



**PERMANENT MISSION OF
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Statement by

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**to the 53rd session
of the Commission on the Status of Women**

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference
in Women and to the twenty-third special session of the
General Assembly entitled
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the
twenty-first century”**

New York, 4 March 2009

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Let me first align myself with the statement presented by the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union.

Mr Chairperson,

The discussion on the topic of this years' CSW comes at a very timely moment. Equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men is on top of the agenda of many women's organisations and it is intensely debated in The Netherlands.

The economic crisis underlines once again that stakeholders around the world need to invest in an equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men. When the economic position of families is under pressure, old patterns may turn out to be even harder to change and positive trends might reverse. Men may be less inclined to make use of parental leave or other forms of leave to make more time available for family and household responsibilities and the pressure and need to work longer hours may increase.

Mr Chairperson,

During the High Level Round Table discussion, I spoke about the dilemma that the Netherlands Government is currently facing. On the one hand, we would like to raise the labour participation of women, but on the other hand, we do not want to limit their freedom of choice. Stereotypical assumptions about women's role as caregivers and men's role as breadwinners, however, strongly influence women's choices.

The Dutch Government is actively working towards a society in which responsibilities are more equally shared and women work more hours. In addition to measures to expand after-school-childcare and day-care I would like to highlight two new initiatives which we have introduced:

1) Tax measures.

By introducing additional tax advantages to discourage women and men to stay at home and to make employment more financially attractive, also for women. A transferable tax credit for the non-working partner will be phased out.

2) Creating male role models.

The Minister for Emancipation is actively promoting a model, in which both partners work 4 days a week. In this respect, he initiated an award for organizations or persons who play a visible part in promoting the role of men as caregivers. Furthermore, he is creating a network of male role models as ambassadors for the promotion of the emancipation of men.

Through these (and other) initiatives the Netherlands Government hopes to both facilitate and persuade Dutch women to work more hours and Dutch men to take up their responsibility for care giving.

Mr Chairperson,

Let me turn to the second part of this years' theme which is care giving in the context of HIV/AIDS. In the Netherlands, most people who live with HIV/AIDS have access to adequate health care, including medication, and are therefore able to continue to work and participate in society.

The promotion and protection of human rights, the empowerment of women and adequate prevention are key elements in the Dutch HIV/AIDS policy. It is impossible to take effective measures against the HIV/AIDS epidemic without taking into account the fundamental impact of gender inequality on the spread of the disease, its consequences and prevention. Gender inequality lies at the basis of the

feminisation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic as women are less able than men to exercise control over their own bodies and lives.

In addition, women are the ones who bear the heaviest burden in food production and care giving. The Netherlands recognizes the urgent need for robust policies and programmes to support households affected by HIV/AIDS. These have to be responsive to women's gender-specific interests and needs. Women affected by HIV/AIDS risk to lose access to shelter, food and health care if their husbands die. In this respect, Governments have to promote and protect women's equal rights to land, inheritance and property, thereby supporting women and reducing their workload. In this respect, Governments should also ensure that legislation and policies to eliminate and prevent violence against women are implemented.

Mr Chairperson, as the persistently high maternal mortality rates demonstrate, women's and girls' reproductive health status remains unacceptably poor in numerous countries and violations of their sexual and reproductive rights are rampant. This situation is exacerbated in the context of armed conflicts and internally displaced people. Reducing maternal mortality rates and ensuring 'reproductive health for all' will remain among the key areas of Dutch development policy.

Finally, I would like to draw your attention to the ongoing debate on strengthening the UN gender system in order to be able to effectively deliver on the ground. For all the issues that I have mentioned today and achieving gender equality worldwide, the expedient conclusion of the reform process is crucial. In 2005 our Heads of States decided we should act and improve the current system. Let us wait no longer and do as Member States what we also expect from the UN agencies and organisations; that is to actually deliver!

Thank you Mr Chairperson.