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UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review

Netherlands

Addendum

**Views on conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented
by the State under review**

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by the State under review**

1. The Netherlands stated that it had been an honour to be part of the very first session of the universal periodic review. It was of the opinion that the review had the potential to become a platform for the discussion of all the challenges and constraints, achievements and best practices of Member States in the area of human rights.
2. The Netherlands was reviewed on 15 April, as the interactive dialogue the General Assembly had in mind when it adopted its resolution 60/251 in 2006. A total number of 37 countries intervened and many issues were raised, including on issues that were currently the subject of debate in the Netherlands. It noted that the approximately 50 questions and 31 recommendations received would help it find answers to the challenges that the country was facing and to develop new thoughts and ideas for the future.
3. The Netherlands submitted its responses to the 31 recommendations to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). In that document, it tried to be as open and transparent as it had been during the review and earlier in its national report by substantiating why certain recommendations could or could not be supported. Many of the recommendations concerned integration, discrimination and migration issues, which were the subject of current public debate in the Netherlands. The Netherlands stated that it supported most of the recommendations and that they were generally in line with the Government's policies, as explained in its national report.
4. The Netherlands further noted that two of the questions that it received in April still needed to be answered. The first one was from Slovenia, which expressed its concern at the lack of sufficient mental health services for adolescents, the prevalence of drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. Slovenia also requested more information on programmes and measures to prevent or reduce drug and alcohol abuse.
5. The Netherlands assured that it offered a variety of education and prevention programmes designed for young people. Young people with alcohol and/or drug problems could turn to outpatient or inpatient clinics for help. The number of teenage births was relatively low and not rising and the number of sexually transmitted diseases had stabilized over the past two years. It also informed the Council that, with regard to mental health care, more resources had become available so that young people with severe behavioural problems could now have access to care more rapidly.
6. The second question came from Switzerland, which asked about the action plan on human rights education. The Netherlands pointed out that the action plan was currently being discussed within the framework of the human rights education platform, which was looking for ways to help schools to incorporate human rights into existing study programmes. Furthermore, it stated that a major challenge was posed by the limitation mentioned in its national report, namely that schools could not be ordered to include specific subjects in their curriculum. The Netherlands stated that it would inform the Council on progress in due course.
7. Moreover, the Netherlands took the opportunity to make some remarks about the universal periodic review process to date. Although a lot of work still had yet to be done, the Netherlands highlighted some trends developing in the first two sessions of the review that it considered to be promising for the future.

8. Firstly, it noted that the major human rights issues in every State under review had been raised in a constructive manner, showing that the intention of the General Assembly that the universal periodic review should be a cooperative mechanism based on interactive dialogue could actually work. Secondly, the Netherlands was pleased to see so many Member States actively participating in the process. Thirdly, it experienced an increasing openness and transparency as the sessions evolve. For the moment, the Netherlands considered the review a 'work in progress' that would ultimately contribute to the improvement of the human rights situation in all countries.

9. The Netherlands pointed out that it should be kept in mind, however, that the universal periodic review was an additional tool for human rights monitoring, intended to complement and not duplicate the work of the treaty bodies and the special procedures. Furthermore, the review should not detract from the mandate of the Human Rights Council to act upon gross human rights violations in specific countries.

10. The Netherlands was also of the view that it was crucial to have an open dialogue in the Council and at home; an open dialogue between States, but also between Governments and civil society. The Netherlands reported that, in its preparations for the universal periodic review, it had organized three consultative meetings with a total number of 24 Dutch human rights non-governmental organizations and other representatives of civil society. The last meeting had been held when its response to the 31 recommendations received was discussed. The Netherlands also stated that, directly following that review, the head of the Dutch delegation, State Secretary of Justice Nebahat Albayrak, had participated in a very useful side event for non-governmental organizations on the outcome of the Dutch review. The Netherlands expressed the view that policies designed through dialogue are more workable and effective than those conceived on the Government's drawing board alone.

11. While the Netherlands noted that several countries had followed a similar procedure, it strongly encouraged others to opt for and stimulate a more active involvement of civil society in preparations for the review, the review itself, the concluding outcome meeting and the follow-up of non-governmental organizations, and to participate in country-based side events on the premises of the United Nations Office in Geneva.

12. The Netherlands stated that it was essential for a productive universal periodic review outcome that the voice of civil society be sufficiently heard by the Human Rights Council.

13. The Netherlands concluded by repeating what the State Secretary of Justice had said in April. For the Netherlands, the universal periodic review was not a snapshot of a particular moment in time, but rather an ongoing process that should lead to a permanent focus on the promotion of human rights at the national level. The Netherlands therefore stated that it would not wait four years to write a new report for the next review, but would submit interim overviews to inform States and others on the implementation of recommendations and other relevant human rights developments in the Netherlands, including the pledges made when it submitted its candidacy to the Council. It stated that it would continue the dialogue that it has now started, including the one with civil society, and that it would include answers to the questions that were asked during the adoption of the outcome either in its first interim overview or in bilateral contacts to the extent that they had not already been addressed in its national report or in its response to recommendations.

14. Finally, the Netherlands thanked Nigeria, Pakistan and Peru, the members of the troika that had helped prepare the Working Group report on the Netherlands, the Council Secretariat and the staff of OHCHR.