

Report of the Bi-Annual Signatory Event of the NAP 1325 Community, June 12th, 2023

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In light of the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict on the 19th of June, the Ministry of Justice and Security, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform, hosted the Bi-annual NAP1325 Signatory Event on June 12th. This Signatory Event focused on **safeguarding women and girls in and from conflict zones** by means of three panels. The panels were moderated by **Alix Vuillemin**, the Executive Director of *Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice*. This report illustrates the key points and takeaways discussed by the NAP 1325 community during the Signatory Event.

Keynote Speech- Rob Huijser, Director European and International Affairs, *the Ministry of Justice and Security*

Rob Huijser started his speech by expressing the Ministry of Justice and Security's deep commitment to the National Action Plan 1325, which as he says, aims to promote peace and security by supporting women, men, and youth in conflict-affected countries and in the Netherlands. He highlighted the Ministry's core focus on accountability, international crimes, and asylum.

He emphasized the importance of understanding the experiences and vulnerabilities of asylum seekers who fled armed conflict. Leaving the conflict area does not resolve the existing problems and trauma faced by these individuals. A comprehensive understanding of their experiences is needed during the asylum procedure. The Ministry strives to create a safe and supportive environment where individuals feel safe to share their stories, including instances of sexual and gender-based violence.

The speech then shifted to the topic of accountability for international crimes. Rob emphasized the necessity of international cooperation in investigating and prosecuting these crimes. Evidence-gathering often requires collaboration between different countries, which can be difficult to achieve. Critical to this is the creation of an international legal framework for mutual assistance. The Ljubljana-The Hague Convention is a milestone achievement in this regard, enabling prosecutors and competent authorities worldwide to assist each other in their investigations and bring perpetrators to justice.

He underscored the importance of the belief that persecution should ideally take place in the country where the crime occurred. He cited the convention as a critical tool for ensuring accountability and compensation for victims of international crimes. By acknowledging the suffering of those affected by war and conflict, including the people of Ukraine and Sudan, as well as the Yazidi victims of Daesh, the Netherlands aims to provide redress and prevent impunity.

Rob concluded his speech with a heartfelt appeal to the Signatories and participants, emphasizing that the new convention and the overall efforts toward accountability are ultimately aimed at victims of the most serious international crimes. Rob stressed that these victims and their families deserve attention, support, and justice. He highlighted the importance of working together to achieve accountability, prevent future atrocities, and uphold the commitment of "Never again."

Panel 1: Dutch Contributions to International Sanctions, Accountability, and Justice for Survivors

Sanne Weber, Senior Program Officer, *Impunity Watch*

Sanne Weber kicked off the first panel by highlighting the importance of taking a gender-transformative approach to justice. Sanne explained that Impunity Watch takes a gender-

transformative approach to justice and a holistic approach to engaging with survivors. This goes beyond ideas of formal justice and includes addressing (S)GBV and working against the underlying structures of gender inequality. It was emphasized that the agency of survivors must be recognized in justice processes and that engaging men and boys are crucial in effectively addressing violent masculinities that reinforce violence against women and uphold impunity. Concluding, Sanne highlighted the importance of women's participation in post-war processes by sharing the example of the positive influence of women on the peace negotiations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Frederieke Quispel, Head of the Department of Multilateral Institutions and Human Rights, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

Frederieke Quispel spoke about the Dutch policy on accountability for victims and survivors of CRSV, which specifically is given importance in the Dutch policy on accountability. She highlighted that while the international community has made significant progress in terms of narrative frameworks related to CRSV, more action is needed to overcome existing barriers to accountability that victims and survivors of CRSV face, and that it is crucial to address these barriers in a survivor-centered way. "Nothing about them without them" is really the motto here. The Netherlands contributes to tackling existing barriers in various ways. This includes keeping CRSV on the agenda, underlining the importance of CRSV in international accountability mechanisms and evidence gathering, and paying special attention for inclusion of CRSV in compensation mechanisms. Frederieke was asked about double standards in international justice to which she answered by emphasizing the importance of the (political) context of each situation. The strong interventions in Ukraine for example are facilitated by the willingness of both the international community and Ukraine to address issues such as CRSV. As a concluding remark, Frederieke emphasized that we have a collective responsibility in ensuring that gender-related issues are not overlooked, but actively prioritized

Huub Alberse, Head of the Sanctions Team, *the Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

Huub Alberse underlined that the full enjoyment of all human rights by women and girls is a cornerstone of Dutch Feminist Foreign Policy, including the right to live a life free from violence. The Dutch government believes sanctions should be part of the wider EU-policy response to preventing sexual violence by putting the spotlight on abuses and those responsible, signaling our concern and increasing pressure to prevent future violations. With the recent EU sanctions pack on violence against women the Union expanded its toolbox in responding to sexual violence against women and girls. Huub explained that sanctions are a means to signal the importance of preventing and protecting women and girls, ensuring their meaningful participation in conflict situations, and catalyzing international cooperation on this issue. Concluding, Huub emphasized that "sanctions are not the ultimate achievement; rather, the real accomplishment lies in the collective change made together."

