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Hollands regering

Ståndpunkter om tvångsäktenskap och annan hedersbrottslighet uttalade av bl.a. ministrar i den holländska regeringen perioden: 2009-10-11



Government of the Netherlands

Measures against forced marriages

Press release | 10-11-2011

State Secretary Teeven of Security and Justice wants to increase the freedom to marry by further reducing forced marriages and by limiting the recognition of marriages concluded abroad. In future, it will also become easier to annul marriages solemnised under coercion. There will also be a ban on child marriages (< 18 years of age).

This is evident, inter alia, from a legislative proposal he has sent to various agencies for their advice. The measures follow from the coalition agreement.

The current option of letting minors in the Netherlands marry subject to certain conditions will be abolished. In order to be allowed to marry, both future spouses have to be of age from now on. The marriage of a minor validly solemnised abroad can now be recognised in the Netherlands. In future, this will only be possible if the spouses have reached the age of eighteen at the time they apply for recognition of their marriage in the Netherlands.

Entering into a polygamous marriage is still prohibited in the Netherlands on the basis of current legislation. Polygamous marriages solemnised abroad can be recognised in the Netherlands in some cases. Recognition of a polygamous marriage does not mean, however, that a residence permit for several partners can be granted in the Netherlands. One spouse at

most can be granted a residence permit. That possibility of recognition of polygamous marriages solemnised abroad will be further reduced. If a foreign national marries abroad following submission of an application for a residence permit, such a marriage will not be recognised if he settles in the Netherlands. Said marriage does not constitute a ground for admission of the marriage partner. Once the foreign national has settled in the Netherlands, he will have to abide by Dutch laws and regulations. If he travels abroad after some time in order to enter into a polygamous marriage that marriage will not be recognised.

Furthermore, the Cabinet wants to include blood relations in the third and fourth degree in the collateral line, so that coercion can be concluded more often in these co-called cousin marriages. The marriage can be concluded if coercion cannot be demonstrated.

Minister Opstelten takes action against forced marriages

Press release | 22-11-2010

A period of six years from the date of the crime still applies, but in future the limitation period will start when the victim has reached the age of 18. This widens the options of reporting abuse and prosecuting suspects.

This is evident from a legislative proposal the Minister sent to various bodies today for their opinion, such as the Public Prosecution Service and the Council for the Judiciary. In the Netherlands forced marriages are punishable and are considered a form of violence against women that must be tackled forcefully.

The extension of the limitation period is part of a set of criminal measures against forced marriages and is in line with the coalition agreement, which provides that the policy of combating forced marriages must be tightened and enforcement must be intensified.

A wider limitation term gives victims of forced marriage the possibility of reporting their abuse in due time. As an adult, they will have more time to think about the forced marriage and to become aware of the possibility of reporting. In many cases, children only fully realise the extent of their abuse at a later age. For sexual offences and female genital mutilation the limitation period already starts at the age of eighteen.

Forced marriage usually occurs in the seclusion of the family circle and is sometimes committed in the country of origin. Victims are in an isolated position and do not dare or do not want to report their abuse, out of shame, loyalty to the family or for fear for physical violence. Sometimes it concerns children who are retained in the country of origin during a holiday and are forced to enter into a marriage there. Forced marriages have far-reaching consequences, which is why additional protection is required.

In future, both Dutch nationals and foreign nationals with permanent residence in the Netherlands can be prosecuted, if they are guilty of forced marriage abroad. It will also become possible to prosecute persons in the Netherlands who have forced a Dutch national or foreign national to enter into marriage abroad. The Minister will implement these measures by extending the so-called extraterritorial jurisdiction. At this time, the possibilities of prosecuting persons who are guilty of forced marriage abroad are limited.

In addition, the jurisdiction for polygamy, which is prohibited in the Netherlands, will be widened. Foreign nationals with permanent residence in the Netherlands who enter into a polygamous marriage abroad can be prosecuted.

In addition, the maximum term of imprisonment for forced marriage will be raised from nine months to two years and in future the court may impose pre-trial detention, for instance to prevent a case from escalating or to guarantee the safety of the victim. Forced marriage is often linked to honour-related violence. The Public Prosecution Service will also have the possibility of exercising additional investigative powers, for instance to retrieve traffic data (telephone or Internet traffic). This may help to solve the crime.

Combating forced marriages will also be given a higher priority in the prosecution policy of the Public Prosecution Service.



