



Kingdom of the Netherlands

Statement by H.E. Roderick van Schreven

Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations
at the occasion of the adoption of the UPR report of the Kingdom of the Netherlands at
the 21st Session of the Human Rights Council

Geneva, 21 September 2012

Madame President

Madame High Commissioner

Excellencies

Distinguished participants:

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to jointly discuss the consideration of our UPR outcomes today. It is my privilege to speak on behalf of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, which constitutes of the four countries Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten and the Netherlands. On the 31st of May, our Minister of Interior and Kingdom Relations, Her Excellency Ms

Liesbeth Spies, had an extensive dialogue on the national human rights policies with this Council.

Firstly, the Netherlands apologies for the late submission of our response to the recommendations received. Yesterday, some final improvements to the document were made. The secretariat has distributed hard copies of this document, which you will find in front of you. I shall ensure, in cooperation with the Office, that the updated document will be placed on the website as soon as possible.

In the Netherlands, international solidarity and tolerance, as well as the promotion of and respect for human rights has since long been embedded in society. We highly value the promotion and protection of human rights, whether they are civil and political rights or social, economic and cultural rights.

This tradition continues today. Our support for the so-called Shelter City-initiative - aimed at an improved protection of human rights defenders in need - is a good example. However, protection of victims alone is not enough: we also underline the need to combat impunity and ensure accountability for human rights violators. In that light, I would like to emphasize the position of The Hague - international capital of peace and justice - which hosts the worlds' leading international courts and tribunals, among which the United Nations International Court of Justice. I am also

happy to recall that the 10th anniversary of the International Criminal Court was marked in July of this year.

Similarly, in the everyday life of our citizens, we cherish respect for human rights. Today, in the Netherlands, school children of different origins define themselves by various sources of identity. I am convinced that this diversity enriches our society. For us, it is of great importance that these children grow up in an environment characterized by tolerance and respect: a society which allows ample space for differences regarding ethnic origin, gender identity, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. These are the same values we strive for in our foreign human rights policy.

In the Netherlands, we remain strongly committed to ensure the equality of all citizens, as safeguarded by our constitution. Similarly, we continue to promote integration, and encourage everyone to participate in and contribute to our society. We continue to combat domestic violence. We maintain our fight against trafficking of human beings and safeguard the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. Furthermore, we promote the full enjoyment of all rights by lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders, and combat discrimination on all grounds.

We are well aware that the job is never finished, and that we should persist in our efforts to bring our national human rights policy to a higher level.

Especially for that reason we are very satisfied with the long-awaited opening of our National Human Rights Institute. This accomplishment is of particular importance in today's context, as the Institute's establishment was recommended during our review of 2008. In our view, such an example clearly illustrates the power of the UPR mechanism.

The National Human Rights Institute will be officially inaugurated in ten days' time, on the 2nd of October. We are proud that the inauguration will be attended by both Her Majesty Queen Beatrix and Her Excellency, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Dr. Navi Pillay. Their attendance underlines the importance we attach to human rights, both in terms of national policy and international obligations and cooperation. The Institute will be an independent body, operating in accordance with the Paris Principles, and we are convinced it will provide an important contribution to our work. We look forward to a broad and open cooperation with the Institute and shall likely use its input in our interim report of 2014.

The Netherlands also attaches great importance to consultations* and dialogue with civil society, which we consider to be an essential link between society and government. For that reason we are encouraged by the interest of a number of NGOs to speak in this Council today, and look forward to further cooperation with them.

Madame President:

I have already briefly touched upon human rights within our foreign policy. Please allow me to elaborate further on this topic. Within the United Nations system, our commitment to human rights is exemplified by the fact that we were the largest donor of voluntary contributions to the Office of the High Commissioner in 2011. Despite the current economic reality, I am convinced that our contribution shall remain substantial in the future. Furthermore, we strongly support other elements of the UN human rights framework, such as the Special Procedures – the Netherlands issued a standing invitation to all -, the treaty body system, and the mechanism which is the basis of our dialogue today: the Universal Periodic Review. We strongly believe in the value of this universal instrument. That is why we strive to contribute to the UPRs of all UN member states. Additionally, we support non-governmental organizations that work towards assisting countries in implementing their UPR obligations.

The Netherlands appreciates the active contribution of members of this Council and the NGOs that contributed constructively to our UPR cycle.

Shortly before our UPR review in May, the Dutch government resigned. Because the current government - although care taker - highly values a full adherence to UPR procedures, it has made every effort to adequately react to recommendations received. On the 12th of September, parliamentary

elections were held in the Netherlands, and we are currently in the process of the formation of a new coalition. I can assure you that the future government will take up the opportunity of the interim report to elaborate further on our human rights policies and challenges.

Concretely, we have thoroughly looked into all recommendations received, and will continue to do so. In addition to our responses to the formal recommendations, we have voluntarily provided additional information to questions raised by delegations. We are satisfied that the vast majority of recommendations could be accepted, or that they are in fact in line with standing policy. Consequently, we welcomed those recommendations which we can practically implement.

As you can see in our Addendum and Annex, only a limited number of recommendations could not be supported. As a result of the outcomes of our UPR discussion in May, we have once more realized the amount of international attention attributed to themes such as combating racism and xenophobia, migration and asylum policies, and the position of women on the labour market. All these themes are highly placed on our national human rights agenda.

To the Netherlands, the UPR constitutes a continued process of dialogue, both from a national perspective as well as within this Council. In the years to come, we stand ready to see where further progress can be achieved.

The dialogue with all UN member states in this global forum, as well as nationally with civil society, the National Human Rights Institute, and other interest groups, keeps us focused and self-critical and forces us to keep looking into possible improvements. We strongly believe that the peer review element of the UPR creates an environment in which we can genuinely contribute to strengthening national human rights policies, all over the world.

Madame President

Madame High Commissioner

Excellencies

Distinguished participants:

The Netherlands would like to, once again, extend our gratitude to this Council and to all those involved with the UPR cycle of our Kingdom, including the members of the Troika: Benin, Thailand and the Russian Federation. We look forward to continued dialogue and cooperation with all of you.

Thank you.

