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Summary record of the 43rd meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 17 September 2025, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Saran

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Consideration of reports (continued)

(a) Reports submitted by States Parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (continued)

Seventh periodic report of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (continued)
(E/C.12/NLD/7; E/C.12/NLD/Q/7; E/C.12/NLD/RQ/7)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands joined the meeting.*

2. **Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu** (Country Task Force) said that she wished to know what steps the State Party was taking to address the disparities in educational achievement between students who had a migration background or whose parents had a low income or education level and their peers, to reduce ethnic and socioeconomic segregation in primary and secondary schools, particularly in urban areas, and to improve educational outcomes and expand access to teaching resources, including digital ones, in the Caribbean Netherlands. She would also like to know what the State Party was doing to remove barriers to the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education and to address teacher shortages. She would be grateful for information on any steps taken in follow-up to the amendments introduced to the national law on citizenship education, which had entered into force on August 2021, that had enhanced the place of human rights in such education. She wished to know whether a new citizenship education curriculum had been developed for primary and secondary schools and, if so, whether it addressed economic, social and cultural rights and what role civil society had played in its development.

3. She would be grateful for information on any measures being taken to eliminate the economic and geographic barriers to the participation of low-income and rural communities in cultural life; to promote the heritage, languages and cultural practices of populations with distinct cultural characteristics in both the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands and constituent countries; to address disparities in cultural funding, which was largely directed to urban institutions, leaving small, community-based initiatives underfunded; and to increase the participation of women, migrants and marginalized groups in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

4. **A representative of Aruba, the Kingdom of the Netherlands**, said that the social security system in Aruba had two components. The first, taxpayer-funded social assistance, encompassed financial assistance for individuals or families to cover the basic cost of living, financial assistance for children and financial assistance for persons with disabilities. Applications for such assistance were assessed by the Department of Social Affairs. The second component, social insurance, encompassed both national insurance, which covered everyone and included general medical insurance, insurance for orphans and widows and general old-age pensions, and insurance specifically for employees, which covered sick leave, maternity leave, workplace accidents and unemployment.

5. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that treaties concerning fundamental rights, such as the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights) and the Covenant, had long been applicable throughout the Kingdom. The autonomous countries were working to expedite the implementation of other human rights treaties. Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius were considered public bodies within the Netherlands. The Government had been applying a “comply or explain” approach in recent years, whereby, in principle, legislation in the Caribbean Netherlands must be the same as in the European Netherlands and a reasoned justification must be given for non-compliance with the legislation.

6. The Government did not intend to amend the anti-discrimination legislation to add socioeconomic background and ethnic origin as grounds for discrimination. The Netherlands Institute for Human Rights interpreted the protected ground of race broadly, and most of the rulings in which it invoked that ground related to cases involving ethnic origin. Debates were ongoing as to whether socioeconomic background should be a protected ground, and a government study on the matter was planned for 2026.

7. Reports of discrimination could be made to local anti-discrimination services operating around the country. The Government planned to strengthen the system by creating a single, independent, central body with branches nationwide. The police could open investigations into discrimination complaints filed with them if there was sufficient evidence of a criminal act. The national human rights institution responded to questions and complaints about discrimination and investigated cases under the country's equal treatment legislation. The hearings held by the institution were free of charge and did not require the involvement of a lawyer. If the online discrimination reporting point found that online content about which it had received complaints was unlawful, it would ask the website owner or platform to remove it. Complaints against government bodies could be made to the National Ombudsman, and complaints about discrimination against children could be made to the Children's Ombudsman. Victims of discrimination could also go to court. A new provision of the country's criminal legislation introduced a legal basis for increasing the penalty for crimes involving discrimination by one third. It was not the role of the Government to determine whether political statements constituted hate speech; that was the exclusive responsibility of the public prosecutor.

8. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that the national contact point operated independently from the Government. In 2023, 14 notifications had been pending resolution before it on matters such as the freedom to join a trade union and the transparency of company information, and in 2024, there had been nine, including on the lack of a grievance mechanism and the lack of stakeholder engagement.

9. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that the Kingdom did not pressure countries to become parties to the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants. The Convention's aim was to encourage the development of new varieties – a time-consuming process requiring significant investment – by providing an effective system of plant variety protection. The Convention only protected newly developed varieties and thus did not prevent farmers from using traditional varieties or varieties that were no longer protected.

10. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that the delegation would provide the Committee with fact sheets from a July 2025 report containing the demographic data requested on migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees.

11. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that migrant workers in an irregular situation could go to court to enforce their rights. They had the same access to the courts as any other citizen or resident of the Kingdom and could receive legal aid under the Legal Aid Act.

12. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that, to improve living standards and social security in the Caribbean Netherlands, the Government had allocated a total of 62 million euros in 2022 and 2024 to measures primarily directed towards reducing poverty there; significantly increased the minimum wage, minimum benefits and the child benefit; and put €7.6 million towards enhancing the social housing stock and €5.6 million towards alleviating rental expenses in 2024, providing another €2 million to support those measures and €9 million to improve purchasing power in 2025. Utilities such as electricity, drinking water and fixed Internet were subsidized.

13. The progress made in reducing barriers to equal access to the labour market, especially for persons with disabilities, through tailored job support, subsidies, training and workplace adjustments was monitored and reported to the parliament. Incentives provided to employers included wage cost subsidies and workplace adaptation funds.

14. The Government's investments in increasing the purchasing power of persons with low incomes, made in follow up to recommendations of the Commission Social Minimum, had led to a decrease in the number of people living below the poverty threshold. However, it was estimated that, in 2026, 2.9 per cent of the population would still be living in poverty.

15. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that increases in the statutory minimum wage, which was set by the Government, could negatively affect wage structures set out by social partners in collective labour agreements, as all the salaries would have to be adjusted to maintain the wage difference between the lowest salary scale and

higher ones, thereby leading to higher labour costs. The statutory minimum wage had been substantially increased in recent years, and further increases could lead to job losses.

16. The social minimum for young adults aged 18 to 21 was aligned with the minimum wage for that age group. The Government planned to increase the minimum wage for young people aged between 16 and 20 in 2027. The wage scale for vocational training would be abolished, and the municipal youth supplement for young persons with absent parents or parents unable to pay child support would also be increased.

17. Employers were adapting to the ageing of the population and preparing for a stagnant labour supply by investing in labour productivity. The Government was engaging in discussions on that transition with social partners and other stakeholders and had organized a summit on labour shortages in March 2025.

18. Measures under the European Union Platform Work Directive, including the introduction of a legal presumption of employment, increased algorithm transparency and human oversight, and new rules on data protection and unfair dismissals, would be incorporated into law by December 2026.

19. There was a national campaign to raise awareness of the rights of pregnant employees. The results of a new study on pregnancy discrimination were expected in late 2025.

20. In connection with the “For an Inclusive Labour Market” work agenda, a review of eight pilot projects had been undertaken to identify effective methods for improving the labour market position of persons with a migration background. The insights gained would be shared with employers. The second “For an Inclusive Labour Market” work agenda, covering the period 2025–2028, had been developed in consultation with employers, municipalities and educational institutions.

21. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that the Government had incorporated the recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force, which set international standards on the prevention of money-laundering and the financing of terrorism, into national legislation and had received high scores for its implementation of those standards in its most recent review by the Task Force, in 2022. The country’s registers of ultimate beneficial owners of companies and of ultimate beneficial owners of trusts and similar legal structures were both accessible to the competent authorities. The law on the supervision of trust companies prevented illicit financial streams from passing through the country. As a result of the Government’s efforts to reduce tax avoidance by multinationals, financial flows to low-tax jurisdictions had dropped from €37 billion to €7 billion between 2019 and 2023.

22. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that the upcoming updated national climate adaptation strategy would not itself be legally binding, but any elements of it implemented in legislation or regulations would be. The housing- and health-related safeguards contained in the national climate adaptation implementation programme, a key component of the new strategy, addressed matters such as the resilience of new buildings, the foundations of existing buildings, heat allergens and vector-borne diseases. The Government had made €3 million available to help residents of the Caribbean Netherlands buy drinking water and was investing in drinking water production and distribution facilities. The Government’s three-step strategy to protect the islands against the consequences of extreme weather was focused on analysis, ambition and action.

23. **A representative of Aruba, the Kingdom of the Netherlands**, said that the National Climate Resilience Council of Aruba, established in 2023, had been tasked with developing a national climate resilience framework and was following the three-step strategy of analysis, ambition and action in its work. In the analysis phase, from 2024 to 2025, a climate risk profile and a climate impact atlas had been prepared. In the second phase, in 2025, a national adaptation strategy for Aruba and short- and medium-term climate adaptation plans would be developed. In the action phase, scheduled for early 2026, multi-year investment plans would be prepared.

24. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that, according to projections published by the Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis, in February 2025, under the new definition of poverty established in 2024, 3.5 per cent of inhabitants and 3.4 per cent

of children in the Netherlands lived in poverty. Both those figures were estimated to decrease to 2.9 per cent in 2026. Poverty among migrants from outside the European Union was three times higher than average and was especially high among Syrian migrants. The risk of poverty was high among single parents, at 9.2 per cent, but had decreased significantly in 2024 owing to purchasing-power measures and increased funding for child-related programmes and services.

