



IOB Evaluation

Between paper and practice

Evaluation of Dutch support
to human rights in a changing
world order (2017-2022)

December 2024

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Summary

The Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) conducted an evaluation of Dutch support to human rights during the third Rutte administration (2017-2022).

1. Policy objectives

The Dutch constitution obliges the government to uphold the international legal order, and, in doing so, to protect and promote human rights. In recent decades, the Netherlands has developed a strong international profile and relevant expertise in this field. Successive administrations have agreed that these efforts are not only morally important but also serve the national interest. Indeed, a democratic rule of law and an international framework that guarantees human rights provide a solid foundation for global stability and prosperity. As a medium-sized, export-driven country, the Netherlands benefits from this.

Dutch human rights policy has shown considerable continuity. It focuses primarily on individual civil and political human rights. The following six themes were central during the period under review:

- freedom of speech and internet freedom;
- freedom of religion and belief;
- human rights defenders and civic space;
- equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer persons (LGBTIQ+);
- equal rights for women and girls;
- the international legal order and fighting impunity.

This evaluation focuses primarily on the first four thematic priorities. The third Rutte administration allocated additional funding to the first three themes. The fourth theme, 'Human rights defenders and civic space,' has always been a key priority, also in budgetary terms, and is therefore included here. The latter two themes were addressed in other recent IOB evaluations.¹

The international context in which the Netherlands implements its human rights policy has become more challenging in recent years. The number of (semi-)authoritarian regimes has increased sharply. As a result, civil and political human rights are under increasing pressure worldwide. International efforts to protect human rights are increasingly dismissed as unwelcome (Western) interference. In response, the Netherlands has sought closer cooperation with countries in the Global South to broaden international support for human rights.

To counter these headwinds, the third Rutte administration also allocated additional financial and human resources within the MFA budget to human rights engagement. However, the size of the budget remained modest compared to other policy areas. Article 1 of the MFA budget, which includes funding for human rights efforts, accounted for about 2% of the overall budget at the time of the third Rutte administration.²

¹ IOB (2022); IOB (2021a).

² Article 1 of the MFA budget not only includes human rights policy, but also further political commitment to the international legal order and host country policy for multilateral organisations based in the Netherlands.

For this reason, the extent to which human rights are integrated into – and prioritised within – broader foreign policy has a major impact on the effectiveness of human rights efforts. In line with this, the coalition agreement of the Rutte III administration envisaged a ‘far-reaching, integrated’ foreign policy, with consideration for the international legal order and human rights. The recent MFA policy framework, ‘Human rights – Democracy – International legal order’ from 2023 also aims to promote human rights in the Netherlands’ broader bilateral relations with other countries.³ This evaluation’s assessment of how human rights were embedded in broader foreign policy under the third Rutte administration is therefore also relevant to current Dutch foreign policy efforts.

Dutch foreign policy today faces growing tensions between its three strategic priorities – ‘resilience’, ‘prosperity’ and ‘values’ – as the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) recently observed.⁴ The WRR stresses that the Netherlands faces difficult choices in the current geopolitical landscape and underscores the importance of safeguarding values in its foreign policy: ‘After all, a world without values is also an insecure world.’ In this sense, human rights engagement is a preventive instrument within a broader foreign policy framework.

2. Evaluation objectives

The aim of this evaluation is twofold. First, the review serves to account to the Dutch House of Representatives and other stakeholders for the Netherlands’ efforts to protect and promote human rights in the period 2017-2022. In addition, IOB draws lessons and provides recommendations for the development and implementation of future policies.

Given the broad scope of human rights policy, this evaluation takes a comprehensive approach. The following research questions guided the evaluation:

Main question

To what extent did the Netherlands contribute effectively and efficiently to achieving human rights policy goals between 2017 and 2022?⁵

Sub-questions

The first sub-questions examine three key components of human rights policy:

1. To what extent has the Netherlands contributed **multilaterally** to international diplomatic achievements on human rights goals?
2. To what extent has **bilateral** diplomatic and financial engagement (through the Human Rights Fund) helped to achieve human rights goals?
3. To what extent has engagement in other policy areas contributed to human rights outcomes, and how were negative impacts addressed? How has MFA managed to promote **policy coherence**?

