



Kingdom of the Netherlands

Dignity, Equality and Freedom

*The Kingdom of the Netherlands
Candidate for the United Nations Human Rights Council 2015 - 2017*

We pledge to:

- Practise at home what we promote internationally
- Promote a Council which works on the basis of mutual respect, engagement and inclusive dialogue
- Continue to work for a life of human dignity for all
- Uphold the principles of equality and non-discrimination for all
- Ensure the promotion and protection of all fundamental freedoms



‘Experience shows that, when a people enjoy human rights, there is a strong tendency to consider them as self-evident, as just a part of ordinary daily life. Apparently we only fully realize the true significance of human rights when we have lost them.’

– Max van der Stoep, first High Commissioner on National Minorities of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Former Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights

Foreword

by Frans Timmermans, Minister of Foreign Affairs

I am proud to present the candidature of the Kingdom of the Netherlands for the Human Rights Council for the 2015-2017 term. As a nation dependent on international cooperation, the Kingdom of the Netherlands highly values partnerships with countries across the world. This is the core of our commitment to the Human Rights Council.

Human rights are universal, inalienable and indivisible; they are the foundation of an open and free society. There can be no democracy, development or rule of law if human rights are not respected and promoted. Human rights activists, journalists and others who fight to protect the human rights of others are especially deserving of our full support.

I therefore believe that defending human rights is not just a moral and legal obligation; it is also a prerequisite for a stable and prosperous world. This is why human rights are an integral part of our foreign policy, and we will continue to work unremittingly to ensure that they are respected, both at home and abroad.

The Human Rights Council is an indispensable forum for promoting respect for human rights, addressing violations and abuses, making

recommendations and sharing experiences. We believe in a Council for everyone, which operates on the basis of mutual respect, engagement and dialogue. We value our interlocutors, and look forward to engaging with every country, whether large or small, because we believe that by joining hands with states and stakeholders from all regional groups, we can achieve something great.

In this booklet we set out our vision for the promotion of human rights and our ambitions for the Human Rights Council. Universal values are the starting point of our human rights policy, with human dignity, equality and freedom as the cornerstones of our commitment. We sincerely hope to be given the opportunity to contribute to the Council's work, and are prepared to bear the great responsibility that comes with membership.

I hope for your trust and your support,

Frans Timmermans
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands



The Kingdom of the Netherlands: key player in the field of human rights...

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is an engaged, constructive and determined defender and promoter of human rights. Our commitment to human rights issues is integral to our national and foreign policy, our development cooperation and trade agenda, and our long tradition of promoting international justice and peace. We work to further the protection and promotion of human rights at three levels: nationally, bilaterally and multilaterally.



...Nationally: Practise at home what we promote internationally

The Kingdom of the Netherlands has a long and rich tradition of defending, promoting and upholding human rights. The promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms are enshrined in our constitution. In addition to the judiciary, a number of independent institutions, such as the National Ombudsman, the Children's Ombudsman, and the Data Protection Authority deal with complaints and uphold human rights standards. In 2012 we also established the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights, which highlights, monitors, protects and promotes respect for human rights in practice, policy and legislation and examines complaints of unequal treatment.

We are party to the UN human rights covenants and nearly all human rights conventions. We remain committed to reporting in depth on our national situation to the UN treaty bodies and the Universal Periodic Review, and to following up on their recommendations.

As we pledged during our last review, we have recently presented a National Human Rights Action Plan and a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights. All the independent experts mandated as 'Special Procedures' of the Human Rights Council have a standing invitation to visit the Netherlands.

...Bilaterally: Bilateral and trilateral partnerships

The Kingdom of the Netherlands considers cooperation with other countries to be crucial in achieving tangible results in the field of human rights. We are committed in particular to promoting respect for women's rights and for human rights defenders, and to combating all forms of discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Through our extensive network of embassies we provide concrete support on the ground to countries wishing to develop national human rights policies and instruments.

In 1999, we appointed a Human Rights Ambassador to maintain close contact with partner governments and civil society. We assist other states in adopting universal human rights standards, and support civil society initiatives through our Human Rights Fund.