25. National poverty funds received resources to provide support to children and young people in areas such as schooling, sports, culture and leisure. Municipal authorities, too, provided support on the basis of individual needs. Recently, five ministries responsible for social affairs had worked intensively together to develop an integrated approach to support vulnerable families with children, in recognition of the fact that poverty was a multidimensional problem. The Government facilitated the provision of free meals in schools with large numbers of vulnerable pupils.

26. Food aid was provided under the national programme on anti-poverty and indebtedness and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment supported various organizations providing food and emergency aid. Efforts were under way to reduce food insecurity by improving institutional cooperation, including in hard-to-reach communities, and by linking food aid with income support. Municipal authorities sought to identify persons in need at an early stage so that the underlying causes of poverty could be addressed. In 2023 and 2024, the Youth Education Fund, together with the Red Cross, had provided support to more than 323,000 children.

27. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that an allowance was available to help working parents cover the costs of childcare. Municipal funds were available to ensure that children with developmental delays from disadvantaged backgrounds were able to access childcare. The Government was preparing a reform to make childcare almost free for working parents. Municipal authorities had been granted greater authority to reimburse childcare costs for low-income families. In parallel, work was under way on a programme aimed at increasing the number of childcare professionals. Measures were being introduced to ensure that public funds allocated to childcare were used efficiently. The childcare sector was being designated a service of general economic interest, which would limit profits, and a ceiling was being placed on the salaries of executives in the sector.

28. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that approximately 4 per cent of children in need were still unable to access timely care. Those children were nevertheless under active monitoring and many were already receiving some form of assistance. Efforts to reduce waiting lists and regional disparities included measures to ease professional workload. Since 2023, the workload of youth protection professionals had decreased by 25 per cent, ensuring that they had sufficient time for each child. A subsidy scheme had also been launched to attract new staff from other sectors. The inspection body was preparing recommendations for the sector, which would inform new policy proposals.

29. The Government was revising the youth care system and strengthening specialized services. Measures included enhancing early support for vulnerable families to prevent unnecessary removals, improving coordination among child protection bodies and addressing disparities in the procurement of specialized care by municipal authorities. Neighbourhood teams were being established to provide accessible support, and care organizations were being merged to increase efficiency. Legislation obliging municipal authorities to purchase specialized care collectively at the regional level had been adopted and was awaiting parliamentary approval; it was expected to enter into force on 1 January 2026, ensuring nationwide availability of specialized care.

30. Following the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), the Government was drafting legislation to meet treaty requirements in the Caribbean Netherlands. Important steps had already been taken in recent years, including the establishment of advice and reporting centres and victim shelters on the islands, the adoption of a protection code, the establishment of a right to report for professionals, legal clarification of the definitions of domestic and child abuse and the provision of social and psychological support services for victims.

31. The State's approach to gender-based violence was increasingly gender-sensitive and targeted different forms of violence, addressing victims and perpetrators and both adults and children. Several action plans were in place, including on femicide, which remained a grave concern. The femicide plan focused on professional training, awareness-raising, risk assessment and a new legislative proposal to criminalize psychological violence, expected to enter into force in 2026. A national action plan on sexually transgressive behaviour and sexual violence had also been launched, with emphasis on prevention and protection, including online.

32. Under Directive (EU) 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on combating violence against women and domestic violence, steps were being taken to improve national coordination. The definition of domestic violence would be amended to explicitly cover economic violence and the most recent State budget included an additional €12 million for women's shelters. Measures against online violence, discrimination and hate speech were being pursued. The Authority for the Prevention of Online Terrorist Content and Child Pornography had recently been empowered to require hosting and communications providers to remove or disable access to such content, with penalties for non-compliance.

33. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that the Government acknowledged the current shortage of shelter spaces. The matter was receiving the attention of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and would remain a priority. Most victim support services were the responsibility of municipal authorities and were organized regionally, with municipal councils ensuring both availability and quality.

34. A new housing law, expected to enter into force in 2026, would oblige municipal authorities to provide urgent care to victims leaving women's shelters. The Health and Youth Care Inspectorate monitored waiting times at the country's 25 regional "Safe at Home" centres. The Government maintained regular contact with representative organizations to identify problems and safeguard service quality nationwide. Children could accompany their mothers to shelters, but preference was given to ensuring that children received care within the child protection network.

35. An estimated 33,000 people had been homeless in the Netherlands in 2024, though the true figure was likely higher, as minors and persons without legal status were excluded from that estimate. Two projects were under way to improve data collection: regional counts based on the European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion, and a national quantitative monitoring system in collaboration with Statistics Netherlands. The National Action Plan on Homelessness aimed to include all homeless persons in data collection, using the light version of the European typology, by 2030.

36. The Plan treated homelessness not as an individual failing but as a societal issue. In line with the Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combating Homelessness, it set the objective of ending homelessness by 2030. It was structured around six pillars: strengthened livelihood security, prevention, a priority on housing, improved implementation, knowledge-building at all policy levels and support for specific groups, including young people and LGBTQI+ persons. It placed particular emphasis on prevention, access to housing as a priority, financial security and accessibility.

37. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that there was a social housing shortfall of some 400,000 homes. To support construction, €5 billion had been allocated until 2029. Two thirds of the new homes would be affordable for low- and middle-income households; at least 30 per cent of them social housing. Those objectives had been incorporated into the bill on strengthening housing governance. Procedures and regulations had also been streamlined to accelerate housing projects.

38. National performance agreements on social housing, revised in December 2024, contained ambitious targets, including 30,000 new social homes annually by 2029. Housing associations had also committed to building 5,000 homes priced for middle-income households annually, moderating rent increases, improving insulation and energy performance and enhancing housing and local environment quality. Average waiting times for social housing would be cut by increasing construction.

39. Residential mobility also played a role, as new middle-income homes and affordable owner-occupied housing would allow middle-income households to move out of the social sector. Measures to stimulate construction included financial incentives, simplified regulations and assistance to municipal authorities in coordinating projects. In addition, higher-income households in social housing faced steeper rent increases, which strengthened associations' investment capacity and created incentives to move up the housing ladder.

40. To prevent the loss of middle-income homes, the Government closely monitored housing transactions. Loss of such homes through sales by small landlords was largely offset by new construction, conversions of non-residential real estate and renovation of substandard housing. Sales by buy-to-let investors did not reduce overall stock but shifted tenure, with most dwellings purchased by first-time buyers, including young couples and families. Before the Affordable Rent Act, such homes had often gone to wealthier investors.

41. Maximum rents for social housing were determined by a points system, with most rents under €900 per month. Recent measures to improve affordability included the Affordable Rent Act, which introduced fines for overcharging landlords; the restriction of maximum rent increases in the private sector; and the expansion of eligibility for housing benefits from 2026. An information campaign and cooperation with municipal authorities and the Rent Tribunal ensured compliance with the Affordable Rent Act and sanctions for violations.

42. **Mr. Emuze** (Country Task Force) said that he would welcome information on measures taken to address shortages of general practitioners in rural and certain urban areas, and to reduce waiting lists for registration and appointments, in particular for specialist mental health services. He would appreciate information on national health workforce planning, including plans to address staffing gaps. He wished to know what measures had been taken to harmonize access to primary care across the country and how regional equity was monitored. In that regard, he wondered how measures under the Recovery and Resilience Plan would expand healthcare capacity and provide evaluation milestones.

43. It would be useful to receive information on health outcomes for migrants, persons with disabilities, low-income groups and persons in the Caribbean Netherlands, including any targeted interventions in place and measures taken to alleviate disparities. He wondered what measures had been taken to increase the availability of specialized care and preventive programmes in the Caribbean Netherlands and would be grateful for disaggregated data in that regard.

44. He wondered whether there were plans to scale up preventive healthcare and whether health screening and lifestyle programmes targeted disadvantaged groups. With respect to the Caribbean Netherlands, he would welcome information on resources for specialist medicine and telemedicine, medical evacuation coverage and island-based diagnostics; for closing gaps in preventive programmes such as cancer screening and chronic disease management; and for ensuring workforce attraction and retention.

45. Lastly, he wondered what measures had been taken to end medically unnecessary, non-consensual interventions on intersex children, including an update on the status of a legal ban recommended by national studies in 2019 and 2024 and supported by parliamentary motions and national human rights institutions, as well as information on access to redress and specialized psychological support for the victims of such interventions.

46. **Ms. Crăciunescu-Tatu** said that she would appreciate an update on abortion legislation in Sint Maarten, which prohibited abortion in all circumstances.

47. **Ms. Pérez** said that she wished to know whether there were plans to continue stressing the importance of vaccination throughout the State Party, in particular in the Caribbean Netherlands.

48. **Ms. Rossi** (Country Rapporteur) said that she would appreciate more information on how the social housing situation would be addressed, including a description of any measures taken to address discriminatory housing practices against migrants and refugees. It would also be interesting to receive an update on the State Party's efforts to decrease the climate-adverse effects of its housing sector.

49. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that he wondered whether social housing, once built, was subject to a requirement stipulating how long it must remain as such. The average living space in the European Union had increased in recent years; he wondered whether it was possible to examine the implications of such changes for future housing construction. In addition, the construction of 400,000 homes would generate significant greenhouse gas emissions. He wondered what discussions were under way in that regard.

50. **The Chair**, speaking as a member of the Country Task Force, said that she wished to know how the State Party ensured that its healthcare laws and practices were culturally appropriate and respected cultural and religious freedom of the islands in the Caribbean Netherlands.

51. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that medical guidelines were currently being developed to ensure appropriate care for intersex children when necessary. The guidelines would be published in the second half of 2025. Research into the best regulatory approach to prevent unnecessary, non-consensual treatments for intersex persons would also begin. That research would include input from affected individuals, medical experts and human rights specialists. The research was expected to conclude in late 2026. Both efforts aimed to protect the rights of intersex persons to self-determination and bodily autonomy, while ensuring they had access to necessary care.

52. The question of redress was not currently under discussion in the country because there were no laws or regulations requiring intersex children to undergo surgery. However, a process was under way to examine whether and how legislation and regulations could prevent potential suffering among intersex children in the event of a possible ban. That process had been initiated following the adoption of parliamentary motions to introduce a legal ban on non-consensual and unnecessary medical treatment, and the State was commissioning in-depth scientific research to examine the pros and cons of the various forms of regulation. Regarding operations on intersex children, the debate currently centred on what constituted necessary care and unnecessary care and the subsequent implications. There was no consensus on that point, which was why the matter was still being researched.

53. The Netherlands provided different types of accommodations for foreign nationals who were required to leave the country or were residing there illegally. However, such accommodations were provided only if the individuals cooperated with their return, in accordance with Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals. The Netherlands had the legal obligation to prevent migrants without legal residence from experiencing far-reaching material deprivation. Undocumented migrants who were staying in the Netherlands were provided with the necessary medical care and shelter. Furthermore, many organizations and municipalities were committed to supporting undocumented migrants by providing shelter and guidance.

54. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that the Government addressed noncommunicable diseases through the comprehensive National Prevention Agreement, involving 70 public and private organizations. The Agreement focused on reducing alcohol and tobacco use, tackling overweight and promoting healthy nutrition and physical activity. Measures included offering healthy food in schools, kindergartens and hospitals, reformulating products and introducing the Nutri-Score food labelling system to guide healthier choices in supermarkets. Regarding alcohol awareness campaigns such as Dry January, stricter rules on online sales and enforcement of the “Nix or nothing before 18” policy to prevent the sale of alcohol and tobacco to individuals under the age of 18 aimed to protect young people. In November 2023, the Netherlands Cancer Agenda was adopted as a broad-based, bottom-up initiative of the Netherlands Cancer Collective, consisting of over 150 organizations. The Agenda set 20 ambitious goals, involving the prevention, early detection and treatment of cancer, as well as improving the quality of life for cancer patients and survivors, to be achieved by 2032. The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport actively supported the agenda. Long-standing policies on prevention also targeted noncommunicable diseases more broadly, with notable progress made in reducing tobacco use. Adult smoking had declined from 26 per cent in 2014 to 18 per cent in 2024.

55. As clear communication between patients and healthcare professionals was essential, funding was provided for formal interpretation services. However, the arrangements differed under the country's five healthcare laws. Such services could be reimbursed under the Healthcare Insurance Act. In long-term care, interpreters were mainly required during the initial assessment. In public health, municipalities and centres for sexual health arranged for interpreters, with the costs covered through municipal budgets or government subsidies. Under the Social Support Act and the Youth Care Act, municipalities often provided interpretation services through contracts with care providers. Municipalities and providers were encouraged to strengthen those agreements.

56. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that renovating social housing sometimes required demolition. However, people living in housing subject to demolition were, in many cases, relocated as a matter of priority or were granted the right to new housing with rent protections and housing benefit entitlements. Older social housing in particular had poor energy performance, which exposed households to higher energy bills and the risk of mould and damp, thereby endangering their health. In some cases, demolition and new construction were the best options.

57. Draft legislation was currently under consideration in the Netherlands that would remove the priority currently given to persons with refugee status in the allocation of social housing. The Government believed that such priority should not be given to them based solely on their status. If enacted, the bill would give persons with refugee status the same opportunities as other citizens looking for housing. The Government submitted that the draft legislation was consistent with the Covenant. Its constitutionality was currently being reviewed by the Council of State.

58. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that, in the Netherlands, communities and schools received funding to address gaps in the education system. Early and preschool education, as well as out-of-school programmes such as summer courses or international classes to help students learn Dutch, were funded through the schools' regular budgets. The Equal Opportunities Alliance worked with the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, communities, schools and civil society organizations to improve equal chances for children through various programmes, paying particular attention to their home situation, poverty and domestic violence. Children in stable environments had better educational prospects.

59. Schools had had to be closed during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic for a short time and children had had to follow distant learning. That had posed many challenges for both teachers and students with regard to education performance and social interaction. In February 2021, the Government had introduced a national education programme to address the learning delays and mental health issues of students and a total budget of €8.5 billion was allocated to support education, ranging from elementary to higher education, of which €5.8 billion was allocated to primary and secondary education. The extra funding had reached 1.5 million students in primary education and 1 million students in secondary education. The support had been available to all schools based on a needs assessment and it depended on the type and proportion of the student population with a high risk of learning delays. Schools could choose from a list of internationally proven effective interventions. There were also interventions on mental well-being. The results of the programme had been closely monitored and they had been used to enhance the programme over the years. Monitoring of the programme was ongoing and the latest results were expected to be reported in December 2025.

