

**Opening statement by Jet Bussemaker, Minister of Culture,
Education and Science, at the Dialogue with CEDAW Committee,
sixth periodic review in Geneva on Thursday, 10 November**

Madam Chair, Members of the Committee,

I am honored to present the sixth periodic report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women in the Kingdom of the Netherlands and I look forward to engage in a constructive dialogue based on the findings it contains.

All four countries that make up the Kingdom of the Netherlands are represented here today: the Netherlands, Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten. Our delegations include experts from many different ministries.

We are also pleased that many non-governmental organizations from our Kingdom have chosen to be here today, along with representatives from the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights. The commitment shown by all these stakeholders is exemplary of our shared mission to ensure gender equality in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In the lead-up to this Dialogue, broad consultations have been held.

I would like to start by clarifying the constitutional structure of the Kingdom. Since our last Dialogue, the structure of the Kingdom of the Netherlands has undergone major changes.

On October 10th 2010 the Netherlands Antilles ceased to exist as a country. Since that date, the Kingdom of the Netherlands consists of four autonomous countries: the Netherlands, Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten. One kingdom, four countries.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is a member of the United Nations, and as such it ratified the UN Convention on July 23rd 1991. The Convention applies to all the countries of the Kingdom. Each country within the

Kingdom is autonomous in its implementation of the obligations stemming from the Convention at the national level. Any questions relating specifically to an individual constituent country of the Kingdom will therefore be answered by the representative of that country.

[Ladies and gentlemen,

One month ago, the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie was in the Netherlands to talk about a remarkable essay she has written on the subject of gender equality.

The examples of gender inequality she describes in this essay mainly concern her homeland Nigeria, but they apply just as readily to the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

I am sad to say that discrimination against women, domestic violence and stereotyping are a daily occurrence in all four countries of our Kingdom. At the workplace. In our homes. In our schools and on our streets.

And these are abuses we need to address and to combat. In our Kingdom. And throughout the world.

In her essay, Adichie writes: *'Some people will say that a woman being subordinate to a man is our culture. (...) So if it is in fact true that the full humanity of women is not our culture, then we must make it our culture.'*

It is a statement with which I wholeheartedly agree. Working to achieve equality between men and women is a universal aspiration and the right to protection from all forms of gender discrimination is a universal right. Cultural identity should never be used to excuse the perpetuation of inequality, discrimination and violence against women.

There is another important reason why I embrace Adichie's statement: Issues of equality – whether they concern equality between men and women or equal rights for the LGBTI community – are increasingly being

presented in the Netherlands as a cultural achievement that is restricted to certain groups of people.

That gives a distorted view of the value of equality. For equality is not about making distinctions, but about removing them.

It is about embracing universal human rights and giving more people the opportunity to reap the benefits of these rights. And this can only happen if we insist on an equal position of women and men and of the LGBTI community across the social spectrum.]

Today's dialogue can help us be more effective in reaching our goals and ambitions in the field of gender equality.

At the start of February 2017, the Netherlands will organize a conference for NGOs, policy makers, municipalities, police officers, judges and other judicial officers to disseminate and discuss the Committee's concluding observations. We will use this conference to collectively generate ideas on how to follow up on the Committee's recommendations with a view to furthering gender equality in the Netherlands.

Let me now turn to the situation in the European part of the Kingdom, before giving the floor to my colleagues from the other three countries.

I will focus on the topic of economic independence of women. Other topics raised by the Committee will hopefully be addressed during the Dialogue, such as stereotypes and concerns with regard to sex workers.

In 2010 the Committee urged the Netherlands to create more opportunities for women to extend their working hours and to gain access to full-time employment. Increasing the economic independence of women is a priority of the Dutch government. Several projects described in the sixth report have since been launched and extended: *Eigen Kracht* (On Your Own), *De Tafel van Een* (Table for One) and a project aimed at raising literacy levels.

Another project is the Dutch Empowerment Tour. This Tour is aimed at increasing awareness about the importance of economic independence and to encourage women to increase their working hours.

Six major regional events were held, at which women from all walks of life came together to discuss the importance of economic independence and matters such as the division between working partners of paid and unpaid work.

The Dutch government has also entered into agreements with municipalities and companies which express a shared and active commitment to helping women return to employment.