Government of the Netherlands

Measures against forced marriages

Press release | 18-03-2011

The Dutch government intends to provide extra protection to children who become the victim of a forced marriage by extending the limitation period. The council of ministers has agreed thereto upon recommendation by Minister Opstelten of Security and Justice.

Currently, a period of six years still applies from the moment the offence has been committed; in future the limitation period will commence when the victim has reached the age of eighteen. The consequence is that there will be more possibilities to file a report with the police and to prosecute the accused. Forced marriages are liable to punishment in the Netherlands and constitute a form of violence against women that must be dealt with vigorously. Extension of the limitation period is part of a package of criminal-law measures against forced marriages and is in line with the coalition agreement which provides that policy against forced measures will be tightened and enforcement intensified.

A longer limitation period will give victims of forced marriages the option to file a report with the police after considerable time has passed. There is more time, as an adult, to consider the forced marriage and to become aware of the possibility of filing a report with the police. Children often do not realise the full extent of what has been done to them until they are older.

The limitation period already commences from the age of eighteen with respect to sex offences and female genital mutilation.

Forced marriages often take place within the privacy of the family circle and is sometimes committed in the country of origin. Victims often find themselves in an isolated position and are afraid or unwilling to file a report with the police out of shame, loyalty to the family or fear of physical violence. Sometimes it concerns children who are abandoned in the country of origin during their holidays and are forced to marry there. The consequences of a forced marriage are severe and far-reaching, which is why more protection is required.

In future, both Dutch citizens and foreign nationals with a fixed place of residence in the Netherlands can be prosecuted if they are guilty of forcing a marriage abroad. It will also become possible to prosecute persons who have forced a Dutch citizen or resident to enter into a marriage abroad. These measures are realised by expanding the so-called extraterritorial jurisdiction. The possibilities for prosecuting forced marriages solemnised abroad are currently limited. In addition, there will be an expansion of jurisdiction to include polygamy which is illegal in the Netherlands. Foreign nationals with a fixed place of residence in the Netherlands who enter into a polygamous marriage abroad can be dealt with.

The maximum term of imprisonment for forced marriages will be increased from nine months to two years and in future the courts will be able to impose remand in custody to prevent escalation or to guarantee the safety of the victim, for example. Forced marriages are often closely linked to honour-related violence. The Public Prosecution Service will also have the possibility of deploying additional investigative powers, such as demanding traffic records (telephone or Internet). This may facilitate the resolution of the offence. And finally, the approach to forced marriages will receive more attention in prosecution policy of the Public Prosecution Service.

The council of ministers has agreed to the bill being sent to the Council of State for its opinion. The text of the legislative proposal and the Council of State's opinion will be published upon submission to the Lower House of Parliament.

More severe punishment for forced marriages

Press release | 04-02-2010

Minister of Justice Hirsch Ballin wants to deal more strictly with forced marriages. However, in order to target this form of coercion more efficiently under criminal law, specific provisions are required. For example, the term of imprisonment for forced marriages will be increased from nine months to two years, and in future the courts will also have the opportunity of imposing pre-trial detention. Furthermore, the Public Prosecution Service will be able to exercise more investigative powers, such as the demand for access to traffic data (telephone and Internet) and the arrest of a person not caught in the act.

The Minister is working on a legislative proposal in which these measures will be laid down and which will be submitted this spring to the various agencies – including the Council for the Judiciary and the Public Prosecution Service – for their advice and recommendations.

'An important accomplishment of our State under the rule of law is the freedom of the individual to choose his or her partner independently. Forced marriages are not in accordance with the Dutch legal system', according to Hirsch Ballin. The measures will also contribute in a preventative sense to the combating of forced marriages because they have a warning effect.

Although forced marriages are punishable in the Netherlands, the possibilities for prosecuting marriages coerced abroad are still limited. The Minister would like to change this by expanding the so-called extraterritorial jurisdiction. This will allow for more effective combating of marriage coercion committed abroad. Currently, Dutch citizens who commit marriage coercion abroad can only be prosecuted if the requirement of double criminality has been satisfied: there is only jurisdiction if the fact is also punishable in the country in which it was committed. Moreover, a foreign national with a permanent or temporary address in the Netherlands, cannot be prosecuted for a marriage coerced outside the Netherlands. This is about to change.

Increasing the maximum punishment from nine months to two years does not only apply to forced marriages, for that matter. It will also become possible to punish other serious forms of coercion more adequately, for example religious coercion. The legislative proposal changes the maximum punishment of the crime of coercion in general, and that comprises more than just forced marriages.

