



Opening statement of the

**KINGDOM
OF THE NETHERLANDS**

69th session of the Committee of the Rights of the Child
Consideration of the fourth periodic report of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

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INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE KINGDOM OF THE
NETHERLANDS

Head of delegation The Netherlands –Mrs Angelique Berg

- Mr Chairman, distinguished members of the Committee, ladies and gentlemen,
- My name is Angelique Berg, I am Director General of Public Health for The Netherlands Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport.
- Unfortunately the Minister responsible for Youth Affairs, Mr. van Rijn, could not be here today due to an unscheduled parliamentary debate this week, much to his own regret. I will therefore replace him.
- I will first give the floor to The Honorable Minister **Rita Bourne-Gumbs**, Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports, and currently also Minister of Health Care, Social Development and Labour, who will address your Committee on behalf of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

H.E. Minister Rita Bourne-Gumbs

- Mr Chairman, distinguished members of the Committee, ladies and gentlemen,
- It is an honour for me to address your distinguished Committee on the occasion of the consideration of the fourth periodic report of

the Kingdom of the Netherlands on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- The Netherlands holds the work of your Committee in high esteem and my delegation is looking forward to a productive exchange of views.
- Allow me to briefly introduce the other two ministers from the countries within the Kingdom:
 - From Aruba: the Minister of Social Affairs, Youth and Labor, **Mr. Paul Croes**
 - From Curaçao: the Minister of Social Development, Labour and Welfare, **Ms. Ruthmilda Larmonie-Cecilia**
- We are all at your disposal to answer any questions you may have on the implementation of the Convention, and will do so to the best of our ability.

General remarks about the Kingdom of the Netherlands

- Before briefly addressing the situation in each of the four countries within the Kingdom, I would like to set out the structure of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.
- Following **constitutional reforms**, the country of the Netherlands Antilles – which consisted of the islands of Curaçao, St Maarten, Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba – was dissolved on 10 October 2010.

- The Kingdom now consists of **four countries**: the Netherlands (which has a European part and a Caribbean part), Aruba, Curaçao and St Maarten.
- The four countries have equal status within the Kingdom. Each of the countries is, to a large degree, responsible for its own internal affairs. Any questions relating specifically to an individual constituent country of the Kingdom will therefore be answered by the representative of that country.
- Firstly, Miss Angelique Berg will give a short introduction on behalf of the Netherlands, then Minister **Croes** will address you on behalf of Aruba followed by Minister **Larmonie-Cecilia** on behalf of Curacao. Finally, I will address you shortly on behalf of St Maarten.

Angelique Berg:

Introduction for (the country of) the Netherlands

- Mister Chairman, it is a pleasure to see so many NGO's here today, which shows us that the subject of Children's Rights is very much alive in The Netherlands.
- Much has happened since your Committee reviewed the Netherlands' third report in January 2009. The constructive recommendations your Committee made at the time have been of major importance in developing youth policy in the Netherlands.

- The Dutch government agrees with you that children must be able to grow up safely and in good health, develop their talents and participate in society according to their ability.
- So I'm pleased to say that for several years now, UNICEF studies have shown that Dutch children are the happiest in the world.
- That is of course a wonderful track record, but nonetheless the Dutch government must still aim to improve the position of children where necessary and, in doing so, act in the best interest of the child.
- I will now briefly discuss a few of the developments that have taken place with regard to youth policy in the Netherlands.

1. Children's Ombudsman

- Following the recommendations of your Committee, the Netherlands has appointed a Children's Ombudsman.
- The Children's Ombudsman maintains a critical attitude, which is good. It keeps us all focused on doing everything we can in the interests of children.

2. Decentralisation in the Youth Act

- The new Youth Act took effect on 1 January 2015.
- It now places youth care, child protection and youth probation **under the responsibility of the municipalities.**

- This change will benefit children's rights and ensure problems are identified sooner. It will also make sure care providers work together more effectively, fewer children are taken into care and the number of victims of child abuse declines.
- Changing methods takes time. However, so far we've been able to ensure continuity in care.
- I'm convinced that changing the system will help children in the Netherlands grow up safely and in good health, develop their talents and participate in society.