In addition, there are two cross-sectional sub-questions:

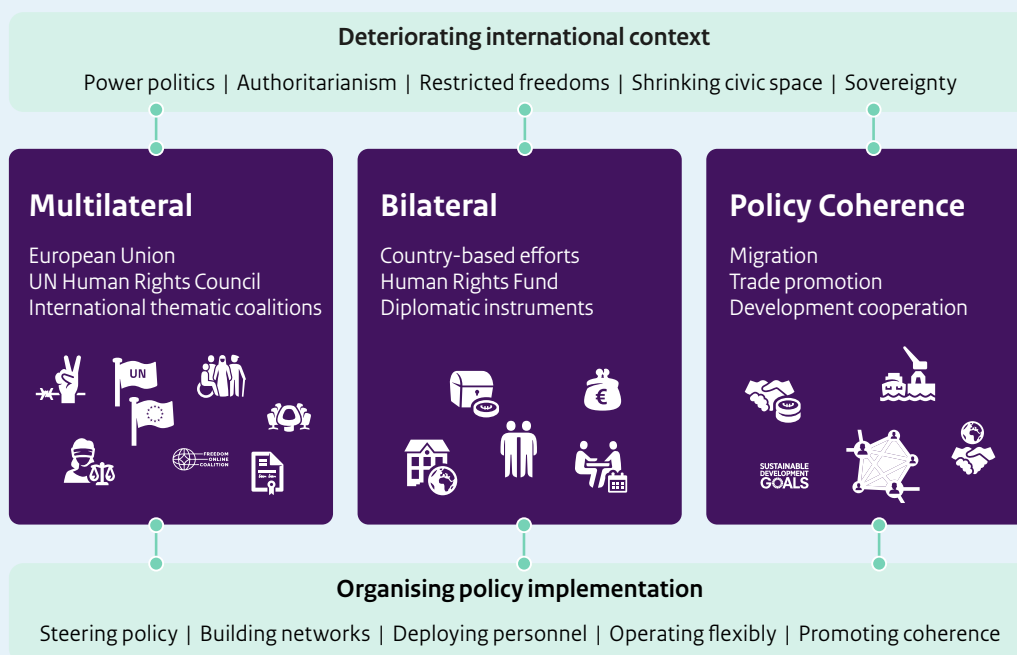
4. **External:** How has the Netherlands adjusted its human rights priorities and implementation in response to a deteriorating international context?
5. **Internal:** What organisational factors at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported or hindered the implementation of human rights objectives?

³ MFA (2023a).

⁴ WRR (2024).

⁵ When assessing *effectiveness*, IOB evaluates the extent to which Dutch efforts contribute to (intermediate) policy objectives. In assessing *efficiency*, IOB looks at the relationship between the human and financial resources used and the results achieved.

Visual representation IOB human rights evaluation



3. Research approach

To maximise the validity of the research findings, IOB uses complementary sources of information (triangulation) in this evaluation. Information was gathered from: (a) interviews with over 400 respondents (including MFA staff, diplomatic partners, think tanks and (inter)national human rights organisations), (b) 10 focus group meetings with human rights defenders from different regions, (c) visits to Indonesia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Brussels (EU) and Geneva (UN) to evaluate Dutch human rights efforts in practice, (d) analyses of internal MFA documentation and external publications, (e) online surveys among Dutch embassies and international human rights organisations, and (f) an externally conducted literature review.

To evaluate the bilateral and multilateral policy efforts, IOB selected several cases where the MFA dedicated substantial capacity, money and attention. These include Dutch efforts in multilateral organisations such as the UN Human Rights Council and the European Union (EU), as well as bilateral efforts led by Dutch embassies, the Human Rights Ambassador and the Human Rights Fund. Through these case studies, the evaluation examines a wide range of bilateral and multilateral components that were prioritised in the implementation of human rights policy during the period under review.

For the policy coherence component, IOB conducted research on the role of human rights in policy frameworks for migration, trade promotion and development cooperation. In addition, IOB also examined several country case studies where Dutch foreign policy operates in precarious human rights contexts, such as Libya, Tunisia and the Philippines. These cases primarily illustrate how the Netherlands balances interests in complex environments and addresses negative human rights impacts. However, these cases are not representative of the overall integration of human rights into Dutch foreign policy. In countries with less complex human rights contexts, achieving policy coherence is likely to be less challenging.

