

POST EVENT REPORT

Disparity in Parity: 100 years of Women's Right to Vote in The Netherlands



On the 4th September 2017, Gender Concerns International in partnership with Nederlandse Vrouwen Raad (Dutch Women's Council) hosted an expert panel at Huis Van Europa for a public reflection entitled 'Disparity in Parity', focusing on the Dutch National Elections held in March earlier this year. Our esteemed guest panel included parliamentarians, directors and members of organisations from the non-for-profit sector. The multi-stakeholder event was organized as a prelude to the parliamentary debate on the election held on the 14th September. The discussion focused on the recommendations of the Gender Election Observation Mission (GEOM) facilitated by Gender Concerns International during the Dutch 2017 elections and the subsequent GEOM Final Report, along with the expert observation of our panel members. The event was attended by honourable members of the diplomatic community with representatives from the French, Belgian, South African, Romanian and German embassies, along with academics, political leaders and representatives from various non-governmental organisations. An important conclusion of this discussion was that electoral gender inequality persists in the Dutch electoral system despite the general notion that gender disparity is not an issue in the Netherlands.



Gender Concerns International is a gender and development international organisation with the mission to build the capacity of women, Women's Organisations (WOs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), and government officials to lobby and advocate for a gender inclusive society. One of the principle areas of expertise for Gender Concern's International is Gender and Democracy, both internationally and at home in the Netherlands. GEOM NL 2017 was launched by Gender Concerns International as the first European GEOM, in commemoration of 100 years of women's suffrage in the Netherlands. A team of international observers was deployed to observe the electoral process from a gender perspective.. GEOM NL 2017 Final Report concluded with a concrete set of recommendations for moving forward to electoral gender parity in the Netherlands. These recommendations formed the basis of discussion for our expert panel during the public event.

Huis Van Europa director Eduard Slootweg opened the event, reminding us of the historic and diplomatic significance of Huis Van Europa and the honor of hosting our event under its roof. Chief Coordinator and Program Development leader for Gender Concerns International Benjamin Tida followed with an introduction to Gender Concerns International's vision, strategies and of course, the GEOM methodology. Gender Concern's International director Ms Sabra Bano began and facilitated the discussion, promoting the GEOM Final Report recommendation for the formation of an expert commission for gender-focused electoral reform.. All speakers agreed that efforts towards gender electoral parity must be a focus in the parliamentary debate and provided the audience with reflections on the GEOM Final Report along with their own recommendations and observations.



These trends highlighted by the panel were another reminder of why gender-focused electoral processes are as important as ever within Dutch society. Further, on the basis of the GEOM NL 2017 Results and Recommendations, incorporating the conclusions made by the expert panel, concrete steps towards increased gender parity in the Dutch Electoral system have been identified:

- The panellists suggested that election observation in The Netherlands must be encouraged by putting smooth and efficient accreditation procedures in place. The relevant information must be available to the public and international and domestic election observation missions need to be invited to ensure that electoral transparency and accountability prevails.
- Constantly reiterated was that:

A: there is a lack of gender segregated data in the electoral process and this creates an obstacle for monitoring and responding to gender disparity in the Dutch democratic system, and thus greater efforts should be made in incorporating gender-segregated data into electoral data collection.

B: there is an urgent need to continue working on electoral reforms in The Netherlands with the support of a diverse committee including Parliamentarians and women's organizations to guide a preparatory electoral process for future elections and especially 2018 local municipal elections.

C: The recruitment of female candidates for the national, regional, local and European candidate lists deserves much attention, to start with the upcoming municipal elections. The number of women in local politics is significantly lower than the number of women in parliament. As an illustration: the current city council of Rotterdam consists solely out of men.

Following panel reflection, audience members were invited to contribute to the discussion. Important issues such as the need for developing electoral processes that address the specific needs of ethnic minorities, the potential barriers for women attempting to run for parliament and the need for a broader audience for events such as this discussion. Concluding the discussion, Ms Bano expressed her gratitude to Huis Van Europa, the esteemed panel and audience members for their valued contribution in enabling the public event. The guest panel especially was thanked for their valued time and contribution by the Gender Concerns International team with small tokens of gratitude.