3. Child Abuse

- Reducing child abuse is one of my key priorities.
- I find it extremely important that we know which children are being abused or are in risk of being abused. Because if we don't know who they are, we cannot help them.
- That is why, amongst other measures, we introduced the compulsory reporting code.
- Although it doesn't please me to see that approximately 119,000 children are victims of child abuse and neglect, I do firmly believe that now we know who these children are, we can help them. Therefore I see it as a success that the number of reported cases has risen.
- Of course putting violence to a halt and actually helping the

children also has our full attention. We will discuss our action plan later today.

4. Combating child sexual abuse and child sex tourism

- Safeguarding our children from sexual violence and abuse is our priority.
- Robust, well-trained, dedicated police units and dedicated prosecutors have been active in the Netherlands for a few years now. **And they have achieved results.**
- 560 Cases have been referred for prosecution by the police in 2014 alone. But more importantly, the teams have been able to focus on the most serious cases and identify and help the victims. More victims more than ever before have been identified in 2014.
- I look forward to your detailed questions.
- I will now give the floor to Minister Croes for Aruba.

Aruba – Minister Paul Croes

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished members of the Committee,

It is an honor for me to introduce to you the third report of Aruba under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Aruba is a small country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Approximately 25,000 children are living on the island, representing 21% of the total population.

In addition to the information presented in the report, I would like to briefly highlight some important areas of progress and recent developments with regard to the implementation of the Convention.

The government is glad to inform, that on the Committee's recommendation, a comprehensive policy plan for the Aruban youth, entitled 'Generation of Leaders', has been endorsed by the Council of Ministers and presented to the Parliament. The document focusses on the areas identified as essential for the development of the child, including family and school setting, leisure time, and youth participation. The findings of the UNICEF human rights- based analysis on the situation of children and adolescents in Aruba were used in drafting this policy. UNICEF will also start assisting the government with the translation of this policy document into a national youth action plan in June 2015.

In November 2013 the government assigned the responsibility for youth policy to a specific minister: The Minister of Social Affairs, Youth and Labor. It is my duty as Minister in charge of Youth to ensure that all children in Aruba have their rights fulfilled and that they are nurtured to develop their full potential. The government also re-installed the National Children's Rights Committee in October 2014, with the aim of giving a fresh impulse to the coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the Convention. A Kingdom-wide Task Force was set up to promote cooperation in the field of children's rights within the Kingdom. The issues being addressed include violence against children and the role of parents in the child's upbringing.

The government believes it is important that children can participate in society and encourages active involvement in community activities. In this regard the government creates opportunities for young people in volunteer work and other positive activities by joining forces with NGO's and the private sector. Moreover, a research project

commissioned by the government and recently conducted by the University of Aruba regarding norms and values of the youth and young adults provides a better understanding of the young generation.

The government is also committed to combating child abuse. The implementation of a reporting code and underlying protocols with the organizations in the different sectors is expected to contribute significantly to the prevention and early reporting of child abuse. Furthermore, the government is in the process of setting up a Youth Monitor to keep policymakers and stakeholders informed about the situation of young people.

Distinguished members of the Committee, compliance with and protection of children's rights is a continuous process in which we encounter many challenges on the road ahead. Aruba welcomes international support and hold your views and recommendations in high esteem.

I thank you for your attention. I will now give the floor to Minister Ruthmilda Larmonie-Cecilia for Curacao.

Curaçao – Minister Ruthmilda Larmonie-Cecilia

**Mr Chairperson,
Distinguished Members of the Committee,**

On 10 October 2010, the island of Curaçao became an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, having its own executive and legislative branches of government. The Council of Ministers of Curaçao consists of nine ministers, each bearing responsibility for one of the nine ministries of the administration. The

minister of Social Development, Labor and Welfare is responsible for family, youth and gender affairs, among others.

Most of the laws as well as international and regional commitments of the Netherlands Antilles were retained by Curaçao. Curaçao reaffirms its commitment to the protection of human rights in general and the rights of children in particular.

Even though the process for establishing a new country within the Kingdom has been long and complicated, we are now finally in a position to implement those policies and structural changes that are necessary to continue to safeguard the rights of the children.

