

Introduction by State Secretary Dijksma at the UN Committee on the
Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in Geneva, 26 January
2010

(spoken word counts)

Madam Chair, distinguished members of the Committee, ladies and gentlemen,

As the State Secretary of the Netherlands Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, I have the honour to address the Committee on behalf of the Dutch government. I am glad that I have the opportunity to elaborate on the fifth periodical report of the Netherlands in pursuance of its obligations under the Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. This report covers the period from 2005 to 2008 and outlines the main policy changes.

The Netherlands holds the work of the Committee in high regard and my delegation is looking forward to a productive exchange of views.

Ladies and gentlemen,

A lot of progress has been made in the Netherlands regarding the elimination of discrimination against women since the last report has been reviewed. Among others, the current cabinet has implemented a several measures that robustly stimulate emancipation. *No lip service to, but bolstering emancipation: that is our aim.*

Firstly, I will address the matter of labour participation of women, a key, and measurable, indicator of emancipation. In the second part of my speech, I will speak about the safety of women.

Women who are exposed to violence and oppression have to focus on survival rather than enjoying life. They are not in a position to grow and develop. Because of the fact that being safe is a precondition for

emancipation, part of my introduction will go into legislation aimed at putting domestic violence to a stop.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In 1964 the electronics multinational Philips conducted a study among Dutch housewives. It showed that the average Dutch woman spent sixty hours a week doing the housekeeping. And that only 7 percent of married women worked outside the house.

Now, half a century later, some 70 per cent of Dutch women have a paid job. Married or unmarried, this distinction hardly makes a difference like it did in 1964. One thing is abundantly clear: women have made a substantial effort to catch up.

Our government has invested heavily in measures aimed at opportunities for combining paid work with caring for (young) children. For example, paid parental leave for both partners has increased from 13 to 26 weeks. Even more important, large investments have been made in childcare: the current government has allocated enormous sums to this sector. To be precise: an extra annual one billion euros is added to the already reserved budget of **two billion euros**.

Increasingly more young women prefer a combination of work and motherhood, a highly positive development. This increase has caused a growing need for high-quality childcare. Yet, we still have a long way to go.

It is true that girls have surpassed boys when it comes to school performance, but this development is not yet reflected in the labour market. Women and men start at the same level, but gradually, women lag behind, both in terms of salary and career prospects.

Within the civil service this is changing rapidly as a result of a specific policy to that end. The number of women in top positions is increasing rapidly.

Women in top positions are economically independent. However if we look at the overall picture in the Netherlands, only forty-five per cent of the female workforce is economically independent.

Dutch women often prefer part-time jobs of an average 25 hours a week. This means that they don't have to leave the care of children to others. It allows them to spend time with their children and contribute to the family's income. This so-called one and a half income model keeps women economically dependent on their husbands.

Why do Dutch women want to stay home with their children instead of working outside the house and being economically independent?

All of this can be attributed to the relics of the "breadwinner's" model, in which the family income was provided by the husband only, while the wife ruled the home. A wife who did not need to work added to a man's status. This bourgeois ideal prevailed in other European countries as well, but unlike France for example, in the Netherlands this way of life was rather quickly embraced by the entire population.

The relative equality and independence of Dutch women within the family also plays a role in their preference for working part-time.

However an interesting perspective would be a model in which both parents with young children work four days, the so-called two times four model. This would allow both husband and wife to contribute to raising their children and running a home, while they both have an equal position in the labour process.

As a state secretary it is not my task to impose this model. However it is my responsibility to assist in giving people freedom of choice by creating favourable conditions, such as proper childcare arrangements.

Over the years different measures have been taken. This has resulted in a patchwork of regulations dealing with childcare. There are nine regulations dealing with benefits for child and family support.

The economic and financial crisis is in this regard an opportunity we can and must seize. We have to move forward

Therefore I proposed the introduction of a school for the future, for all children aged 2 to 12 and offering everything to help them in their development. In this school childcare, education and sport facilities are combined.

I believe that such top-quality facilities would encourage more parents, and especially women to work more hours. Their children are in good hands and they are on their way to career prospects and economic independence.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our society desperately needs the talents of women. And therefore all women should have the opportunity to fully develop their selves.

Domestic violence is still an issue in the Netherlands. The government is aware that it needs to do its utmost to put this to a stop.

Important steps have been taken since the fourth CEDAW report. There are some new developments I would like to share with you. To begin with, I would like to mention the new Temporary Restraining Order Act, which went into force last year. This Act enables municipal authorities to impose a ten-day restraining order on perpetrators of domestic violence or child abuse. After those ten days, the order can be extended by a maximum of four weeks. During the period in which the restraining order is effective, assistance programmes are developed and provided for all those involved. These may involve family therapy, in which the entire family is counselled.

A second development is a law that is being prepared: an obligatory reporting code on domestic violence and child abuse, which will also cover situations of honour-related violence and female genital mutilation. This law is intended to offer guidelines for professionals, so that they learn how to recognise such forms of violence at an early stage and know how to deal with such matters. Within the context of this Reporting Code Act, provisions will be made for a "reporting right", which grants professionals the right to waive their obligation of professional confidentiality when they identify a case of domestic violence or child abuse.

Domestic violence needs to be tackled as early as possible. Women and children who are forced to live with violence and in fear of

violence cannot develop to the fullest. Lives are destroyed and talents go to waste.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Another form of violence against women is human trafficking.

Our parliament recently increased new maximum sentences for perpetrators of the prohibition of trafficking human beings. The Netherlands is taking determined action within the European Union to promote new and more stringent measures against trafficking in human beings. The Dutch Minister of Justice also advocated appointing an EU Anti-trafficking Co-ordinator, in order to tackle the problem at the EU level.

Ladies and gentlemen, Madame Chair

To conclude I would like to refer to the vulnerable position of lesbian women. Studies have shown that women who are afraid to be open about their sexual identity tend to suffer from health problems more frequently than others.

The Dutch government sets great store by the social acceptance of lesbian women. A topic that belongs on the agenda if dealing with the emancipation and participation of women. After all, the Convention refers to all women in the world, regardless of their sexual orientation.

Madame Chair I would like to thank you for your attention.