinement for a long duration in inhumane labor camps.

You cannot own a passport or leave the country.

You can have no knowledge of the outside world due to a complete censorship of media, news and other forms of information.

You cannot own mobile phones and any contact with a foreigner is considered treason.

These are just a few of the examples that the North Korean people suffer each and every day.

Hopefully, this is a reminder to all, that more than anything else we might possess, or hope to possess, the blessing of freedom ought to be at the top of every person's list of things for which we should be thankful for each and every day.

Living in Seoul, for me was like living in any other city in the world; you get caught up in the hustle and bustle and focus on the daily routine of your own life. It was easy to forget the reality that you are living only 30 kilometers from a nation without freedom. That also led to sometimes taking freedom for granted. As easy as it was to forget the reality of suffering so close, it was also the strongest reminder of our freedom that I had. A reminder not only of the cost of freedom, but of just how fragile freedom is and how it must be constantly fought for if it is to be maintained. A perfect example of this fight for freedom is the many Military Veterans that we are honoring today.

Freedom speaks to me....what I can hear it saying, and what I hope you can hear as well, is

``don't take me for granted``

Thank you for being here today. Your participation shows that you are ambassadors for peace and freedom, and through our combined efforts we can stride forward with courage and determination to make peace and freedom a reality for all.

When we dream alone it remains only a dream; but when we dream together we can create a new reality.

I'd like to finish with a few words by Joseph Addison that have inspired me to maintain this struggle. I hope that these words may inspire you too.

"Let freedom never perish in your hands."