60. The current curriculum had been developed in 2006 and it had been found to be outdated. The Government had therefore been working on curriculum reform for a number of years. It was necessary to update the curriculum to take account current topics and tackle challenges that needed to be addressed in the classroom. The reform also needed to be more precise and set more concrete attainment goals. The current goals were currently broadly defined, making it difficult for teachers and educational personnel to grasp its exact meaning. The reform was being undertaken by the Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO), which worked with a number of stakeholders, including teacher organizations, trade unions and educational and research institutions.

61. Reports of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) had found that the quality of reading and writing and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills of students was steadily decreasing. In response to declining student performance, in 2022, the Government had launched a master plan to enhance basic skills, with a focus on language, mathematics, citizenship and digital literacy. Almost 95 of the country's students were covered by the plan.

62. The Government was implementing measures to support children with disabilities as part of its transition towards fully inclusive education by 2035. Its goal was to ensure that every child could attend a school close to home and participate fully and equally in learning, regardless of their support needs, if possible within the mainstream education system. The Government was also reviewing the special education requirements in the Caribbean parts of the Netherlands. Given the smaller number of students in the Caribbean Netherlands, it was taking a specialized, tailored approach to addressing their educational needs.

63. Some students, especially those requiring wheelchair-accessible transport, relied on public transport to get to school. However, the system was currently under strain because of a shortage of drivers. The Government was working with municipalities – which were responsible for student transport – to encourage better policies and procurement practices that ensured quality and adequate frequency. Furthermore, efforts were under way to improve supervision, enhance procurement processes and recruit more drivers.

64. The Government was tackling teacher shortages through a two-tiered approach. First, a multi-year campaign promoted teaching as meaningful, well-paid work with growth opportunities, attracting both students to teachers colleges and persons looking to change careers. That was supported by improvements to ongoing teacher education, regional collaboration and strategic staffing. Second, measures were being taken to retain teachers and improve primary school salaries to bring them in line with those in secondary education and create opportunities for newcomers to enter the profession.

65. To address lower educational outcomes in the Caribbean Netherlands, the Government had launched an intensive programme focused on boosting student performance. The programme included the Strategic Education Alliance, which facilitated scholarships, exchanges and internships across the Kingdom. European and Caribbean universities of the Netherlands also collaborated on a foundation year programme to better prepare students for vocational and academic education. Additional support included Dutch language lessons and a buddy system to guide students toward further education.

66. To improve education quality, the Government was initiating curriculum reform in the Caribbean Netherlands, starting with language education: Dutch and Papiamentu in Bonaire, and Dutch and English in Saba and Sint Eustatius. Testing of new attainment goals was expected in 2026. Furthermore, math and calculus goals would be translated into English for Saba and Sint Eustatius later in 2025 to support localized testing.

67. The Government provided subsidies to support access to cultural life, with attention to geographic distribution. It was currently assessing those subsidies to ensure that they were fairly distributed. With regard to higher education, a dedicated committee advised the Government on diversity and inclusion policies, focusing on women, migrants and underrepresented groups. The Government provided support for a national network of female professors that advocated for women in academia.

68. Lastly, following the recent Slavery Memorial Year, the school curriculum now placed greater emphasis on colonial and slavery history and its impact, in both the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands.

69. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that the Government funded national poverty programmes and social organizations that supported participation in extracurricular activities, sports, culture and leisure to help children and young people from low-income households access cultural activities. Municipalities also provided tailored support, such as city passes for cultural access and reimbursement for transport services, to reduce geographic and economic barriers.

70. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that social housing in the Netherlands was generally permanent, although housing associations could sell units to

tenants to fund new construction. The increase in floor space per person was owing to aging populations remaining in larger homes built for families in earlier decades. Efforts are under way to improve housing options for older persons and optimize use of existing housing. Housing shortages stemmed from capacity losses in the construction sector during the financial crisis. To address those shortages, the Government intended to enhance coordination, in accordance with the proposed the public housing management legislation. Concerns about CO2 emissions from new construction were being tackled by promoting efficient building methods and a circular economy in the sector.

71. **Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu** said that she would welcome the delegation's comments on the reported increased ethnic and socioeconomic segregation in primary and secondary schools and its connection with the residential segregation. She wondered whether there were any measures in place to address such segregation. With regard to citizenship education, it would be interesting to hear whether economic, social and cultural rights were explicitly included in the curriculum.

