



Submissions for the online book commemorating UN Women's 10th anniversary

Our women in New York: “tough on the issues, respectful in the dialogue.”

Since 1945 – yes, no mistake – the Netherlands government has given the stage to a women’s representative, elected by her peers and facilitated by the (now) Netherlands Council of Women (NVR), to speak (mainly) in the third commission of the General Assembly of the UN. *For seventy-five years the Dutch women’s representatives to the UN General Assembly, the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission for sustainable development (now High Level political Forum) have seized every opportunity to inspire women the world over and give them hope. That is vitally important in a world in which violations of women’s rights are still everyday occurrences. You will always run into these former women’s representatives in every line of work having to do with gender issues. Once you are elected as a women’s representative, you are a representative for life. These women possess sufficient stamina to enable them to attend meetings to deal with issues that are “specialist” and “tedious”. And on top of that they are blessed with so-called “political antennae”, which is indispensable while playing a part in international politics. It stands to reason that they share a common drive to represent (Dutch) women and a deeply felt commitment towards international issues of gender on a global scale.*

Until today – as far as we know -the Dutch women’s representative is the only one to deliver a self-written statement to the Third Commission.

Only few other countries have a record of women’s representatives in their delegations. Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Japan, Singapore, Australia and Canada, the US and France have sent women’s representatives to UN GA’s over the past years, but not on a regular yearly basis.

All these women that served on delegations to several different (functional) bodies of the UN invested huge amounts of time and energy. On the downside these mainly voluntary inputs of women are hardly really recognized by the formal hierarchy of the UN or most member states. At the same time, their voices sounded loud and clear, were heard and helped to further the UN agenda on equality. Their inputs were never only about what is seen as typical “women’s issues” but always aimed at the betterment of humankind.

What all women representatives stress, is that the UN is a place to meet and exchange between countries and cultures. Where we still have a problem is that a lot of representatives of member states still presume by default that the women are the juniors or from the secretariat.

The women’s representative in 1985 said the following – but she could have said it today: “We must ensure that women can reap the benefits of development. Women must be given equal opportunities to influence the development process in the country in which they live. We cannot accept that the process should make little progress or indeed come to a standstill. Even the current economic recession is no excuse. The integration strategy in development policies does not guarantee freedom from oppression and exploitation or give women freedom of choice and the opportunity to control their own lives inside and outside the home. There is a concern that women are being integrated into a men’s world, on whose shape and attitudes they have little or no influence. The strategies and policies to be evolved should concentrate on increasing women’s autonomy and their involvement in and influence on the development process”.

So why are women (still) investing in the UN?

Because we get a stage, freedom of speech that might not be able in our own country (yet). Because



the UN (Women) pushed the gender mainstreaming strategies emerging from Beijing 1995 – although in retrospect it may not have been action oriented enough? As the Dutch women’ representative said in 1995 “Policy aimed at the integration of women’s issues should never result in their disappearing from the agenda. Highly specific policies are needed if mainstreaming is to have a chance of success. Women’s rights have been considerably advanced on paper, but still we need to combat de facto discrimination in many areas. Beijing was not a conclusion but a worldwide starting point for genuine progress for women”.

Because we believe in cooperation. It would be great if the UN invested even more in women.

...My dream is that in the 21st century ...gender equality has truly been achieved... that the United Nations has managed to: “redress an imbalance that goes against the very profound principles of the Organisations and which should not have existed in the first place”...

In 2006 NVR showcased the contribution of Dutch women through the years. https://www.nederlandsevrouwenraad.nl/docs/Historisch_overzicht_vrouwenvertegenwoordigers.pdf (both in Dutch and English).