Start of the campaign entitled 'Forced Marriages and Being Left Behind'

Press release | 12-05-2010

Stop coercion. This is the motto of the 'Forced Marriages and Being Left Behind' national campaign by the Ministry of Justice which started this week. The campaign is intended to generate awareness among certain groups of young migrants regarding the risks which they are, or might be, running and to draw their attention to suitable precautionary measures which can be taken to prevent a forced marriage and/or being left behind in the parents' country of origin.

Stop coercion is an initiative being taken within the framework of the Honour-based Violence programme in cooperation with various ministries, the MOVISIE knowledge and advice centre and other organisations such as the Domestic Violence Advice and Support Centres [Advies- en Steunpunten Huiselijk Geweld], the Child Abuse Counselling and Reporting Centre [Advies- en Meldpunten Kindermishandeling] and Children's Helplines [Kindertelefoons]. The 2010 campaign is a continuation of the forced marriages and being left behind publicity campaign which took place in 2009 in (the run-up to) the school holidays.

No-one can say for certain how extensive the problem of forced marriages and young people being left behind in the Netherlands actually is. However, the fact is that every year reports are received of young migrants (mainly girls but sometimes boys as well) who fail to return to

school after a holiday in the parents' country of origin. It is presumed that a number of these young people are left behind with their families abroad and/or forced into arranged marriages.

The 2010 campaign is therefore aimed first and foremost at these young people. An advertorial in the May edition of Schoolmagazine and the ROC magazine, which drew attention to the issue of forced marriages and young people being left behind, is to be followed-up at the MOVISIE youth conference entitled 'Your right to choose', which will take place on 28 May in Utrecht and on the Internet.

Young people: do the self test

The online youth campaign primarily uses a web-based informative approach. On sites visited by many young people from the target group, a banner will appear which invites young people to do a self test to determine the extent to which they run the risk of being married off or left behind during their holiday in the country of origin (of their parents). The banner and the test lead the young people to the campaign site, www.stopdwang.nl. Here they will find, among other things, information on forced marriages, being left behind and honour and practical tips and suggestions on precautionary measures they can take. They can chat anonymously with trained young people of their own age and social workers, and talk privately with a confidential advisor or social worker. They can also draw up an emergency plan which includes an information sheet which the young people can leave behind with a confidential advisor or professional social worker in the Netherlands before they go on holiday to ensure that someone is aware of their personal details and situation. The young people are made aware of the fact that it is very difficult to help them return once they are abroad. This is certainly the case if they are underage and/or have dual nationality.

Professionals: do not act independently

Professionals who work a lot with young people are the second key target group of the campaign. In the run-up to the campaign, as many professionals as possible are to be informed about the phenomenon of forced marriages and young people being left behind by means of a detailed email briefing and morning training sessions. The information explains what they can do if a young person contacts them to report (the threat of) a forced marriage and/or being left behind. If the professional in question suspects that a forced marriage may take place or the young person may be left behind, it is crucial that he obtains advice first because honour motives may play a role and there may be a risk of honour-related violence. Any independent actions on the part of the professional may simply make the situation worse. For that reason, professionals are going to be issued with a so-called toolkit during the campaign which will help them identify the signs and adopt the right approach. The toolkit can also be found at www.huiselijkgeweld.nl.

d on Dutch values

Integration policy based on Dutch values

Press release | 17-06-2011

The government believes that Dutch society and the values it is based on should be central to integration policy.

People who wish to live in the Netherlands are expected to contribute to social cohesion and demonstrate involvement and citizenship. The government is justified in imposing requirements on immigrants because society places the same demands on its own citizens.

This was the message conveyed by Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations Piet Hein Donner in a letter to the House of Representatives on integration, engagement and citizenship. With this change of course, the government is distancing itself from the relativism embedded in the model of the multicultural society. The new integration policy takes as its starting point a society which is changing, partly due to the influence of migrants, but is not interchangeable with any other.

The government believes that integration policy with a more mandatory character is needed to prevent fragmentation and segregation in society, which would ultimately result in no-one feeling at home in the Netherlands. In his letter Mr Donner states that integration is not the responsibility of the public authorities but rather of those who decide to settle in the Netherlands. Every citizen is expected to contribute to Dutch society by taking responsibility for their subsistence, for their living environment and for society as a whole. For instance, immigrants are expected to learn the language and learn about Dutch society.