72. **Ms. Rossi** said that she wished to know what measures were taken to ensure that the native language, Papiamentu, and aspects of the culture of Bonaire formed part of the educational curricula of schools on the island. She wondered how the State Party ensured that teaching methods on the island were culturally appropriate and how it involved local communities and educators in the development of education policies that reflected and preserved the island's cultural identity. She would be grateful for information on any measures taken to recognize the authority and leadership of the native population of Bonaire in the cultural and institutional governance of the island and to protect and promote local knowledge, history and heritage. She would like to know how the State Party guaranteed the participation of, and consultation with, native communities in decisions affecting their social and cultural development, including in relation to environmental policies.

73. She would appreciate details of any measures taken to suspend or restrict military and dual-use exports to Israel that might be used in the commission of serious human rights violations against the Palestinian people. She wondered whether the State Party would consider reviewing its economic and trade relations with Israel, particularly in the light of the order issued by the International Court of Justice on 26 January 2024, the advisory opinion issued by the Court on 19 July 2024 and the report recently issued by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, which indicated that Israel was committing genocide in the Gaza Strip.

74. Lastly, she would be interested to learn about the State Party's policies on debt crises in developing countries. In particular, she wondered how the State Party ensured that all decisions relating to loans to such countries, and the conditions attached to such loans, were in line with its commitments under the Covenant and its broader commitments relating to climate justice and gender equality. Did the State party routinely assess the impact of loans on human rights?

75. **Mr. Bouzid** said that he wished to know how the State Party would ensure that digital accessibility requirements were applied throughout the education system and digital technology was made accessible for all students with disabilities.

76. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that a recently signed supplementary healthcare and welfare agreement established a series of commitments between healthcare and welfare organizations and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. The purpose of the agreements was to ensure that healthcare and support remained accessible and affordable for all persons living in the country, irrespective of their place of residence, income, age or health condition. The goals set out in the agreement included reducing staff shortages by 100,000 persons by 2028, establishing more equal access to care, including mental health care, and developing a strategy for using technological innovation to improve the quality of care and reduce staff shortages.

77. The Government collaborated with regional organizations of general practitioners and the municipalities with a view to establishing new general practices. The use of hybrid practice models, which involved both in-person and online consultations, had been increased and greater emphasis was being placed on the use of practice assistants and digital communications. Efforts had been made to identify the reasons behind the long waiting times

for specialist care for young persons. Those reasons included inadequate diagnoses, which resulted in children not receiving the appropriate care, the failure of municipalities to cooperate with each other and with providers, and the lack of specialized care services.

78. A youth care support team made efforts to tackle the regional causes of excessive waiting times. A bill on improving the availability of care for young persons was intended to tackle bottlenecks in the contracting of specialist care. The bill established that municipalities would be required to specify the steps that they were taking to reduce waiting times.

79. A forthcoming agenda for care and support for persons with disabilities was aimed at making healthcare more accessible and sustainable for persons in residential facilities and those receiving home care. The agenda focused on overhauling disability care and strengthening organizations in order to address changing needs. It set out new ways of working that would enhance the availability, affordability and quality of long-term care. The agenda also addressed care for persons with complex needs, support for persons with mild intellectual disabilities, the improvement of client support, the use of innovation and technology, the strengthening of the workforce and the provision of lifelong social support.

80. In the Caribbean Netherlands, a number of programmes were implemented to promote participation in sports and healthy lifestyles for young people and adults. Significant improvements in healthcare on the islands of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba had been made since 10 October 2010, the date on which those islands had been granted the special status of municipalities within the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

81. The Government had previously aimed to establish an acceptable level of healthcare on the islands. In 2022, however, it had set itself the more ambitious goal of ensuring a level of healthcare comparable to that found in the European Union. Under the recently introduced Health Deal for the Caribbean Netherlands, efforts would be made to collaborate with local authorities on the islands to improve preventive healthcare and to attract sufficient qualified personnel. As part of this agreement, a future-oriented labour market programme for healthcare in the Caribbean Netherlands would be developed. In order to address the fall in vaccination rates in the country, efforts were being made to engage with communities with particularly low rates in order to build trust and raise awareness of the importance of vaccinations.

82. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that most of the policies implemented by the Ministry of Education were geared towards a sustainable increase in the quality of education as a whole. However, targeted support, including additional funding, was provided to underperforming schools. Such schools also received suggestions for improving their standards from the Inspectorate of Education. All students were free to choose which schools they attended, which helped to reduce segregation between different communities. The module on citizenship education in the reformed curriculum addressed economic, social and cultural rights as well as the rights enshrined in other human rights instruments.

83. The Ministry of Education cooperated with school boards in the Caribbean Netherlands with a view to recruiting and training teaching staff, professionalizing school boards, promoting multilingualism, maintaining school buildings, facilitating the transition between primary and secondary education and developing a vision for digital literacy.

