

Opening conference Across the border
30-7 – 3-8 Amsterdam
Initiatief van LCC+ projectpartners met bijdrage van OCW.
Programma met LGBT Christians uit Polen, Rusland en Oekraïne.
Bijdrage uitgesproken door Ben Baks

I start with a personal note:

*When I was a small boy I often went to the Salvation Army local community centre just around the corner of where my family lived, to watch the weekly Wednesday slapstick & western movie for all kids on the block. That was in my hometown The Hague.
That was real fun.*

That was my first experience as child with church and faith based local community services.

My second experience was when my mother wrote a letter to Head of that hometown faith based community service centre . As mother of six children of which two are gay, she expressed her worries about reported cases of discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation by that Christian faith based community, the Salvation Army.

I, as one of her two gay sons, am very proud that she spoke out. That was 1983, 31 years ago. My mother got a reply in which the Salvation Army stated that it won't discriminate against gay people.

But as many of you know it took quite a while for churches and faith based communities in the Netherlands to become inclusive to all its believers!

And now, standing before you as policy advisor to the Dutch Government on LGBT equality matters, you won't be surprised if I say that the Dutch government's view is: that we still have a long way to go.

Why does the Dutch government give support LGBT Christians in the Netherlands and abroad?

I quote te government policy letter:

<In Europe and beyond there is still great resistance to the recognition of the human rights of women and LGBTs. In international debate, emergent conservatism and fundamentalism are evident in orthodox religious countries and orthodox religious circles. (...)

While as long as people continue to be discriminated against or threatened because they are different and hate is preached as part of religious or orthodox beliefs, government commitment is necessary in The Netherlands as well. > end of quote letter to Dutch parliament.

We urgently need a response to the international polarisation within and outside Europe and at multilateral level, by building bridges and by standing up for the rights of women and LGBT's.

That is why the Dutch government actively support LGBT Christian groups in the Netherlands and FORUM in Europe.

Two months ago the Dutch government met with Dutch Christian LGBT groups - as a preparation of a review of the Dutch government LGBT policy. We discussed how to improve social acceptance of homosexuality in Dutch society and the role of government and religious authorities and civil society.

Representatives of Christian and Muslim LGBT NGO's gave us valuable feedback:

Traditionally the LGBT community preaches for diversity and inclusion. The LGBT community can be proud of the diversity within its own community.

But that same LGBT community often has a blind eye on the fact that being a Christian or Muslim or Jew can perfectly well be combined with being L,G,B or T person.

On that meeting the signal was clear: with respect to believers and nonbelievers, freedom of religion, the LGBT community should enjoy this diversity.

I am proud that Wielie Elhorst from LKP and COC Netherlands can take stock of that.

That is why at the European level the Dutch government encourages the steps of FORUM -

*the European Network of Christian LGBT groups -
to associate itself with the International Lesbian
& Gay Association – ILGA.*

*That's a good example of:
Practice what you preach and preach what you
practice!*

*Another piece of food for thought is the many
resemblances between women's rights and lgbt
rights, despite the many differences. In the
Dutch government offices both units work closely
together.*

*What about the discrimination of women in
church? What about building bridges with women
in faith based communities?*

*I wish you a fruitful meeting.
Let us continue to make allies, join forces and
let's move forward!*

D) International polarisation

Beyond our country borders – in Europe, but particularly beyond – there is still great resistance to the recognition of the human rights of women and LGBTs. In international debate, emergent conservatism and fundamentalism are evident in orthodox religious countries and circles. Last March, I took part in the 57th meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. In this context, it is striking that, in recent years, some countries have been more targeted in their opposition to establish women's reproductive health and rights. Against this backdrop, the rights of LGBTs are even more difficult to get on the agenda than women's rights. An active international commitment to the achievement of this is vital. Traditionally, the Netherlands plays a front-runner role in the above and this still applies today, in 2013; this will continue to be essential in the years ahead. However, it should also be observed that we cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the problems that exist in our own country. While As long as people continue to be discriminated against or threatened because they are different and hate is preached as part of religious or orthodox beliefs, government commitment is necessary in The Netherlands as well.

I feel that these are very worrying developments to which the response must be a strong one. In my speech to the UN, I said that a situation could not be tolerated in which the victims of violence are afraid to speak about what has happened to them from fear of stigmatisation, in which women are unable to claim the rights due to them and in which perpetrators go unpunished. None of the countries may be allowed to ignore this problem on the grounds of cultural, economic or religious grounds. Fortunately, this also forms part of the Agreed Conclusions that were adopted on Friday 15 March of this year.

The government wants to actively formulate a response to this new challenge to emancipation policy with other front-runner countries, which it wants to do by standing up for the rights of women and LGBTs, within and outside the EU and in a multilateral context. In the State of the European Union 2013, the defence of fundamental values like quality and respect for human rights in general and for LGBTs in particular have been made the spearhead of policy¹.

The promotion of LGBTs and the rights of women are a spearhead of the human rights policy pursued by the Minister for Foreign Affairs. The Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation is investing in the rights of women and in sexual reproductive health and rights. My active international contribution as the coordinating Minister for Emancipation is complementary to this. Together, we will put the following measures in place:

- *Collaboration and power reinforcement in Europe*
- *Attention for emancipation and the consolidation of efforts outside Europe too*

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¹ Government paper "*Bruggen slaan in Europa*", 15 February 2013