Integration policy will no longer target specific groups. Anti-social and criminal behaviour will be combated without regard for ethnic origin. Mr Donner also assumes that the general labour market, education and housing policies enable all citizens to build a life for themselves in accordance with their ability. The letter sets out the following measures in the area of integration, engagement and citizenship:

- the Civic Integration Act will be amended and made more rigorous;
- grants and measures for the integration of specific groups will be terminated and incorporated in general integration policy;
- a bill dealing with forced marriage under criminal law will be introduced, and prevention of forced marriage will be made a priority;
- bill will be introduced banning face coverings in public;
- a common agenda for modern citizenship will be drawn up in cooperation with municipalities, civil society organisations

Measures needed to combat violence against girls worldwide

Press release | 23-02-2009

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is hosting an international conference entitled Making Recommendations Work: The Girl Child Conference. On 9 and 10 March policymakers,

experts and representatives of civil society organisations will gather in The Hague to discuss the global problem of domestic and family violence against girls.

In his opening address the Minister of Foreign Affairs Maxime Verhagen will draw attention to the physical and emotional violence, sexual abuse and harmful cultural and traditional practices that children – girls in particular – have to contend with every day. Explaining the need for this conference, Mr Verhagen said: ‘Children are vulnerable and young girls in particular suffer terribly in many parts of the world. The aim of this conference is to initiate action that will genuinely improve their position’.

On Monday 9 March, the discussion will focus on neglect, abuse and sexual exploitation of girls. On Tuesday 10 March the participants will turn their attention to the issues of genital mutilation, honour killings, forced and early marriage and preferential treatment of sons.

The Interministerial Programme for Youth and Families and the Ministries of Justice, Health, Welfare and Sport, and Social Affairs and Employment, as well as the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, are assisting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in this endeavour. Ministers Rouvoet (Youth and Families), Koenders (Development Cooperation), Hirsch Ballin (Justice) and State Secretary Bussemaker (Health, Welfare and Sport) will address the conference.

Investigation: no Sharia courts in the Netherlands

Press release | 23-04-2010

The Netherlands does not have any Sharia courts. This is the conclusion of an investigation performed by Radboud University Nijmegen on the instructions of the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Ministry of Justice. The existence of an official institute administering justice for all Muslims in the Netherlands cannot easily be imagined due to the ethnic and religious diversity among Dutch Muslim groups. The investigation, together with a response from the Dutch government, was sent today to the Lower House by Minister Hirsch Ballin (Justice) and Minister Van Middelkoop (Housing, Communities and Integration).

In the Netherlands, there are however practices of advice and dispute settlement on the basis of Sharia law. Many Muslims in the Netherlands request advice from people in their immediate circle and Islam scholars concerning matters in respect of which Islamic points of view and life in the Netherlands necessitate choices. They jointly look for the best solution in the given circumstances: how can an individual Muslim, in a non-Islamic country, live according to Islamic rules? It therefore concerns mediation rather than dispute settlement.

Sharia is not a law in an official sense, nor is it a uniform legal system for Muslims. There are no general codes of law to prevent or settle disputes. There are various movements in the interpretation of the Sharia which have led to various schools of law. According to the investigators, Sharia can best be described as the correct and consistent application of the laws and rules, regulations and advice of the Islam. In Western countries there are often Sharia experts that make statements about what is proper Islamic behaviour with respect to the rules of law of the country.

The investigators interviewed 93 persons, partly a representation of the Dutch Muslim population, partly Islam experts, about their own knowledge and experience of the application of Sharia rules in the Netherlands. The majority consider Sharia in first instance as Islamic standards and values. They do not consciously apply Sharia rules and associate it mainly with practical and normative aspects of religion, not with legal matters. The investigators therefore rather speak of 'Islamic standards and values'.

The interviewed persons state they often approach people in their surroundings for advice on matters in respect of which they seek an interpretation of Islamic opinion within the standards of Dutch society. Advice is first requested of relatives or friends. If they are unable to resolve the issue, they approach an imam or other Islam scholar. When seeking advice in mutual disputes, many Muslims consult Islam experts. The outcome of the consultation is not binding.

It is however important that the proposed solution is acceptable to all parties. This concerns mediation rather than settlement of a dispute. Every person can consult various experts about the same matter in order to arrive at a proper decision about the best course of action. There is little pressure from the social environment to comply with the advice. In addition, Muslims derive their knowledge of Sharia from books and from the Internet. Many Dutch Muslims see sufficient space for their religion within Dutch legislation and do not feel a need for a different legal system.