Over the past two years, more than eighteen-hundred women have participated in the Tour and more than 120 agreements have been signed. The Empowerment Tour is now continuing at local level with ongoing support from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

The Dutch government has also introduced new legislative measures to improve care arrangements and flexible working arrangements in order to facilitate the combination of work and care.

Since 2010, the percentage of women who are economically independent has increased from 47.5 percent to 53 percent. The progress is slow but steady, and we are definitely heading in the right direction.

Madam Chair, to conclude, let me acknowledge that **challenges remain** for the Netherlands. Although the government has taken substantial measures to combat violence against women, too many incidents still occur. On November 18th 2015, the Netherlands ratified the Istanbul Convention and it entered into force on March 1st this year. The Istanbul Convention calls for a gender-sensitive approach to combating domestic violence and violence against women. We will intensify our efforts to achieve this goal.

The same goes for women in decision-making positions. The good news is that on September 30th this year, 32.8 percent of top positions in central government were held by women.

I can assure you that achieving this proportion required a lot of effort on our part. However, there is still much work to be done. Despite the introduction of temporary special measures aimed at the business community, the percentage of women on company boards continues to lag behind.

We look forward to discussing these matters further and to hearing your suggestions on how to make progress in this area.

Madam Chair, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your kind attention. I will now give the floor to Minister Hooyboer-Winklaar of Aruba.

**Opening statement by M.J. Hooyboer-Winklaar, Minister of
Education, Family Policy and Lifelong Learning, at the Dialogue
with CEDAW Committee, sixth periodic review in Geneva on
Thursday, 10 November**

Madam Chair, Distinguished members of the Committee,

It is an honor for me to introduce to you the sixth report of Aruba under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Aruba is a small country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, with approximately 58,000 females, representing 53% of the total population.

Six years ago, after serving only 3 months as Minister of Social Affairs I stood before you to present at that time, the fifth CEDAW report for Aruba. I committed on behalf of the Aruban government, our resolute efforts to work together with social partners towards full implementation of the Convention.

I am pleased to inform the Committee that much progress has been made over these 6 years towards this goal. At the same time it is evident that some of the challenges Aruba faces with regards to Women's rights are not only universal, they are also challenges that continue to span generations.

I would like to briefly highlight some important areas of both progress and challenges with regard to the implementation of the Convention.

In 2011, Aruba introduced The Centre for Women's Development, a government agency tasked with providing a variety of cross-departmental services for women. This Centre has reached over 12.000 women and is actively providing 800 women with various services, everything from free legal service, to job-skills training, to group therapy for domestic abuse survivors. This agency continues to work on educating, coaching, guiding and inspiring women from various social economic backgrounds.

In 2012, UNICEF conducted their research for their Situation Analysis of the State of Children and Women in Aruba. The findings of the UNICEF human rights-based analysis on the situation of women and children in Aruba has shaped new policy and has assisted in addressing inequities in current laws and government policies.

A comprehensive policy plan for Aruban youth has also been developed based on recommendations from UNICEF's assessment.

Madam Chair, we are glad to inform, that on the Committee's recommendation, a commission has been appointed with the task of

developing an integrated national gender policy. Consultations are being held with the relevant stakeholders on the areas identified as essential for the protection and promotion of women's rights, including the combatting of violence against women, participation in public and political life and empowering of women and the girl child.

Much needed progress has been made through legislative changes to our Civil Code.

With the parliamentary adoption of an amendment to the Civil Code concerning the law of persons and family in September 2016, registered partnership has been made possible for the civil unions of same sex and heterosexual couples and is legally recognized. However, it must be noted that the amendment to this law came after an intense public debate pitting religious leaders and congregants against LBGT activists and other citizens supportive of this amendment. The arguments used to maintain discriminatory practices against members of the LBGT community exposed an undercurrent of staunch community beliefs that continue to exist despite the progress that has been made in many societal areas, including women's rights and LBGT rights.

With the amendment of the law on family name, parents may choose between the family name of the father and that of the mother, while previously the child automatically took the father's name when he or she was born in wedlock or was acknowledged by the father. The new law also prohibits corporal punishment in the family setting and establishes by law an advice and reporting center for child abuse.

The presence of quality childcare services are critical to economic development and increased female labor participation, especially when there are 29,9 % children being raised primarily by a mother. The presence of child and daycare centers requires regulation and supervision.