4. Research findings

Main conclusion

During the period under review, the Netherlands was among the leading countries contributing to international diplomatic human rights agreements. Despite increasing resistance from (semi-) authoritarian countries, the Netherlands achieved notable diplomatic results on priority human rights issues in the EU and UN context with relatively modest resources.

At the same time, IOB identifies a gap between policy results on ‘paper’ and in ‘practice’.

In countries where the Netherlands was (and remains) active, the effectiveness and efficiency of human rights policy implementation were more limited than intended. The evaluation identifies three factors contributing to this.

First, policy implementation during the period under review was fragmented across many countries and issues. In other words, the Netherlands did a little bit of everything everywhere.

Second, most policy efforts were focused on the short term, without a clear understanding of what the Netherlands wanted to achieve in the medium term.

Third, in practice, the Netherlands’ emphasis on human rights in bilateral cooperation with other countries was inconsistent and dependent on the importance of competing national interests.

This overall conclusion is based on the following five sub-conclusions:

Sub-conclusion 1

The evaluation finds that the Netherlands has contributed effectively and efficiently to drafting international resolutions, guidelines, agreements and the development of new multilateral instruments in the field of human rights. However, the Netherlands has devoted less attention to the practical implementation of these diplomatic achievements.

International diplomatic achievements

In the multilateral forums evaluated (the UN Human Rights Council, the EU and various international coalitions focused on specific human rights issues), the Netherlands has long been among the leading group of diplomatically active countries in the field of human rights. On its priority policy themes, the Netherlands has made effective contributions, despite modest resources, to developing international human rights guidelines and instruments during the period under review. For example, thanks to years of Dutch diplomatic efforts, the EU can now impose sanctions on human rights violators worldwide. The Netherlands also played a key role in establishing UN commissions to investigate human rights violations and fight impunity in conflict zones such as Yemen, Afghanistan and Ukraine.

Gap between policy and implementation

The evaluation finds that Dutch diplomatic efforts in multilateral forums were not strongly linked to human rights efforts at country level in the period 2017-2022. The Netherlands focused mainly on embedding its priorities in international agreements (standard-setting). There was less focus on ensuring the practical implementation of human rights resolutions, guidelines, agreements and instruments once adopted at the country level.

This gap between policy on paper and implementation in practice was most evident in international thematic coalitions. In The Hague, the MFA allocated considerable human capacity to taking a leading diplomatic role in these coalitions. However, according to embassy officials, these coalitions contributed little to the effectiveness of Dutch human rights efforts in the countries where they operated.

The evaluation also shows that the Netherlands made only limited contributions to implementing various European human rights guidelines and instruments during the period under review. One example is the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, which aimed to coordinate efforts between EU institutions and Member States. The Netherlands and other European countries spent six months negotiating its content in Brussels. However, during a visit to Indonesia, IOB found that many European diplomats were unfamiliar with the Action Plan. According to Dutch embassy officials and human rights defenders, the European policy framework hardly played a role in many other countries either.

For two multilateral human rights instruments, the gap between policy development and policy implementation was significantly smaller in the 2017-2022 period. Dutch embassy staff often used country resolutions of the UN Human Rights Council in practice. The same applied to recommendations made in the context of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). This is the 'human rights exam' for Member States. Both Dutch embassies and human rights organisations actively promoted and monitored the implementation of these recommendations.

Sub-conclusion 2

The evaluation shows that the bilateral diplomatic and financial efforts during the period under review did not contribute effectively and efficiently to achieving Dutch human rights objectives. Policy implementation was fragmented, often short-term and lacked a clear strategic approach.

Lack of strategic approach

The evaluation found that during the 2017-2022 period, the Netherlands did not sufficiently define *what* it aimed to achieve in the countries where the human rights policy was implemented in the medium term, nor *how* different instruments could best contribute to the policy objectives.

The evaluation also shows that Dutch engagement during the period under review was geographically and thematically fragmented. The policy theme 'International legal order and human rights' was a priority in more than 100 countries. And in no fewer than 50 countries, the MFA financed projects from the Human Rights Fund. The choice of these 50 partner countries was based neither on an analysis of relevant human rights trends nor on an analysis of Dutch influence and expertise in these countries. Moreover, the Netherlands addressed a wide range of human rights issues across these countries.

