

Annual Meeting of Japanese Citizens' Network of Museums for Peace
Message from Dr. Peter van den Dungen,
General Co-ordinator, International Network of Museums for Peace (INMP)

Dear friends and colleagues,

It is with pleasure that I am responding to the request to send a message on the occasion of your meeting here today and tomorrow.

In a few days, on Thursday, President Barack Obama will be receiving this year's Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo. Following the announcement in October that he had won the prize, volunteers and supporters of the Dayton International Peace Museum (in Ohio), decided to send letters to him in the hope that he would donate some of the prize money to their museum. On 18th November, the museum held a press conference when an official letter from the museum was sent to the President.

It would be a terrific boost for the Dayton museum, and for peace museums everywhere, if the new Nobel laureate would respond positively to this approach. Meanwhile, the world's media have introduced the (small) museum to a large public, and one strong message is that the efforts for peace education taking place in peace museums is vitally important, but these institutions are in need of financial support.

This picture is familiar to many of you. Not a few museums for peace have been created following the initiative of one person, or a small group of individuals, whose vision, drive, and determination made a dream come true. Many museums for peace are sustained by the invaluable work of their volunteers, as well as the small but vital donations by their friends and sponsors.

The museums associated in your Network are of the most diverse kind with a rich variety of exhibitions and displays, as well as activities and educational programmes. Your museums give meaning and substance to the phrase 'developing a culture of peace' and show what has been done and must be done to make the world a happier place for all. Your museums provide their visitors with enlightenment, inspiration, and encouragement, and in this way offer an educational experience which is truly priceless.

Over the years I have had the good fortune of visiting several museums represented here which all have left a lasting impression – of the striking and sometimes profoundly moving exhibits, but also of the devotion of the museums' staff and volunteers. Please allow me to mention a few examples only.

The Display House of the 5th Lucky Dragon, the Center of the Tokyo Raids and War Damages, and the Women's Active Museum of War and Peace, all in Tokyo, as well as the Maruki Gallery in nearby Saitama, are wonderful creations, addressing very different subjects, but united in their vision of a world without violence and war. In Okinawa I have been moved by visits to the Himeyuri Peace Memorial Museum (now celebrating its 20th anniversary as a new member of the Association of Japanese Museums for Peace) and the Sakima Art Museum, among others.

I have the highest regard also for the Oka Masaharu Memorial Nagasaki Peace Museum whose name commemorates a great Japanese peacemaker who was concerned with the fate of Korean and Chinese forced labourers, and who were forgotten victims of the atomic bombing of the city. Very different is Grassroots House in Kochi where, many years ago, I was happy to meet its founder and inspiring peace educator, the late Mr. Shigeo Nishimori.

I am happy to salute editors of MUSE including Mr. Masahiko Yamabe, Dr. Kazuyo Yamane and Professor Ikuro Anzai for their tireless work over many years and also for producing (with the help of others) an English translation which enables friends of peace museums around the world to be kept informed of the many developments in Japan, the only country where it is possible to speak of a peace museum movement.

On behalf of the International Network of Museums for Peace I am sending heartfelt thanks for all the splendid work for peace you are engaged in, and best wishes for a fruitful reunion.