Draft legislation has been submitted to parliament for approval. We anticipate this legislation to be approved in early 2017.

Furthermore, the government seeks to create more opportunities for persons on government financial assistance to enter the labor market. The government offers young women who are welfare recipients and have no formal education the opportunity to finish school and enroll into the labor market by prolonging the assistance whilst attending school. We are currently working on a new policy that will waive university tuition for single parents, of which 92% are women.

Distinguished members of the Committee, compliance with and protection of women's rights is a continuous process in which we encounter many challenges. Discrimination against women is a persistent threat that requires its continued presence on the public agenda. I am currently the only female minister in a cabinet of 9. In my previous term, I was the only female minister in a cabinet of 7. My predecessor was the only female minister during her term. This is how it has been since Aruba formed its first autonomous government in 1986. There is still much left to accomplish; not only in the area of political participation, but also political representation. The world needs female political leaders. Perhaps there has never been a time where that is more true. While Aruba has a female population of 53%, only 27% of the votes during general elections goes to female candidates. We hope to continue to raise awareness within our society that gender equality matters and is the best and only way to creating well-being for all our citizens, coinciding with the sustainable development goals.

Madam Chair, Distinguished Committee, the government continues to work diligently towards the enhancement of women's rights and holds your views and recommendations in this regard in high esteem.

I thank you for your attention. I will now give the floor to Ms. Juliet-Pablo of Curacao.

**Opening statement by Jeanette Juliet-Pablo, Head of Delegation
Curaçao, at the Dialogue with CEDAW Committee, sixth periodic
review in Geneva on Thursday, 10 November**

Madam Chair,

The autonomous status obtained since 10th of October 2010 involved political, governmental and constitutional changes. The new country Curaçao is facing new challenges and new opportunities that we must address together as one nation.

The government of Curaçao therefore intends to strengthen in particular the vulnerable groups in our society and support them. Improving the status of women in our society is a continuing process. The compliance with the CEDAW is very important for the country of Curaçao despite its actual challenges such as high unemployment among youngster and especially young women.

Poverty worldwide has a female face and this is also applicable for Curaçao. Breaking this vicious circle of poverty requires insight and vision but is also highly dependent on the strength and the voice of the woman and her family. Therefore, the spirit of the convention (CEDAW) remains a compass to develop the appropriate strategies and actions to support and improve the status of women in our society.

The actions resulting from them are not only the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Development, Labor and Welfare but generally it should be interlaced into all ministries. In a society that strives for social inclusion the coordination and monitoring between the government, NGO, civil society and private organizations is imperative.

What we are experiencing worldwide today was not the social and economic reality in the seventies and the eighties when the Cedaw was established; the challenges nowadays are even more multifaceted than before.

Considering the above-mentioned context, there are groups and domains that need our attention:

- The status of the young single mother versus the huge aging population.
- The opportunities for further education and personal development of women in relation to their reproductive rights and their future prospects.
- The increase of child abuse and domestic violence and policies for persecution of the perpetrators.

Two years ago a collective package of fiscal incentives was introduced to stimulate employers to hire young people. Creating new jobs for young people provides future and security.

Other issues that draw our attention are: a new gender policy, supported by all ministries.

The national machinery was transferred to Bureau of Women's Affairs before 2010 and will again be on the agenda.

National plan against Violence

The national plan against violence to women is ready. The implementation of this plan will be launched in an integrated form by January 2017. The realization of this plan was a joint effort of both government and NGOs.

Youth and Employment

With the introduction of the program "Mil Hoben na Trabou" in 2014, the Ministry of Social Development Labor and Welfare in collaboration with

several entrepreneurs, small and large companies on the island are actively incorporating and guiding young people into the labor market.

Justice/Human Trafficking and smuggling persons

Women and children are more likely than men victims of trafficking and smuggling. In 2011, an MOU was signed by the Ministers of Justice of Aruba, Curaçao, St. Martin and the Netherlands. In this context, various ministerial consultations have been held and for the coming year more awareness campaigns will be organized focusing on risk groups, residents, tourists and organizations in the economic sectors.

Madam Chair, the issues related to eliminating unequal treatment of women are broad, challenging but also delicate. It requires the right policies and priorities of the government and strong NGO network with a steady and solid voice, to mutually improve the position of the Curaçao woman in a sustainable way.

Thank you Madam Chair, I'll give the floor to the delegation of St. Maarten.

