



After the Concluding Comments

Activities of the Dutch CEDAW-Network (February-December 2007)

The Dutch CEDAW-Network is a network of NGOs and experts working together on CEDAW related issues. Its aim is to:

- promote the dissemination of information and expertise on CEDAW and other human rights treaties which are relevant for the position of women;
- lobby for the implementation of CEDAW in the Netherlands;
- draft shadow reports and other documents that contribute to the above mentioned aims.

The Dutch CEDAW Network (further: the Network) together with the NJCM (the Dutch section of the International Commission of Jurists) presented a shadow report on the Fourth Report by the Dutch Government on the implementation of CEDAW. This report was examined by the CEDAW Committee during the preliminary session of August 2006, and the 37th session of CEDAW in 2007. Two representatives of the Network attended both sessions. The Committee made use of quite a lot of the information presented by the Dutch NGOs in both the Constructive Dialogue with the Dutch Government and the Concluding Comments. It also shared some of the critical remarks of the NGOs on the implementation of CEDAW by the Dutch Government. On some topics the wording of the Concluding Comments was quite strong. The Committee, for example, expressed a deep concern regarding the status of the Convention in the Dutch legal order, which was the leading theme of the shadow report. So far, our work had been successful. However, to be really successful, we had to make sure that the Concluding Comments would not disappear in a drawer at some ministry, but would be used to improve the policy of the government, and to enhance the position of women in the Netherlands. Therefore, the Network undertook several activities after the publication of the Concluding Comments. As we feel that our experiences may be of use to others, we present a short overview of our follow-up activities and their results.

Publicity, information and awareness raising

As soon as the Concluding Comments were available, the Network launched a [press-release](#), highlighting the main issues of the Concluding Comments.

The Concluding Comments as well as the press release were published on the website www.vrouwenverdrag.nl (which contains all information on CEDAW, its implementation in the Netherlands and the reporting and lobbying process). This website is published by Steo, an NGO and member of the Network.

Unfortunately, the press paid little attention to the Concluding Comments of CEDAW.

On 23 March the Network organized a public meeting in which the Concluding Comments were presented and the NGO-representatives shared their experiences during the CEDAW-session in New York. The participants discussed ways to implement the recommendations of CEDAW, both by the government and by NGOs. The meeting was attended by some 90 participants, all representatives of civil society.

Lobby towards government and parliament

As soon as the Concluding Comments were published, the Network wrote a letter to the minister for Emancipation calling for the implementation of the recommendations of the CEDAW-Committee. A copy of the letter was sent to Parliament. In March 2007, the minister sent the Concluding Comments to Parliament, along with the promise to provide the comments of the government on the Concluding Comments before summer.

The Network tried to meet with the minister before sending his response on behalf of the Dutch government to Parliament. At first this seemed to be successful - an appointment was planned in June -, but then the appointment was postponed on behalf of the ministry. In July, the government indeed sent its response to the Concluding Comments to Parliament.

The Network started to prepare in-depth comments on this response. Meanwhile a new appointment with the ministry was made. In September, two representatives of the Network met with the minister of Emancipation and two of his staff members. The minister, and especially his staff members, vigorously denied that the government did not take CEDAW seriously (as a legally binding instrument, containing 'hard' obligations for the government). They felt that the Network was treating the government unfair by sticking to this 'accusation'. The minister underlined the importance of the CEDAW Committee and its recommendations, and announced that the next report to CEDAW would be more comprehensive (that is, concretely describing goals, measures, and results).

After the meeting with the minister, the Network sent its comments on the governmental response to Parliament. The main issues highlighted in this letter were:

- the lack of ambition to address the main bottlenecks in the position of women;
- the lack of new measures in response to the CEDAW-recommendations (it just repeated existing policies);
- concerns about the (acknowledgement of the) legal status of the Convention in the Netherlands
- the lack of Gender Impact Assessments

- the risks of gender mainstreaming and the weak coordination of emancipation-policies
- the preparation of the next report (and the complementary report on the Antilles)
- the funding of NGOs for monitoring the implementation
- the offer to organize an expert meeting on CEDAW for parliamentarians and their staff

Together with the letter, a detailed analysis of all CEDAW Concluding Comments and the Governmental response on them was sent to Parliament.

On 10 October, a commission of Parliament discussed 'International Emancipation Policy'. The governmental response to the Concluding Comments was one of the issues on the agenda. Preceding this meeting, the Network disseminated a press release, which underlined the importance of the CEDAW-Convention and its implementation in the Netherlands. During the discussion, members of the Network were present as observers. At the meeting the minister promised:

- to provide Parliament with a letter on the legal status of CEDAW in the Dutch legal system (before the Parliamentary debate on Emancipation issues on 7 November 2007);
- to send to Parliament a document on the coordination of emancipation policies and gendermainstreaming (before the debate on Emancipation issues on 7 November 2007);
- to improve the structure of the next periodic report to CEDAW and make it more comprehensive;
- to take measures to enhance expertise on the CEDAW-convention within the civil service and legal professions.

On 1 November, Parliament organized a hearing on the new Emancipation Policy. The Network was invited for the hearing. Its representative gave a short oral presentation, which was reinforced by an e-mail, which pointed out some specific points. The contribution of the Network focused on:

- positively: the emancipation policy document stresses that international documents and indicators can be used to assess Dutch emancipation policies (point of concern: who will ensure that this will really be done?)
- the fact that the new Emancipation Policy explicitly drops the objective to encourage men to take up more caring responsibilities is not in line with the Concluding Comments of the CEDAW-Committee;
- the proposed grant-scheme, which abolishes almost all possibilities for women's organizations to get funding for their work, is not in compliance with international standards, including the Concluding Comments.

On 7 November, the Parliamentary debate on the new Emancipation Policy took place. The Network prepared a letter to the commission-members, and Network-representatives spoke to several MPs before the meeting. The network stressed that it considered the

ministerial document on the legal status of CEDAW, which was sent to parliament before the meeting, as insufficient, and not responding to the Concluding Comments of CEDAW. During the debate, MPs made use of the letter(s) of the Network, and the minister promised to give a detailed response to the questions raised by the Network.

To conclude and to look forward

Due to all the meetings, letters and contacts with MPs, we managed to get the CEDAW-Convention, and its status in the Dutch legal system, on the political agenda. However, the next challenge will be to make the government use the CEDAW-Convention and other international documents to assess their policies and to really implement CEDAW in all areas.

The Network will continue monitoring the implementation of the 2007 Concluding Comments. Apart from that, the Network is also looking forward to the next periodic report of the Netherlands, which is due in August 2008. The Network applied for project-financing for the preparation of the shadow-report and some side-events, as it was granted for the previous shadow-report. The application is pending.

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