

**Letter of 12 December 2022 from the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation to the President of the House of Representatives of the States General on the results of the exploratory study on racism at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

Inspired in part by the Black Lives Matter movement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Senior Management Board decided to investigate what forms of racism exist within the organisation.

Because we are convinced that transparency can foster dialogue and help fight racism, we present to you the attached report. Considering the importance of this topic and the public debate on the matter, we believe it is good to proactively share the results of the study with the House through this letter. The study surveys the nature and patterns of racism within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The report uses quotations from in-depth interviews to paint a vivid picture of how racism manifests itself and how staff members at the ministry in The Hague and the missions abroad experience it. Racism and discrimination are unacceptable. On behalf of the Senior Management Board, the Secretary-General has apologised and expressed regret for the fact that it has clearly not been possible to provide a working environment in which there is no place for incidents of this kind. We will continue to reiterate this in discussions with staff members. Given that all forms of discrimination are prohibited by law and that the ministry calls for social justice around the world, it is all the more egregious that racism occurs within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In that light, too, we will do everything in our power to eradicate racism from our own organisation.

We accept the recommendations presented in the report. This is in keeping with the broader task and goal of being a diverse and inclusive organisation in which the composition of our staff is a reflection of society, and everyone is fully equal and able to maximise their potential. We are convinced that the vast majority of staff members at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Netherlands and around the world are in favour of a diverse and inclusive organisation where there is no place for racism. The report shows, however, that there is still work to be done to become such an organisation in practice. A project group will coordinate this work, building on the steps already taken in recent weeks and months and making use of expert advice.

The follow-up to the report will proceed along the following three tracks, and where possible will of course dovetail with the government-wide approach to tackling discrimination and racism, which includes the Central Government Code of Conduct on Integrity.

First and foremost, together with the Senior Management Board we will raise awareness and foster broad recognition of the problem, and initiate a fundamental cultural change. The aim of this is to remove barriers to discussing racism, eradicate racism and prevent both deliberate and unintentional racist behaviour by staff. To this end, together with senior civil servants we will communicate much more actively that BZ has a zero-tolerance policy on racism and other forms of exclusion and discrimination. We will carry out a broad-based dialogue on this matter within the organisation. Managers will be given the tools to make active efforts for a safe and inclusive working culture in which staff members can talk to and support one another. Staff will receive various forms of training on unconscious bias, active bystander intervention, and diversity and inclusion.

Secondly, we will improve and simplify the options for reporting and following up on incidents. The aim is to be able to adequately combat racism whenever it occurs and provide optimal support for staff in the unfortunate event that they experience it. We are improving the reporting structure, to make reporting incidents as accessible, safe and easy as possible and so that reports are handled as quickly and professionally as possible. We are also professionalising our system of confidential agents.

Lastly, we are using human resources policy to build an organisation in which there is no place for racism. In this regard, we view the process of recruiting and selecting new staff members as a way

to eliminate possible bias and obstacles, for example by allowing anonymity in the job application process. We also view policy and rules regarding the advancement of staff members up the rungs of the organisation as a way to promote diversity at management levels, especially among bicultural staff members. This includes eliminating barriers or, for example, by offering additional support in the area of professional development to those bicultural colleagues who would like it. When a staff member with a bicultural background resigns, we will explicitly discuss whether racism played a role in the decision so that, where possible, we can learn from it.

All of these actions will apply to local employees at Dutch missions abroad, staff posted abroad and staff in The Hague.

We are committed to ensuring that every member of staff of our ministry is respected and valued. In our organisation, core values and standards such as equal treatment, non-discrimination and respect must be put into practice and enforced and violations must not be tolerated. Together with the Senior Management Board and all staff in The Hague and at the missions, we will do all that we can to achieve this.