



**PERMANENT MISSION OF
THE KINGDOM OF THE NETHERLANDS
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

235 East 45th Street, 16th floor
New York, NY 10017

tel. (212) 519-9500
fax (212) 370-1954

www.netherlandsmission.org

check against delivery

**ANNUAL MINISTERIAL REVIEW:
NATIONAL VOLUNTARY PRESENTATION BY**

H.E. Ambassador Herman Schaper

**Permanent Representative of the Mission of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
to the United Nations**

Economic and Social Council

2010 High-level Segment

NEW YORK, 28 June 2010

See the opportunity

Mr. Chairman, Madam Moderator, distinguished representatives,

Allow me to show you a two minute video clip about the Dutch view on gender and the importance of putting a focus on women and girls. Following the clip. I'd like to discuss five issues that stand out in Dutch gender policies.

I am looking forward to entering the debate on those policies directly after this presentation.

Let's have a look at the clip first.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hBd1HN7WJM>

The hands at the beginning of the clip belong to an old lady who lives in Amsterdam, our capital. You must know that up until only 55 years ago, married women in the Netherlands were considered legally incapable before the law, and female teachers and civil servants were obliged to resign from their jobs once they got married.

Since then the Netherlands has made a lot of progress. Today, women are part and parcel of all domains of public life: 41% of the seats in the Dutch parliament are taken by women; in public administration gender parity is almost complete; 53% of students getting a university degree are women; more than 70% of women have paid work for more than one hour a week.

Social reality being what it is, challenges remain, of course. In the Netherlands and in the world at large. Let me mention five of those challenges, all of which offer opportunities to act. And all of them illustrate why women are essential actors in society.

1. Women are agents of change

First of all, we have to recognize the power of diversity. One cannot design proper policies or completely solve a problem if only half of the population is involved in tackling it. We need to acknowledge that men and women can perceive issues differently, and that we need both perspectives to develop the most effective policies.

In the Netherlands, people, in general, believe it is essential that women can equally participate in political debate and decision making. But the reality is that in many places the viewpoint of women often goes unheard. Women still occupy fewer positions at top levels in politics, administration and business than men; there are cultural barriers and biases against the role of women in society that need to be broken, and so on.

For this reason the Dutch government and civil society act to empower women and make their voices heard. Both at home, and abroad. At home the charter Talent to the Top was launched in 2008. So far more than 140 businesses and public organisations have signed a concrete and measurable commitment to increase the amount of women at top levels in their organisations. Abroad, in 2007, the Netherlands –in coordination with Dutch NGOs- established the so called MDG3 fund, aimed at supporting the voice of women in the public debate worldwide. And we've turned out to be quite successful at that. If you combine the support to women's organisations by the Dutch government with that given by Dutch civil society organisations,

more than one third of all international support given to women's organisations worldwide originates from the Netherlands. But we would like this situation to change. We would like to see many more actors, governments, civil society organisations and businesses, to recognize the advantage of diversity and to increase their support to the voice of women.

2. The second challenge is that women provide an enormous economic potential, which is largely untapped.

Women are a critical success factor in contributing to economic growth and stability. In the Netherlands, we are faced with an ageing population. Therefore, it is an economic imperative for us to increase the labour force participation of women. This also increases women's economic independence, and thus even contributes to a more stable social economy. Only 12% of Dutch women with 2 children or more work more than 24 hours a week. Only 12%. There is an enormous challenge and opportunity here. The government has set up a comprehensive package to induce women not to leave the labour market when they establish a family, and to encourage them to work more hours.

3. Women can make conscious decisions on when and how often to get pregnant, taking into account the need to improve their own lives and that of their families

However, 200 million women worldwide cannot make this choice. They don't have access to contraceptives. We need to respond to this unmet need for contraception, which affects so many women all over the world. It is in the interest not only of the women themselves, but also of their children, their partners and society as a whole. We all know that educated women on the whole choose to have fewer children, that children from small families are more likely to go to school and receive health care and to have better nutrition. This is a reality that we cannot ignore. And it is one of the reasons why the Netherlands is the biggest donor of the United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA.

4. Fourth challenge: too many women are the victims of gender based violence. It is the government's core responsibility to ensure the safety of all its citizens, both in public places and in the privacy of the home. Obviously gender based violent acts, like domestic violence, human trafficking, honour-related violence and Female Genital Mutilation, are punishable offences under Dutch law. But we should try to not let it come that far. Therefore, prevention of violence against women is another core objective of Dutch emancipation policies.

Gender-based violence is caused by many factors. Key is the unequal balance of power between men and women and the prejudices men and women hold about each other's sexuality and rights. We see a commercialisation and sexualisation of the female body in the media. This puts the physical integrity and safety of girls at risk. It is estimated that in the Netherlands, one in every six girls and one in every twenty boys under age 25 have been forced to perform or undergo sexual acts against their will. First and foremost this is an individual drama. Moreover, this can have consequences for women that last a lifetime: health problems, unwanted pregnancy etcetera. The Dutch Government believes that it is a responsibility of parents to provide sex education to their children. And it feels that schools must also contribute to empower young people, girls and boys, to set their own boundaries and to equip them with life skills to defend themselves against sexual violence.

5. Fifth and last challenge: we should not forget that the greatest opportunities offer themselves where the gender differences are greatest. Today, around 10% of the total female population in the Netherlands is from an ethnic minority group. Women from Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and Antillean/Aruban descent make up about two-thirds of that 10%.

Their education level is significantly lower than that of women of native Dutch descent, as well as that of men from their own origin group. Special attention to close this 'double gap' can lead to great results. We focus on increasing their social and labour force participation, on increasing their self-sufficiency, as well as on the emancipation of men and boys from ethnic minority groups.

Abroad, we see that the inequality between men and women is most visible in conflict and fragile societies. In 2007, the Netherlands drafted a National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325. A truly *national* action plan, since it was the combined effort of three ministries, and more than fifteen Dutch civil society and academic organisations. We have seen that it is in these situations of conflict and fragile societies, where it is most important to appreciate women as essential actors of change in society. The peace in Liberia would not have happened without the pivotal role of women as agents for change. The same applies to South Sudan. Women can play a similar role in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Afghanistan. We are, on this score, increasing our cooperation with troop contributing countries. When peacekeeping forces improve their gender sensitivity, we can improve the impact of our missions and help create more stable peace and reconciliation processes. Another double winner.

Mr. Chairman, to conclude: the Netherlands warmly welcomes the attention of this year's EC OSOC session for gender. This is the right time to do so. When we look at MDG3 and MI G5, we see that it will take a lot of effort and political will to reach the objectives. But we would like to look at it from a positive perspective: if we put more effort into the gender agenda, we will grab opportunities to not just improve the position of women in society, but to improve society as a whole. Let us see the opportunity, and let us seize the opportunity.

Thank you.