RESPONSE FROM THE DUTCH GOVERNMENT

Although the main conclusion of the investigation removes the concerns about the possible existence of Sharia courts in the Netherlands, the Dutch government continues to consider its duty to ensure that no parallel societies come into existence in which people take the law into their own hands or apply a legal system which operates outside the boundaries of our legal order.

The Dutch government concludes that it has not become clear that advice and dispute settlement takes place against the will of the persons involved. Vigilance nevertheless remains necessary in view of the observation of the investigators that social pressure within a (faith) community cannot be excluded in advance. In this context, the Dutch government sees a role for the government in two situations: in instances where information concerning rights and freedoms that prevail in the Netherlands can offer resistance to opinions within the group, and where it has to be prevented that social pressure prejudices the personal freedom of those involved.

Another point for attention, in instances where religious advice and dispute settlement affect the Dutch legal order, concerns the matter of so-called 'informal marriages'. This could have socially undesirable consequences, as the weaker party, in many cases the woman, is not sufficiently protected due to the lack of legal consequences. In the Netherlands, religious officials are prohibited from performing any religious ceremonies without a prior civil marriage.

The Dutch government aims to strengthen freedom of marriage by consistently fighting forced marriages and abandonment. For example, the maximum term of imprisonment for the crime of coercion will be increased from nine months to two years. This will include certain forms of psychological coercion.

Furthermore, the recognition of polygamous marriages concluded abroad will be restricted, the marriageable age will be increased to eighteen years of age and the impediments to a marriage due to a family relationship will be extended to marriages between relatives in the third and fourth degree. In addition, conditional criminal prosecution will become possible if a forced marriage takes place abroad. It will also be investigated how the provision of care with respect to forced marriages, confinement and violence can play a role in civic integration.

A lack of knowledge of the Dutch legal system seems to play a role as well. The Dutch government promotes the possibilities of every person to find his or her way to the institutions of our democratic constitutional state. Strengthening the knowledge of the constitutional state is of great importance in this context. This is effected by means of various programmes aimed at civic integration, polarisation and radicalisation, active citizenship, voluntary and compulsory civic integration, prevention of honour-related violence and making homosexuality open to discussion within migrant communities.

The Dutch government supports various projects that aim to improve and strengthen the position and resilience of migrant women, such as forced marriages and abandonment. By means of these projects, the Dutch government attempts to make in particular migrant women aware of their rights and duties in Dutch society.

Speech by Verhagen at the Side Event 'Combating Violence against Girls'

Speech | 25-09-2009

Speech by Maxime Verhagen, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, at the Side Event 'Combating Violence against Girls', 25 September 2009, New York

Thank you Mr Khan. Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome you all to this side event on combating violence against girls. I know that no week in the year keeps you busier than this Ministerial week here at the UN. And I know that everybody's schedule is tight, even at this breakfast hour – that's why I appreciate your presence here all the more! Let me thank my good friends and colleagues, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Foreign Minister Celso Amorim, for joining me in organising this event. I am delighted that Brazil, the US and the Netherlands have come together to raise awareness on such an important issue: the elimination of violence against girls. It is an issue that concerns us all. And we all have the power to do something about it.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Seven years ago, the Netherlands was shaken by the story of four-year-old Rowena Rijkers. Parts of her body were found at various locations in the Netherlands, mutilated beyond recognition. Rowena died as a result of severe battery, after suffering continuous physical abuse at the hand of her mother's boyfriend, with her mother's knowledge. Two years later, our country was shocked again by the death of three-year-old Savanna. She, too, died at the hands of her caregivers after extended physical abuse. Their tragic fate seems too cruel to be true, and yet...it happened.

Unfortunately, all of us know of such tragedies. All our societies witness violence against children. Boys and girls grow up without the love and protection they deserve, in fear, with no place of safety and no place to play or learn. Sometimes we see them: on the streets, in sweatshops, in brothels, carrying guns they can barely lift, bleeding and crying. And sometimes their suffering is invisible to us. But we know they are there. Millions of them. Scarred for life.

Elizabeth Fritzl of Austria was held captive in the basement of her parental home for twenty-four years and had seven children by her father.

Jaycee Dugard of the United States was abducted eighteen years ago and resurfaced only recently. All that time, she had been held captive by her abductor, who fathered her two children.