Where possible we also seek to work in trilateral partnerships, preferably in the form of cross-regional alliances. We believe that open and constructive partnerships enrich our international efforts. We look forward to strengthening such ties in the future.

...Multilaterally and in the Human Rights Council: mutual respect, engagement and inclusive dialogue

The Kingdom of the Netherlands was honoured to be member of the Human Rights Council when the Council began its work in the period 2006-2010. As a Council member we actively supported the observance of all human rights, ranging from economic, social and cultural to civil and political rights. We regularly initiated discussion and action on country situations and broad themes such as children's rights, violence against women, and discrimination based on work, gender and descent. We have continued as a non-member to actively contribute to the Council's work.

We are also active in multilateral forums such as the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women. We contribute to shaping and implementing the European Union's Strategic Framework on Human Rights. In addition, we join with partners to introduce resolutions when we can count on cross-regional support, like the biennial resolution 'Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women' in New York and the resolution 'Strengthening efforts to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage' in New York and Geneva. We remain a leading donor to UN organisations like OHCHR, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UNHCR.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands pledges to use its Council membership to respond effectively and rapidly to urgent human rights situations worldwide. We promote and support active and effective Special Procedures that contribute significantly to the work of the Council. We also attach great importance to hearing a wide range of voices in the Council; to this end we have supported the establishment of a voluntary trust fund to promote participation in its debates by small island states and least developed countries. We contribute to the fund and look forward to active engagement with these countries.

We support a Council which works on the basis of mutual respect, engagement and inclusive dialogue, encourages countries to call each other to account when necessary, and is always open to input from civil society. We reaffirm our continued support for the UPR system. No other universal mechanism of this kind exists, and we believe that the UPR contains all the right ingredients to be one of the best review instruments in the field of human rights. We believe we have a responsibility to lead by example, and will continue to work with the Council to further strengthen this mechanism.





Along with New York, Geneva, Nairobi, Tokyo and Vienna, The Hague is among the major centres of the United Nations. The city with the motto ‘Peace and Justice’ is home to over 150 international organisations. In 2013, the Netherlands and the international community celebrated the centenary of the Peace Palace, the ‘seat of international law’.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands pledges to...

Continue to work for a life of human dignity for all

Violence against women and girls

Women and girls, as well as men and boys, are still suffering horrendous atrocities, such as sexual violence, domestic abuse and human trafficking. The Kingdom of the Netherlands has taken several initiatives to address these serious issues in cooperation with the international community.

For example, we join with France every other year to introduce a UN General Assembly resolution on the elimination of violence against women. We also support the UN Trust Fund to Eliminate Violence against Women. During the meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2013, the Kingdom of the Netherlands co-organised a side event to raise awareness on this important topic. At the 24th session of the Human Rights Council we joined with other delegations to introduce a resolution on child, early and forced marriage, which gained the support of 110 countries. At national level we have adopted a number of innovative laws to combat domestic violence, child exploitation and human trafficking.

We pledge to continue our efforts, together with key stakeholders, to combat impunity, support survivors and prevent future violations, so as to end gender-based violence.

Labour

'Decent work' sums up the aspirations of people for their working lives, aspirations that the Kingdom of the Netherlands wants to turn into reality. We therefore actively promote the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, remain firmly committed to ending all forms of slavery and forced servitude, and are active in the fight against child labour and for children's right to schooling.

To prevent and combat human trafficking, both domestically and abroad, the Kingdom of the Netherlands supports increased cooperation with countries of origin so as to offer the best possible protection to potential victims. We have also appointed a National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings, established a national high-level Task Force and ratified the relevant international instruments on the issue. One way we try to eliminate human rights violations all over the world is by urging businesses to take responsibility for the issue in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines.

We pledge to continue the fight against child labour and human trafficking, promote the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and adopt a National Action Plan in this area.

Basic human needs: rights to water and sanitation

Where there is no water, there can be no life. With more than half of our population living below sea level, the Kingdom of the Netherlands understands the struggle with and for water. We are committed to using our water management expertise to help others. The right to water and sanitation requires that these resources be available, accessible, safe, adequate and affordable for all without discrimination.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands actively supports the work of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Water and the resolutions of the Human Rights Council and in the Third Committee on the right to water and sanitation. We have organised and co-sponsored side events at the Council to keep the spotlight on this human right and to turn promise into results. We are committed to providing access to safe drinking water and sanitation to 25 million people in more than 15 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, working through UNICEF and other programmes.

