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Report

## Public Meeting: Reflections on the Dutch Membership of the United Nations Security Council



Organised by the Netherlands Atlantic Association

Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> of January 2019

Press Centre 'Nieuwspoord', The Hague

On Thursday 24 January 2019, the Netherlands Atlantic Association hosted a public meeting at Press Centre 'Nieuwspoord' in The Hague themed "Reflections on the Dutch Membership of the United Nations Security Council". Speaker of the evening was Karel van Oosterom (Permanent Representative to the United Nations for the Kingdom of the Netherlands). He reflected on the Dutch participation in the UN Security Council in 2018, what has been achieved during this period, and how the Netherlands in the future can contribute to the Security Council and the UN as a whole. The event was moderated by Robert van de Roer (diplomatic expert) and attended by approximately 120 people.

In 2018, the Kingdom of the Netherlands was one of the 10 non-permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, and chair of said Council during the month of March. The Netherlands aimed to focus particularly on 'strengthening conflict prevention, modernising peace operations, and promoting justice and accountability'.

Robert van de Roer introduced the speaker, PermRep Karel van Oosterom. He provided a short summary of the previous occasions when the Kingdom of the Netherlands was part of

the UN Security Council as an elected member. Approximately twenty years ago, PermRep Van Walsum brokered a peace deal in East-Timor by 'combining moralism and realism', important for the Dutch, as a small country part of this large organisation. Another significant factor for the level of success for the Dutch in the UN Security Council is knowing when to speak and when not to. This fact is also relevant for PermRep Van Oosterom, who served in the Council during turbulent times.

Van Oosterom started his talk by showing a video with the overview of 2018; the Kingdom of the Netherlands in the UN Security Council. Important moments in this year were the UNAMA Resolutions; International Women's Day when Minister Kaag addressed a mostly female UN Security Council; Resolution on hunger; sanctions against human trafficking; and the adoption of a ceasefire in Yemen.

For Van Oosterom, there were three key priorities to the Dutch term in the UN Security Council: 1. the strengthening of the prevention of conflict in the world; 2. the strengthening of peacekeeping missions and peacekeepers; and 3. to hold people accountable for their crimes through the International Criminal Court, for instance the sanctioning of human traffickers in Libya in relation to the refugee crisis from Africa and the Middle East to Europe. In addition to these key priorities, Van Oosterom emphasized other responsibilities on the Dutch term in the UNSC; the aforementioned International Women's Day in relation to gender equality, and team effort. With this latter aspect, Van Oosterom also referred to the fact that Italy and the Kingdom of the Netherlands split the two-year-term in the UNSC between them, instead of only one country serving the full term.

## Q&A

Van de Roer started the Q&A by asking the question whether the world is safer after 2018, after the Dutch term in the UN Security Council. Van Oosterom's answer to that were the contributions of the Netherlands to the peacekeeping efforts around the world. He paraphrased Minister of Foreign Affairs Stef Blok by saying that "our membership made the world a tiny bit safer." Thereafter, Van de Roer asked Van Oosterom about his contact with his Russian colleague in the Security Council in relation to the crash of flight MH17 in 2014. Van Oosterom stated that through cooperation and dialogue he tried to get the Russians on board regarding Security Council resolutions against the perpetrators of that crash.



Following the discussion between Van Oosterom and Van de Roer, the public was able to ask their questions. The topics ranged from the structure of the Security Council and the United Nations as a whole, to the war in Syria, to lessons of communication towards the Russians.



The structure of the UN and/or the UNSC are in need of adaptation according to an audience member, and Van Oosterom agreed. For instance, it could be beneficial to include more permanent members into the Council, either with or without veto power. Then, the comment was made by a member of the audience that many people around the world may not connect with the UN as an organisation, the perception exists that it is elitist. Van Oosterom explains that

this perception can be changed to make the UN more susceptible for ordinary people, because the UN is in the interest of everybody. The UN is the place where all countries gather to communicate instead of having conflicts. Van Oosterom strongly feels that “je kunt beter overleg voeren dan oorlog voeren”, which translates to ‘it is better to make conversation than to make war’. The UN provides shorter lines of communication between countries, thus enabling instant dialogue.

When asked about the action, or inaction of the Security Council regarding the war in Syria, Van Oosterom expressed his frustration with the constant vetoes from Russia. This conflict affects many in the UNSC through connections with people in the warzone on either side. This frustration with colleagues from other countries leads to what Van Oosterom referred to as ‘schizophrenia’ in the Security Council; though relations might be strained between countries, cooperation needs to be achieved in order to get things done.

Van Oosterom then further discussed the crash of flight MH17 and his relations with his Russian colleague in the Council. The Kingdom of the Netherlands wants to bring those responsible for this crash to justice. However, in order to get a UNSC resolution on this matter all permanent UNSC members need to vote in favour. Russia is one of those permanent members, which entails that a resolution has little chance of getting passed. Therefore, Van Oosterom is always very direct, and sometimes blunt towards the Russians in their communications. But, he also remains diplomatic. For each colleague one has to adapt a different style of approach, he explains. With the Russians this style is head-on, straight-to-the-point, and without letting yourself be intimidated. That is what Van Oosterom referred to as ‘effective diplomacy’.

To end this evening, Van Oosterom referred back to three key messages he wanted the audience to get from this gathering; 'words lead to results', 'the Ministry of Foreign Affairs needs to keep up the important tasks it has', and 'cooperation is key'.

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