Mr. Chairperson,

Allow me to mention but a few of the achievements of the government of Curaçao since the last report on the implementation of the Convention was submitted to your distinguished committee:

- In 2012 the maternity leave act was amended to conform to international standards. The changes include:
 - The extension of maternity leave from 12 to 14 weeks;
 - The right of leave for the other parent;
 - The prohibition for women to be engaged in nightshifts or standing work during pregnancy and lactation; and
 - The right to breastfeed during working hours.

- In December 2014 a National Youth Action Plan was approved by the Council of Ministers of Curaçao. This plan aims to develop a comprehensive approach towards the youth of Curacao, elaborating evidence-based policies, programs and projects in close cooperation with the private sector, labor unions, NGO's as well as young people.

- Reducing unemployment among young people is a priority within this approach. The biggest projects in this regard are:

- The *Lei di Bion*. This initiative gives support and incentives to employers to employ young people so they can gain work experience.
- The ***Work for a 1000 young people*** project (2015/2016). This is a private-public partnership which will provide for on-the-job-training for young people and guarantee them employment at the end of this process.

The Ministry of Social Development, Labor and Welfare is the major agency providing subsidies for family and parent support programs, work/study and apprenticeship programs and social and psychological care for children and the youth.

Mr. Chairperson,

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the government of Curaçao will continue to adopt all necessary measures, including legislation, to guarantee that the rights of children are fully implemented, and we welcome all recommendations and observations from the Committee.

St Maarten – Minister Rita Bourne-Gumbs

Chairperson, distinguished members of the Committee,
It is a great honor to meet with you today and to highlight Sint Maarten's commitment and continued efforts to expand the protection and promotion of the rights of Children in Sint Maarten. Presently there is much progress and I would like to highlight the positive developments which covers our recent report on the period of 2008-2012.

First of all, Sint Maarten established a separate department for Youth Affairs as the leading structure to facilitate the formation of legislation and policies regarding children and youth affairs.

Our government promotes the active involvement of our youth. During the Youth Round Table Conference in 2013, government encouraged the participation of our youth in the revision process of the Integrated Youth Policy of 2006. At the start of my appointment I ensured the establishment of a Youth desk to strengthen dialogue and participation of our youth.

A crisis and transition home assisting child victims as well as a correctional institution for youth "The Miss Lalie rehabilitation Center" were recently officially established. It is the first youth care and rehabilitation centre where detention is seen as a last resort and reintegration being the main objective.

Parliament has unanimously adopted the amendment to Book 1 of the Civil Code which brought into effect the declaration of paternity. This law prevents discrimination of children by equating the position of children born out of wedlock with that of legitimate children.

Chairperson, I am pleased to say that another major step towards the protection of children has been the ratification of the ordinance regarding the Central reporting Center for Child Abuse. Additionally, with the passage of the National Ordinance on Parental Responsibility amending the Civil Code, Corporal punishment is forbidden.

Two important processes ongoing now are (1) the establishment of the "Guide towards the National Protocol for Child Abuse" by my person, the Minister of justice and the entire CoM and (2) the countries "Action Plan Children Rights" which will be the basis for future programs, legislation and assigned resources.

Chairperson, government has many prevention programs for the target group regardless of their civil status. Medical costs not covered by parents of children placed in protective care, including immigrants and minors with illegal status, are also covered by the government.

The Committee recommended that we undertake efforts to reduce the incidence of teenage pregnancies and therefore the Ministries will continue with specific programs like the girl power and Real talk campaign.

In closing Mr. Chairman, Sint Maarten will continue to commit towards championing Children Rights and recognizes the importance of compliance with the Rights of the Child as is stipulated in the Convention.

Conclusion of opening statement by Minister Bourne-Gumbs

- Mr Chairman, distinguished committee members, thank you for your attention.
- Allow me to express my hope that the children of the Kingdom of the Netherlands will benefit from any recommendations that your esteemed Committee makes following this meeting.
- Mr Chairman, members of the committee, we are open to your remarks and questions. Let me end by saying that we are looking forward to a constructive dialogue with your Committee.