

**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE
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TO THE UNITED NATIONS**



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STATEMENT BY

H.E. Ms. Marja van Bijsterveld

Minister of Education, Culture and Science

Fifty-sixth Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

NEW YORK, 28 February 2012

Madam Chair, thank you.

Let me first align myself with the statement made by the representative of Denmark on behalf of the European Union.

In 1995 we agreed in the Beijing Platform for Action that gender equality forms the basis of a society where both women and men are free to make their own personal choices, unimpeded by stereotypes and prejudices.

This Platform for Action is a precious commitment in our efforts to assure a brighter future for women and girls. I am therefore deeply concerned by the restrained use of — and sometimes even critical attitude towards — the concept of gender which has become evident since the previous GPP summit.

The Netherlands regards it as inconceivable that, seventeen years after reaching agreement in Beijing, the principles that underpin the Platform for Action may once again be open to question. In 2012, surely, our efforts should go further than merely propping up agreements we made seventeen years ago. The Netherlands therefore believes that our efforts should be directed towards progress.

We deeply believe in the strength of women. For that reason the Netherlands will continue to work hard on the political and economic empowerment of women, including by supporting the role of rural women in achieving food and nutrition security.

But we must also counter violence against women. Madam Chair, I lack special attention for UN Women in this context.

We also should improve the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women.

Because giving girls and women control over their own sexuality improves their economic and social status, it helps them to improve their lives and their country's development.

It enables them to go to school, to work, to obtain information about their health and education, and to influence their country's government.

Girls and women in rural areas are often more vulnerable. Many of them lack information and have limited access to health care services. These factors increase the risk of neonatal mortality. Often younger sisters or cousins care for the motherless child and, as a result, are deprived of the chance to go to school. A new generation is born.

Modern China has to ensure that human rights apply to all people, in all places and at all times. Surely these rights apply also to people of different sexual orientation and gender identity.

I hope from the bottom of my heart that every government wants its citizens to live in safety and society, regardless of their age, sex, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity.

If we do agree on this, we should be able to make progress and set the conditions for gender equality.

Let us do as we promised so many years ago and give girls and women control over their own lives and bodies. If we can do this, we will contribute to a greater goal that we all share: stability, peace and security throughout the world.

Margaret Chai,

When we look at the world, we see women as victims. But women have an enormous strength. Across the globe we see women building independent lives. Even after tragic setbacks, they pick themselves up and carry on.

Let's take inspiration from their example. Let's move forward with the agreements we made seventeen years ago, and let's give women the position they deserve, as economic actors and agents of change.

May success and wisdom to come in the next two weeks can make a tremendous difference to the women and girls.

Thank you..