Another contributing factor was the persistent (political) pressure on the MFA to respond quickly to developments in virtually every corner of the world. Responding to rapidly changing circumstances is inherent in a policy area such as human rights. But according to staff, the constant 'crisis mode' meant that human rights policy during the period under review was dominated by a short-term perspective. Both MFA staff and human rights organisations characterised policy implementation during this period as ad hoc, incident-driven and reactive.

Human Rights Fund

The Human Rights Fund was the main financial instrument of human rights policy in the period 2017-2022. Dutch embassies managed part of the fund (the 'decentralised fund'). Another part of the fund was allocated by the MFA from The Hague to civil society organisations (the 'central fund'). The evaluation shows that both parts of the Human Rights Fund were *valuable but ineffectively used* financial instruments:

- The Human Rights Fund was valuable because cooperation between national organisations and the international community promoted the effectiveness of human rights policy in the countries concerned; external pressure alone was rarely sufficient. The evaluation shows that multi-year projects, which responded flexibly to changing circumstances during the period under review and which received diplomatic support from Dutch embassies in addition to financial support, delivered relevant and lasting results.

- However, the Human Rights Fund was not used effectively due to a fragmented approach. With €30 million available annually, the Netherlands funded more than 500 projects per year during the period under review. Most of these projects consisted of small, short-term activities spread across numerous thematic priorities. This fragmentation resulted in a high administrative burden and high operating costs in relation to the results achieved (inefficiency). In addition, the fragmented approach limited the contribution of projects to the overarching Dutch policy objectives.

In 2022 (i.e. by the end of the period under review), the MFA adjusted the design of the *central* Human Rights Fund, partly based on IOB's recommendations. The ministry now supports a smaller number of projects with larger budgets. Moreover, current efforts focus more on achieving medium-term results. In addition, the focus of the Fund is now limited to protecting journalists and human rights defenders. However, the design of the *decentralised* Human Rights Fund has yet to be adjusted.

Diplomatic instruments

Demarches by embassies to formally raise human rights issues with foreign authorities primarily serve to send a clear signal. The same applies to public statements, political dialogue and high-level official consultations. Through these actions, the Netherlands, often together with international partners, underlines the importance of human rights in foreign relations. However, the evaluation finds that during the period under review, these efforts were insufficiently embedded in a strategy of influence aimed at achieving tangible medium-term results. Diplomats involved told the IOB that raising human rights concerns often felt like a box-ticking exercise.

At the same time, the evaluation finds that the objectives of the Human Rights Ambassador and the Human Rights Tulip⁶ were largely achieved. These instruments made a visible contribution to the implementation of the human rights policy.

Sub-conclusion 3

Based on the case studies reviewed, IOB concludes that in the 2017-2022 period, the Netherlands *selectively* pursued policy coherence between human rights and other foreign policy areas. The willingness to prioritise – and leverage – human rights within broader bilateral relations with other countries varied considerably.

Policy framework

On paper, the third Rutte administration laid a solid foundation for a coherent foreign policy that incorporated human rights. Policy frameworks on foreign trade and development cooperation, security and migration explicitly referred to human rights. The administration also emphasised in several documents the strategic importance of human rights policy for the future prosperity and security of the Netherlands.

In practice, however, human rights objectives increasingly clashed with other Dutch interests. In a shifting geopolitical landscape, human rights were not only aligned with other policy areas but also had to be weighed against competing foreign policy priorities.

'We are not the Ministry of Human Rights', senior MFA officials frequently emphasised.

The evaluation finds that the Netherlands was selective in prioritising human rights over other interests during the period under review. According to embassy staff, other Dutch interests in Asia often took precedence over human rights. In contrast, diplomats stationed in Europe felt that the focus on human rights and other policy areas was balanced.

The review shows that this tension between the pursuit of policy coherence on paper and the balancing of interests in practice also played out in the areas of migration and trade.

⁶ The Human Rights Tulip is an award from the Dutch government to support human rights defenders in their work.