We pledge to continue our efforts to promote and ensure observance of the right to water and sanitation, within and outside the UN, and to share our knowledge and expertise with our partners at the UN. We believe in a human rights-based approach to the post-2015 agenda.



The Kingdom of the Netherlands pledges to...

Uphold the principles of equality and non-discrimination for all

All forms of discrimination

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is committed to tackling all forms of discrimination and protecting those in our societies who are most vulnerable. We will continue to raise awareness of the need to combat violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, because we believe human rights apply to all people without distinction.

We have signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and pledge to ratify it by 2015 at the latest. We will continue to work in the Council to uphold the principles of equality and non-discrimination for all.

We pledge to uphold equality and combat all forms of discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of race, gender and sexual orientation, and to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Gender equality and women's rights

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is convinced that full participation by women, including participation in political life, will lead to more prosperous and stable societies. Promoting gender equality is therefore central to our human rights policy. We were one of the first countries to adopt a National Action Plan to implement Security Council Resolution 1325, with a focus on equal political participation and female leadership as key elements in restoring stability after violent conflict. We are also holding an international conference on this issue in 2014.

Moreover, we have initiated a Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW) fund, which supports women's organisations in promoting women's political participation and economic independence and eradicating violence against women. We also envision a world in which sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are respected. We have appointed an Ambassador for SRHR and HIV/AIDS who focuses on this issue.

We pledge to continue our work in international cooperation to increase political, social and economic participation by women and promote gender equality and women's rights worldwide.





The Kingdom of the Netherlands pledges to...

Ensure the promotion and protection of all fundamental freedoms

Freedom of religion and belief

As stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, individuals must have the freedom to express their identity, as informed by religious or other beliefs. This includes the freedom to manifest their religion or beliefs in teaching, practice, and worship, and the freedom to change one's beliefs.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands seeks to promote freedom of religion and belief bilaterally by supporting organisations through the Human Rights Fund. In multilateral forums, we have introduced several resolutions on this topic, and support input by faith-based organisations.

We pledge to uphold an inclusive approach to human rights, without excluding people from any religious or other group, and to continue our support for freedom of religion and belief.

Freedom of expression

The Kingdom of the Netherlands strongly supports freedom of expression, opinion and speech as essential elements of the workings of democracy.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands co-founded the Freedom Online Coalition, aimed at facilitating a global dialogue about governments' responsibility for furthering freedom on the internet. Whether online or offline, we believe that individuals' opinions must never serve as justification for violence against them.

For this same reason the Kingdom of the Netherlands and partners in the Freedom Online Coalition set up the Digital Defenders Partnership, a fund to support projects that help keep the internet open and free from emerging threats, specifically in repressive and transitional environments.

We pledge to further promote freedom of expression online and offline as a fundamental freedom for all, both in the Council and through the Freedom Online Coalition.

Human rights defenders

The Kingdom of the Netherlands strongly supports individuals, groups and civil society institutions that are engaged in promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. The work of human rights defenders is indispensable, as they expose abuses and combat impunity for those who violate human rights. Human rights defenders are often oppressed and their activities restricted. It is therefore essential that we support their freedom of association and assembly and their efforts to protect human rights.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands offers concrete support to human rights defenders through its Shelter City Initiative in The Hague. This initiative offers much needed temporary shelter for human rights defenders under threat.

We pledge to continue to support human rights defenders both financially and politically, by promoting their contributions to the Council and by offering relief through our Shelter City Initiative.



The Shelter City Initiative was launched in 2012 in The Hague. Through this initiative, the Kingdom of the Netherlands offers temporary relocation for human rights defenders who face threats in their own countries. This offers them an opportunity to rest, regain their strength and expand their international networks, which should provide them with more protection on their return. Over the next year, we will expand the programme and seek to include other Dutch cities alongside The Hague, as well as promoting the spread of the initiative outside the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

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