84. Currently, there were no standards or regulations on the accessibility of digital technology in the education system. However, the Government was exploring ways of enhancing such accessibility, including for students with disabilities. School boards and corporations of schools were required to consider the issue of accessibility when purchasing educational materials. The Government granted subsidies to two foundations that provided educational materials for dyslexic students and students with visual impairments.

85. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands**, responding to the question on arms exports to Israel, said that the only export licenses that were currently active related to the export of components for the Iron Dome air-defence system. No licence was granted for exports to Israel if there was a risk that they might be used to commit serious violations of human rights or international humanitarian law. The advisory opinion issued by the International Court of Justice justified the continuation of the Government's so-called

dissuasion policy, under which steps were taken to dissuade Netherlands companies from maintaining economic relations with companies established in illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In view of the ongoing deterioration of the situation in the Territory, the Cabinet had decided to actively raise awareness of the dissuasion policy and was taking steps to determine whether the application of the policy could be extended.

86. Measures relating to imports from the illegal settlements were, in principle, a matter for the European Union. The Government was advocating for the European Union to impose a ban, or prohibitive import duties, on imports from the illegal settlements. In the meantime, it was implementing national measures to restrict the import of goods from illegal Israeli settlements, in close coordination with like-minded countries. The report issued by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry included a number of recommendations for which the Government had been calling for some time, including the recommendation to implement provisional measures ordered by the International Court of Justice.

87. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that the Government considered unsustainable debt to be a risk for the global economy and therefore made efforts to promote sustainable debt levels. Analysis conducted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank showed that the problems faced by low-income countries primarily involved a shortage of liquid financial resources rather than debt. The Government supported the three-pillar approach taken by IMF and the World Bank to support countries facing problems with debt. It also supported initiatives to ensure that external shocks, such as natural disasters, were adequately considered in debt risk analysis.

88. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that he would be interested to hear about any plans in place to increase the funding allocated by the Government to humanitarian aid, including funds to help low-income countries deal with climate change. He would also appreciate the delegation's comments on the funding provided by the Government to the United Nations system.

89. **Mr. Emuze** said that he wished to know what measures would be taken to reduce the number of children living in households with incomes below the poverty threshold and to increase the availability and affordability of childcare services. He wondered what was being done to decrease waiting times for specialist care for young persons and to increase the availability and affordability of such care. He would appreciate details of any measures being taken to protect children against violence, including domestic violence, and to enhance the availability of shelters for child victims of violence.

90. He would like to know what steps were being taken to address the deficit of affordable housing, including social housing, and the rise in the number of homeless persons. It would be interesting to hear about any plans in place to establish a national rights-based strategy for tackling homelessness and a comprehensive national plan to address food poverty. Details of any steps being taken to alleviate the high cost of housing and utilities in the Caribbean Netherlands would be welcome.

91. He would be grateful for information on any steps being taken to implement island-specific climate adaptation frameworks, to mitigate the risks associated with extreme weather events and to enhance inter-agency coordination in the implementation of measures to tackle climate change. He would welcome information on any measures being taken to address shortages of general practitioners, particularly in rural areas, and to reduce waiting times for registering with general practitioners and obtaining appointments. It would be interesting to know why waiting times for specialist mental health services were so long, especially for young persons and persons with complex needs. What measures were being taken to tackle regional disparities in the availability of such services?

92. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that the Government was a strong proponent of the United Nations system and supported it through both assessed and voluntary contributions.

93. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that international climate financing fell under the category of development aid since, in the Government's view, climate adaptation and mitigation could not be separated from issues surrounding development. The Government's approach to international climate financing was based on the outcomes of the

Copenhagen Climate Change Conference held in 2009. In 2014, the Government had begun reporting on climate-relevant resources provided for in government budgets. Climate financing was made up of public funds, grants and private funds. In 2024, €2.45 billion had been allocated to climate financing, which was significantly higher than the amount allocated the previous year. Of that sum, €759 million had come from public funds and €1.38 billion had come from private funds. Civil society organizations, companies and experts were involved in the implementation of climate financing.

94. **Ms. Rossi** said that she wished to thank the delegation, including the representative from Aruba, for the extensive information provided during the dialogue and for the supplementary information to be provided in writing. It would have been helpful to have more information about the Caribbean Netherlands, Curaçao and Sint Maarten, ideally from independent delegates representing those territories. Nevertheless, the Committee appreciated the substantive and useful information provided, which would help it to assess the progress made on the implementation of the Covenant in the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

95. **A representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that he wished to thank the Committee for the constructive dialogue and for the efforts made by the Committee members to formulate and pose appropriate questions. He would also like to reiterate the commitment of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to upholding the human rights system in general and the Covenant in particular.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.