

July 31, 2024 at the presentation of a peace tree at the Eemsdelta College, Appingedam.

Dear Mayor Visser and Director Raangs

Dear students from Shunan and other attendees,

It is very special for me that I can address you today as the Dutch ambassador of a volunteer organization founded in Hiroshima in 2011, Green Legacy Hiroshima (GLH). GLH is a worldwide volunteer campaign aimed at spreading a universal message about the proliferation and non-use of nuclear weapons. This is done by planting trees that have grown from descendants of trees that survived the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. There are now more than 40 countries around the world where people are active in this regard. An example of the planting is in Geneva. Ban Ki-moon, the former Secretary General of the United Nations, planted a Peace Tree, a Ginkgo biloba, in the Ariana Park at the UN European Headquarters in Geneva on October 3, 2016. In the Netherlands I always look for special locations for planting a Peace Tree. For example, trees have been planted at the Peace Palace and at Noordeinde Palace in The Hague. There are now trees at Bronbeek, the Royal Home for Former Military Personnel and Museum in Arnhem and in Leiden, Maastricht, Zeist and Bennekom.

I will tell you in a moment how we got to Appingedam. But first I have to tell you how the project ended up in the Netherlands.

In 2017, a Japanese student, Shuhei Nishiyama, came from Hiroshima to Leiden to study law. He took the initiative and asked his professor how he could activate people in Leiden for this Green Legacy Hiroshima Peace Trees campaign. That's how he came to me and I contacted the Leiden Hortus Botanicus. With the help of Rogier van Vugt, the head of horticulture, it turned out to be possible to grow seeds. This project certainly could not have been carried out

without the Hortus. The tree that will be offered has been grown and cared for at the Leiden Hortus. This tree was grown from seeds of a Ginkgo that survived the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945 and whose roots have sprouted again. Those roots were probably protected from the radiation by the soil on top of them. So far I am not aware of any damage from radiation on seeds, in contrast to the Chernobyl nuclear disaster where there is still radiation.

When Shuhei said goodbye to the university, Larissa van den Herik very emphatically mentioned his commitment to this Peace Tree Campaign.

The question is of course why planting a Ginkgo in Appingedam was one of my wishes. It has been a long-standing tradition that Leiden University organizes lectures every year on November 26 in commemoration of Professor Cleveringa. The themes of these lectures are law and freedom.

Rudolph Pabus Cleveringa was born in Appingedam on April 2, 1894 and was a professor of law in Leiden. When the German occupiers ordered all Jewish employees of the university to be dismissed on November 21, 1940, there were fierce protests. Ten teachers, including two professors, were dismissed from their positions. Among them was Cleveringa's promoter Eduard Maurits Meijers. Cleveringa gave a fiery protest speech. Cleveringa knew all too well that the protest speech would not be without consequences. The university was closed. He was convinced he would be arrested. That also happened, but luckily he survived the war, just like Meijers. In Appingedam there is a memorial in memory of your fellow townsman Cleveringa.

I am really happy that we have also managed to offer a Peace Tree here, especially because students from Shunan are present! You have undoubtedly heard about the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the suffering they caused. Today your history comes close to the history of the Second World War in the Netherlands and also in Appingedam.

Shuhei recently wrote to me: 'But in order not to repeat the tragedy that occurred in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I am determined to devote myself to the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross to limit the damage suffered by those affected by conflict'. His studies in Leiden and his activities influenced his further choices in life.

I hope that through this meeting today you have been able to become acquainted with the activities of GLH and that this knowledge will also influence your further development. That is why I have brought a small gift for you students from Shunan, a Ginkgo leaf that lay on the ground under this Peace Tree in the Leiden Hortus botanicus. It is a reminder of this tree for you!

You, Mayor Visser and Mr. Raangs: I wish this Ginkgo a prosperous growth in this location in the center of the Eemsdelta College and close to the center of Appingedam. I am from Groningen and know very well that there was a lot of hard fighting in Appingedam at the end of the Second World War. When we look at this tree we can hope that that never happens again. I wish that the tree here is a lasting reminder of the pursuit of peace and justice and of course also of your fellow citizen Cleveringa.

Rinny E Kooi