Fawziya Ammodi of Yemen was forced into marriage last year and died in childbirth last week. She was only twelve years old.

Sakkubai of India was sold into slavery by her parents to repay their loans. She worked day and night until, at the age of eleven, she was rescued by a volunteer.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo rape is used as a systematic tactic of war and countless girls have fallen victim to this form of violence. Do these girls have names? Do they have faces? What does their fate mean to us? I commend the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Pillay, for her latest report on sexual abuse by army units in the DRC. We must act on it and not avert our eyes from these atrocities. The Netherlands is co-sponsoring the UN Security Council resolution on women, peace and security, to be adopted next week. It requests the Secretary-General to appoint a Special Representative to provide coherent and strategic leadership in order to address sexual violence in armed conflict. I hope his or her mandate will not just focus on women as victims of sexual violence, but that it will also actively promote their participation in ending violence and emphasise the invaluable contribution women make to peace and reconstruction.

Many, many cases of violence never make the headlines. The bulk of these stories go untold. We are grateful to have Mayra and Thandiwe here today to share their life stories with us. Mayra and Thandiwe are two winners of the International Children's Peace Prize. Once you know their names, see their faces, and hear their voices, you will not be able to forget their stories. They will make an impact; they will propel us all into action. That's why it's so important to involve children, to listen to what they have to say, to hear their perspective. No one can walk away unaffected once a story has become flesh and blood.

Violence against children breaks our hearts as mothers and fathers. We want to protect our children. And what we wish for our own children, we wish for every child in the world. Everyone who has ever held a baby in their arms will understand what I am saying. New life is a miracle that should be treated with care and respect. As politicians, we have the ability to do something about this horrendous problem. We have the power to act. And we must. Three years ago, Professor Pinheiro studied violence against children at the request of the General Assembly. In his conclusions, he stated that no violence against girls is justifiable. It is easy enough to agree with that. But he also concluded that all violence against girls is preventable. How do we deal with that?

The international community has taken some meaningful steps since the publication of Professor Pinheiro's study. Some of his recommendations have been implemented. But we can all do more, collectively. That is what I hope will come of this morning's meeting: a renewed and broad commitment to eliminate violence against girls. This year is the twentieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Let's all make this a meaningful celebration!

Earlier this year, the Secretary-General appointed Ms Marta Santos Pais as his Special Representative on Violence against Children. The Dutch government applauds her appointment. We will do all we can to support her in fulfilling her mandate. For a start, we have pledged to donate almost 1,2 million dollars¹. We also invite her to visit the Netherlands and report on the situation in our country, so that we can improve our record.

I call upon all of you to extend the same hospitality to Ms Santos Pais and to support her mandate in any way you can.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the aftermath of the tragic deaths of Rowena and Savanna, emotions ran high in the Netherlands. We asked ourselves: could these tragedies have been prevented? Could child welfare institutions have done better? Would that have made a difference? Where did responsibility begin and where did it end?

It is estimated that every year, 100,000 Dutch children suffer from abuse or neglect. Not every case is as severe as the two I just mentioned. But the physical and psychological consequences of violence against children are extremely serious, both in the short and in the long term, both for the individual victim and for society at large. This raises the question: to what extent can the government exert control over what happens behind closed doors, in a private setting?

Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that governments must take all appropriate measures to protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence. The Dutch government took this article as its starting point in formulating new policy on child abuse prevention. We now have a special Minister for Youth and Families who coordinates our new approach. This new approach is centred around the prevention of child abuse. It includes campaigns aimed at raising public awareness about child abuse and encourages anyone who suspects abuse to take action. We are also investing in training for child welfare professionals. And we are unifying the reporting procedures on domestic violence and child abuse, which should facilitate effective action.

Stopping violence against girls is a top government-wide priority in the Netherlands. And our actions are not motivated by pity. We are under an obligation to protect and promote the rights of the child. We undertook this obligation when we signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Human rights apply to all people, in all places, at all times, including the world's children. They applied to Rowena, Savanna, Elizabeth, Jaycee, Fawziya, Sakkubai and to so many more girls whose names and faces we do not know.

Where does responsibility begin? It begins here, in this room, with all of us. Where does it end? It doesn't. Our responsibility never ends. But we must do everything in our power to end all violence against all girls everywhere. This day, this week, this year, we must let the

world's girls know that we have at last heard their voices. By acting together, and by acting decisively, we should ensure that their daughters can live the life that we wish for our own daughters.