Panel 2: Investigation and prosecution of international crimes by and in the Netherlands

Mirjam Ekkart, Senior Advisor on International Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters and International Crimes, *Ministry of Justice and Security*

Mirjam Ekkart highlighted that the Netherlands has enacted legislation that criminalizes international crimes, with provisions addressing vulnerable groups and specifically mentioning the victims of the Yazidi community. The country has been actively involved in establishing a framework for judicial cooperation, which includes obligations for states to comply, the ability to refuse requests based on

gender or race, and provisions for the restitution of assets belonging to victims. She mentioned that efforts to prosecute international crimes have culminated in the forthcoming signing of the Ljubljana-The Hague Convention, a treaty that aims to enhance the effectiveness of criminal investigations and combats GBV. This treaty will facilitate cooperation in areas such as witness testimonies, extradition of individuals, and the transfer of convicted persons to serve their sentences in another country.

Mirjam Blom, Senior Public Officer Team International Crimes, *National Prosecutors Office Rotterdam*

Mirjam Blom informed us about the Dutch legal system, which has specialised prosecutors that are employed to handle sexual violence cases related to international crimes with a survivor-centered approach. She explained that building trust with victims, particularly those from societies where trust in government authorities is lacking is a significant challenge. Efforts to support victims are complicated when the survivors of CRSV reside abroad due to legal frameworks and rules that the Netherlands must abide by. Mirjam also highlighted that investigating CRSV can be a burdensome process for survivors, as they are required to provide specific statements about their experiences, which often involve sensitive and traumatic events. The Dutch system places importance on evaluating whether victims need to go through these processes again, and individualized support is provided throughout the legal journey. Efforts are made to keep victims informed about the progress of their cases, as these can take years to resolve.

Martijn Lampe, Deputy Head Team International Crimes, *National Police*

Martijn Lampe emphasized that having qualified and trained investigators is crucial for effectively investigating international crimes, including CRSV, in the Netherlands. The Netherlands recognizes the gendered dimension of these crimes and provides training programs to enhance investigators' recognition and sensitivity to these issues. According to Martijn, collaboration between different agencies, including the police, prosecutors, and victim support units, is essential for a comprehensive and survivor-centered approach. Martijn acknowledges and that the investigation and prosecution of international crimes, particularly those involving sexual and gender-based violence, is an ongoing learning process. The Netherlands strives to adapt and improve legal frameworks, strategies, and training programs to address the specific challenges associated with these crimes and ensure effective and sensitive handling of such cases.

Panel 3: Lessons learned to identify, protect and support survivors of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence in the migration and asylum chain

Anne-Marie de Brouwer, Co-director *IMPACT Center against Human Trafficking and Sexual Violence in Conflict*

Anne-Marie de Brouwer emphasized that SGBV takes place against women, men, girls, boys, and LGBTQ persons on a very large scale. Furthermore, research by Amnesty shows that in the Netherlands 60-80% of women and 50% of men with a refugee background have survived sexual violence. Anne-Marie called attention to the importance of recognizing that different forms of SGBV are interconnected. This is crucial to identify and support survivors of sexual violence. Because the Dutch asylum system needs to be fit for SGBV survivors to report. The identification of survivors of SGBV is important, not only because they need support, but also because SGBV are human rights violations that need to be recognized as such. Anne-Marie advocates for SGBV being a ground for asylum and

adding gender as a form of prosecution in the Dutch legal system. This survivor-centered approach would encourage survivors of SGBV to speak up, seek help, and hopefully attain justice.

Vincenzo Gomes, Senior Policy Officer *Directorate-General Migration, Ministry of Justice and Security*

Vincenzo Gomes highlighted the ways the Ministry of Justice identifies, protects, and supports survivors of SGBV in the Dutch migration and asylum chain. According to Vincenzo, the Ministry has both policy and practical tools to identify, protect and support survivors of SGBV in the Dutch migration and asylum chain. The policies provide a broad framework, and COA and IND can develop their own way of working based on their professional findings and experiences. Since they know best what is going on “on the ground”. Another important tool is the education of the Ministry’s staff and COA members because they are crucial to create a safe environment for asylum seekers to speak up about their experiences with SGBV. Since 2021 the Ministry of Justice and Security engages in multi-stakeholder dialogues with women-led refugee organizations concerning gender sensitivity in Dutch immigration policies. These meetings are very valuable as we discuss how to improve recognizing and identifying survivors of SGBV. One of the other stakeholders is *Cultuur in Harmonie*, who gives us insides into where improvement is needed.

Yordi Lassooy, Founder *Cultuur in Harmonie*

Yordi Lassooy works as a translator and a cultural mediator for different organizations in the Dutch asylum chain, such as the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) and the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND). In her work, she encounters many refugees and migrants, who are often survivors of SGBV. Yordi urged that survivors of SGBV need to be able to share their experiences, with someone that really listens to them and understands them. This is often not the case within the asylum chain. Moreover, she emphasized how important cultural-sensitive policies and practices are. To illustrate, *Cultuur in Harmonie* cooperates with *Centrum Seksueel Geweld*, and unfortunately, the center is not very culturally sensitive because reporting of SGBV needs to be done in Dutch. Because many asylum seekers don’t speak Dutch, they don’t receive (the required) guidance to report their experiences and ask for support. Thus, these help centers and institutions need to be culturally sensitive. Otherwise, people are (even more) discouraged to talk about their experiences with CRSV and SGBV. Another reason why asylum-seekers are discouraged to talk about their experience with SGBV is the *Blind Spot in the asylum system*. Due to the fact that SGBV is often overlooked in asylum procedures and not (always) a ground for asylum, people don’t feel the urge to report it. According to Yordi, to counter these challenges, education, and awareness are very important.