

# **OSCE Conference on combating discrimination and promoting mutual respect and understanding**

## **Formal statement of The Netherlands**

### **Opening Plenary Session, Thursday**

#### **Statement by Ambassador at Large for Human Rights, Mr. Piet de Klerk**

Bucharest, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2007

- The motto of the coalition agreement of the new Netherlands' government, which started its work in February, is 'Working together, living together'. As that motto shows, the promotion of shared values and norms, of community spirit and of mutual respect is a priority for the Netherlands. Social cohesion and tolerance are no self-evident features of society. They require continued attention from both government and civil society. The Dutch government is working hard on various terrains to successfully integrate all different groups into society and promote their emancipation.
- The fight against discrimination is priority number one. Discrimination is not only illegal; it is also hurtful to any and all and in particular harmful to the process of integration and emancipation of newcomers to our society. Reports of discriminatory incidents or crimes will always be taken up by the police, and more attention is being given to the prosecution of discriminatory crimes. The government is working on the improvement of the registration system of discriminatory incidents. At this very moment in The Hague, a nation-wide conference organized by the Netherlands' ministry of justice and the ministry of internal affairs brings together the police, the Public Prosecutor, local governments and Non Governmental Organisations to collectively counter all forms of discrimination, and to formulate a list of agreements and best practices.
- The struggle against discrimination on the job market is another challenge taken up by the government, in cooperation with the private sector. Government is giving the right example, by aiming for personnel from all different backgrounds living in our country.
- For the Netherlands, combating anti-Semitism, combating intolerance against Muslims and combating other forms of intolerance are all equally important. All forms of discrimination are dealt with in our policies, for instance in our National Action Plan to Combat Racism which was a follow-up to the Durban Conference in 2001. Formulating

the action plan has been a joint effort in which government bodies have worked closely together with NGOs.

- During the last few years Dutch NGOs of different backgrounds have been able to find each other and cooperate in their joint fight against discrimination; it is a pleasure to see Jewish and Muslim organizations work together in the fight against anti-Semitism and islamophobia. This is the beginning of true respect and understanding: when Muslims take a stance against anti-Semitism, and Jews take a stance against discrimination of Muslims!
- Finally, the Netherlands would like to draw your attention to one group of people, not named in any part of the official agenda, despite the fact that this group is facing more rather the less discrimination in many OSCE participating States. The Netherlands is worried about the rising climate of intolerance towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered persons. The images of the forbidden Gay Pride in Moscow on May 27<sup>th</sup> were a striking example. Unfortunately, a homophobic atmosphere can be encountered in other European countries as well. We consider it an obligation of all participating States to guarantee equal rights, including the right to freedom of assembly, to lesbians and gays, thus preventing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. We call upon all governments to prevent discrimination and harassment of LGBTs, and to actively promote tolerance towards this group in the same manner as we promote tolerance and respect towards ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic or other minorities. The LGBT declaration of yesterday's NGO Forum is an important step in this regard.