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STATEMENT BY

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Forty-fifth Session of the Commission on Population and Development
Agenda item 4: National experience in population matters

NEW YORK, 24 April 2012

Mr. Chair, thank you.

The Netherlands remain fully committed to the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. This is reflected in our national policy experience and its successes. It is also reflected in our international cooperation policy.

For the past decades, starting point for our national policy has been sexual and reproductive health and sexual and reproductive rights, for adults as well as for young people, including adolescents. In the Netherlands, adolescents have access to factual information on sexuality and health, to commodities including contraception and emergency contraception, to services including STI screening and treatment, safe abortion and counseling, as well as to prevention of mother to child transmission, to name but a few examples. Services are youth friendly: they are confidential, available 24/7, and affordable.

These policies have shown results. The Netherlands has a consistently high contraceptive prevalence rate, a low number of abortions, and a low figure of teenage pregnancies. We believe these policies have proven beneficial for public health, for an enabling environment for the rights of young people, as well as cost-effective investment in the future of our country.

These policies did not come about without years of public debate, and this continues as our society keeps changing. We keep evaluating our comprehensive sexuality education in order to address changes in youth culture, as well as changes in the composition of our society. These days, comprehensive sexuality education also supports young people within minority communities, by addressing issues which feature in their daily lives like virginity, gender equity and sexual diversity.

In the Netherlands we recognize and encourage the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders in promoting and respecting adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights. Parents matter. Research teaches us that young Dutch people seek advice from their parents when it comes to relationships and sex. This means we must equip parents to help guide their children in today's complex world of peer pressure and internet. Teachers matter. In my country, teachers are routinely trained by Municipal Health Services so they can teach comprehensive sexuality and relational education confidently. Religious leaders matter. Let me mention an initiative by six different Surinamese congregations in Amsterdam. Together with the Municipal Health Services they initiated training for religious leaders on how to discuss sexuality with their church members. They started this as they wanted to be able to answer the many questions on sexuality that they received especially from young people.

Mr. Chair,

These national experiences and results form the basis of our international cooperation policy on population and development. Sexual and reproductive health and rights is one of the four policy priorities, with a specific focus on sexuality and young people.

Furthermore, we invest in youth leadership and enable young people to have a say in decisions that affect them. It is their fundamental right to co-decide on these issues. If they are able to participate meaningfully in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies that affect them, these are much more likely to meet the true needs of young people and thus be more effective and sustainable; now, up to 2014 and beyond.

As a member of the Board of the Global Fund, I introduced the first Youth Representative to this organization. Today the Dutch delegation to the CPD includes young members of Rutgers WPF and CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, as well as the Dutch Youth Representative to the UN. I invite you all to meet these people, and to learn from each other.

Mr. Chair,

We are committed to the ICPD PoA. We are also committed to ICPD beyond 2014. That is why we intend to launch a joint partnership between young people, youth organizations, other civil society organizations, national governments and UN agencies. We call it the Youth and ICPD Partnership, and we do this together with CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality and with Dance4Life. This is not a financing mechanism. Instead, it is to become a broad coalition to strengthen cooperation and young people's active engagement in promoting and implementing the ICPD agenda up to 2014 and beyond. We believe human rights, including the sexual and reproductive rights of women and men, of boys and girls, are the starting point for this. The same goes, of course, for the MDG's beyond 2015. The PoA remains as relevant as it was in 1994.

Mr Chair,

ICPD was agreed by no less than 179 countries. Since 1994 we have learned much more about the exact issues and problems relevant to people's lives. This knowledge can only strengthen our resolve to work in global partnership to better the lives of the people we all serve.

I thank you.