**Opening statement Secretary General Ms. Joy Arnell, head of
delegation of Sint Maarten, at the Dialogue with CEDAW
Committee, sixth periodic review in Geneva on Thursday, 10
November**

On behalf of the Government of Sint Maarten, I would like to express our gratitude to this esteemed Committee for the admirable work you continue to carry out to ensuring a fair and equitable place for women where they are able to advance and develop towards their full potential.

Sint Maarten as a newly autonomous country within in the Kingdom of the Netherlands is proud to have submitted our very first independent contribution to the wider Kingdom report.

A large part of this six-year period has been dedicated to ensuring that all international legal obligations and legislation in support of such legislation is put into place. To that end, Sint Maarten is proud to share a number of these new and/ or amended pieces of legislation and policy changes.

The government of Sint Maarten believes strongly in the right of women to equal and unobstructed opportunity. This is enshrined in Article 16 of our new Constitution where it's expressly states that discrimination on the grounds of sex shall not be permitted.

In the previous report it was mentioned that a new penal code was being adopted and effective June 1st 2015 this new penal code has come into force. In this new penal code a number of the committee's recommendations have been taken up. For example, Sint Maarten has not only broadened its legal definition of human trafficking but also enacted anti-trafficking as well as anti-smuggling legislation. In the new penal code not only is the criminal offense addressed but so is the different forms of participation, penalties, as well as aggravating circumstances. This is important as women are most likely to be the victims of trafficking and smuggling.

Moreover a National Reporting Bureau as recorded in the report was recently opened. This arm of the Ministry of Justice not only leads national campaigns against human trafficking and smuggling but acts as a place where persons can report incidences. These efforts has led to the elevation of Sint Maarten from tier 2 Watch List to tier 1 in the US Trafficking in Persons Report of 2016. This reclassification underscores Sint Maarten commitment to combatting human trafficking and smuggling and ensuring a safe and equitable society.

In January 2014, direct aid from the Dutch Government, a major source of financing for social initiatives and projects, ceased. There was of course concerns that this would undermine the work of NGOs, particularly those whose work put them at the forefront of women's issues, most notably Safe Haven whose mission it is to protect, consul, and empower victims of domestic violence and their children. Sint Maarten is proud to announce that local government budget support as well as a purpose-made Development Fund has since been created ensuring that these NGOs are properly funded and are able to carry out their specific mandates and good works.

Sint Maarten would also like to report that extensive work has been carried out to address concerns surrounding the legal framework governing the functionality of prostitution and abortion.

Prostitution has under the new penal been decriminalized and efforts continue to be made to ensure a safe and regulated industry. The aforementioned Reporting Bureau and the Ministry of Health, Social Affairs, and Labor play an important role in this regard.

In the case of abortion, the Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy is being finalized and will outline awareness and access services as well as counseling and aftercare. Sint Maarten believes it is important that in anticipation of this policy and possible change to our legislation, the ability to efficiently adapt culturally to these changes, will be necessary. Consequently education and sensitization will remain the main tools in the proper regulation of these two services as part of the greater program of sexual health mainstreaming.

These initiatives focuses on bringing sexual health education more squarely into the classroom, curbing stigmatization on topics such as teenage pregnancy and HIV/AIDS, both of which are more likely to affect and impede the opportunities and progress of lower income girls. To that end, girls are now encouraged to stay in school or are guided by their

respective school boards and counselors to return to school following any number of pregnancies. This ensures any possible discrimination of girls, particularly in light of the fact that compulsory education is now in force in Sint Maarten, is curbed. Having said that mitigating teenage pregnancies is the first priority and education remains the cornerstone of this through NGO-led government initiatives.

On a national level the Ministry of Health, Social Development, and Labor plays a coordinating role in overseeing an inter-ministerial workgroup as well as in monitoring issues related to women's rights.

As a young country within the Kingdom, Sint Maarten has already made great steps in bringing about awareness and making the necessary policy and legislative changes.

For the coming period what we foresee is that we will have to continue strengthening our national machinery to integrate our best practices and further develop legislation to ensure the advancement of women's rights.

We pledge to continue on the same trailblazing trajectory and ask the committee for their consideration during this period as we continue to build an inclusive society for all persons on Sint Maarten. On behalf of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, I would like to thank you for your attention and look forward to today's discussions.