Nevin Özütok: Parliamentarian – GroenLinks

Esteemed parliamentarian Ms. Özütok of the GroenLinks party regarded the number of female parliamentarians as “nothing less than a disappointing number” and they continue to show that “politics is a man’s world”. Highlighting the barriers to gender electoral parity as socially embedded gender roles, violence against women, lack of access to information and education; Ms. Özütok concluded that there is “still a lot of work to be done to create gender equality” in Dutch society and that the electoral process is an important element.



Femke Merel Arissen: Parliamentarian- Partji van de Dieren (Party for the Animals)

Ms. Merel Arissen, esteemed Parliamentarian from Partij van de Dieren (Party for the Animals) joined Ms. Özütok to share her professional parliamentary experience. Ms. Arissen concluded that gender disparity exists in the Dutch political system, as only one party (Party for the Animals) has a female leader. Ms. Arissen identified this being “not a coincidence but a democratic deficit” and concluded that “gender equality is not about doing relatively well” and that her party will ask to push for diversity and gender equality at the parliamentary debate.



Nenita La Rose: Chairman of Nederlandse Vrouwen Raad (Dutch Women’s Council)

The Dutch Women’s Council chaired by Ms. La Rose represents 52 women’s organisations and one million women. Ms. La Rose brought this expert position to the panel, arguing the need for more women at the decision making level of parliament “to ensure social stability”. In recommending how to achieve this, Ms. La Rose concluded that there must be a focus on people not just policy; “society is about people, start there, politicians should remember this”.



René Romer: Director TransCity

Mr. Romer is a media expert focusing on ethnic and cultural diversity. He used his experience in this field to highlight the fact that there is currently “no Dutch parliamentarian of any gender from an African or African Caribbean background”, nor has there ever been a minister with an ethnic minority background. Furthermore, the last elections saw a decrease in the number of female parliamentarians. Mr. Romer recommended urgent action to combat this lack of gender and ethnic diversity in our parliament, not just in regards to statistic based representation but to ensure that female and minority perspectives are truly represented.



Alice Bouman-Dentener: Honorary President of Women for Water Partnership

Ms. Bouman- Dentener opened with a reminder that “in such a democratic country as the Netherlands, it’s important to reflect on if we are doing as well as we think we are”. Of particular concern to Ms. Bouman-Dentener is the fact that the Netherlands is “a country who base [themselves] on data, however there is no sex segregated data” in electoral data collection, which is a necessity in properly identifying and responding to gender disparities in the electoral system. Ms. Bouman- Dentener argued that “gender roles are social roles so we should not mistake individual parity with social gender parity”. Ms. Bouman-Dentener supported the GEOM Final Report recommendation that there is a need for a “constellation of women’s organisations”, an expert commission for gender-focused electoral reform, to make progress in gender development a reality.



Eddy Habben Jansen: Director at ProDemos

Mr. Habben Jansen highlighted the need for greater focus on education; investment in education providing a platform for long-term influence in political participation. Supporting this argument, Mr. Habben Jansen shared a study conducted in the Netherlands that compared the political interest of boys and girls at age 12, where interest was around the same level, to age 18 where boys were more interested than girls and more willing to participate in politics. Mr Habben Jansen pointed to societal trends that discourage women’s political participation during these forming years between 12 and 18; concluding the importance of “developing active citizenship and citizenship tools at an early age”.

Looking forward towards the local elections in the Netherlands 2018, it is imperative that swift actions are taken to improve the gender-parity of the Dutch electoral system. The exclusion and underrepresentation of women is even larger on local level than national. Gender Concerns International firmly believes that with a multi-stakeholder engagement, involving women's organisations and civil society as well as Parliamentarians and government, necessary gender-sensitive reforms conducive to women's equal representation and participation will be enacted and the conclusions of this debate can guide these efforts. It is hoped that those key leaders and representatives present in both our panel and audience will aid in realizing these reforms.

