Speech Sarah Adsett 25 oktober 2026

Hello, my name is Sarah Adsett, I am an intern for the municipality of Bergen op Zoom, working on a project about how to make Second World War commemorations interesting and accessible to the younger generation.
This question – how can we make a war that happened over 80 years ago resonant today - is one that many who work in remembrance are pondering. It is true that youth today do not have the same connection to war as youth in the past did, and that the memory of the war is changing, however this process looks a bit different than you might imagine.
Today, I want to share a bit about what I have learned through my research, and hopefully challenge some expectations you may have about commemorations.

Number 1 - the memory of the Second World War is incredibly flexible Commemorations tend to create an illusion of unbroken tradition.

Who is being commemorated, and how we feel about the war seems solid, immovable. This is however, far from the truth. This very ceremony has only existed since 2014. Beginning as an innitiative of the municipality and the Canadian Embassy, this commemoration allows the stories of the young people buried in the Canadian cemetery to be acknowledged and highlighted, seperate from other rituals. It is far from the only new commemoration. In 2016, lichjeavond, a ritual where candles are lit and placed by war graves was adopted and in that same period Indieherdenking, a commemoration focused on the often-overlooked experience of repatriates from modern day Indonesia was created. What is clear is that far from being immovable, unchangeable traditions, these ceremonies have always been flexible, adapting to highlight new stories and expanding for different rituals.

Number 2 - the memory of the Second World war is still alive

Eighty years on, there are very few people with a living memory of the war.
However, that doesn;t mean that the war has disappeared from the world around us. It is in the very dirt we walk on, upturned in the spring when shell casing are found. It is in the memories passed from generation to generation by those affected and in the silence of stories to difficult to tell. It is also alive in ceremonies like this, in the rituals we partake in to preserve it's memories and in the efforts taken by each of us to remember victims' stories.

Number 3 - there are countless reasons for hope

Sometimes I feel as though commemorations are dominated by discussions of war and violence happening today. Why do we commemorate? Because, in part, extremism, racism, and far-right violence are all present in the world around us making remembrance of the brutal outcomes of these ideologies relevant and important. Today however, I would like to take a slightly different approach. Commemorations are by their very nature, events filled with sorrow, as we reflect on the tragedy of lives unlived. They are also, however, opportunities for gratitude.
Each year that this commemoration is held is a success. More than simply a reminder of war, this ceremony, a marker of the last time BoZ was occupied, is a symbol of peace. Finally, what I found in my months researching was not a generation of youth disconnected from the world around them but youth who are deeply aware of current threats to peace. From protests around the world, to agitation for climate change action, young people today are deeply engaged in the

issues of our time.

Youth may be less aware of war in the past but who are nonetheless, concerned with shaping the future. Today I ask you to honor the sacrifice of these young men not just through sorrow, but through gratitude for 82 years of peace, and hope for the future.