Migration

During the period under review, human rights considerations increasingly took a backseat as Dutch cooperation with North African countries (Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Libya) became more driven by migration interests. Two examples illustrate how this played out in practice:

- In Tunisia, the Netherlands deliberately scaled back cooperation with the authorities when democracy and the rule of law were curtailed and human rights defenders were imprisoned. However, once Tunisia became a key migration partner, the Netherlands intensified cooperation with its authoritarian regime. Moreover, the study found that mitigating negative human rights impacts was not well integrated within migration cooperation. This was at the expense of policy coherence.
- In 2018, at the UN Human Rights Council, the Netherlands raised concerns about human rights developments in Egypt. This strained bilateral relations. In response, the Egyptian authorities suspended the migration dialogue with the Netherlands. The MFA subsequently withdrew as the organiser of a multilateral event on Egypt's human rights situation. In addition, the Netherlands decided to lower its national profile on Egypt at the UN Human Rights Council.

Trade

Trade relations provide an opportunity to discuss human rights in the context of a broader relationship and based on mutual interests. Both MFA staff and external interviewees emphasised the potential role of economic diplomacy in advancing human rights objectives. However, the evaluation finds that in practice, Dutch efforts in the countries did not fully align with this potential. While some embassies saw close cooperation between their economic and political sections, others reported that economic colleagues kept human rights at arm's length, leading to a compartmentalised approach to policy implementation.

The role of human rights is examined in the evaluation of two instruments that the government uses to support Dutch companies: trade missions and export credit insurance. The government does not take the human rights situation into account when selecting the countries in which the Netherlands uses these trade instruments. Even in cases where the Dutch government became involved in large-scale economic projects in developing countries with a challenging human rights context, it did not intensify the human rights efforts in those countries. Dutch policy during the period under review focused primarily on preventing and addressing human rights impacts that were directly linked to individual government-supported economic projects, in line with international standards.

The evaluation also finds that the government structurally informed companies participating in trade missions about risks related to international corporate social responsibility (ICSR), but did so in a limited and inconsistent manner. Recently, the MFA decided to involve Dutch civil society organisations more actively in preparing trade missions to high-risk markets.

In addition, the Dutch policy guidelines required participating companies to identify potential risks in their business activities, including human rights abuses. They were also required to describe, prior to the trade mission, what concrete measures they would take to address these risks. However, in practice, these assessments were often brief and vague. Towards the end of the review period, the government expanded these guidelines, demonstrating its capacity to learn, though it is still too early to assess the impact.

The evaluation also highlights human rights risks in a major ongoing economic project in the Philippines, for which the Netherlands provides export credit insurance. These risks have not been fully identified, but the project has made concrete progress in several areas – including labour rights, workplace safety and compensation for lost income – thanks to the involvement of the Dutch government and international financiers.

The evaluation of the Philippines case study shows that external monitoring plays a crucial role in mitigating negative impacts on local communities. The broader 2021 evaluation of the CSR aspects of the Export Credit Insurance Facility also underscored the importance of independent oversight. Since then, the Dutch government has required external monitoring for all high-risk projects.

Publicly sharing information is also important in relation to human rights, the report finds. The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights stress the importance of transparency on the human rights impacts of business projects. This information must be accessible to local stakeholders. The evaluation shows that during the period under review, the Netherlands provided basic information on high-risk projects online and was more transparent than many other countries.

In contrast, access to concrete project information for local stakeholders remained limited in practice. Such information is formally owned by the companies implementing an export credit insurance project. To protect commercially sensitive data, these companies often restrict access through non-disclosure agreements. While this protects business interests, it also limits transparency on potential human rights impacts – even when the information in question is not commercially sensitive.

Development cooperation

The development cooperation (DC) budget played a significant role in implementing human rights policies during the period under review. However, there was considerable overlap between the different funds that financed initiatives focusing on different human rights themes. This hampered the efficient use of financial resources. In addition, the evaluation shows that efforts to strengthen coherence between civil and political rights (MFA) and socio-economic rights (DC) policies did not achieve the desired results. A key obstacle was the lack of targeted leadership and dedicated human resources within development cooperation directorates to translate this policy link into concrete diplomatic and programmatic action.

Sub-conclusion 4

During the review period, the Netherlands placed a strong emphasis on its own policy priorities in implementing human rights policy. It responded directly to the deteriorating international context surrounding these issues and intensified cooperation with countries in the South. However, the Netherlands devoted little attention to the priority needs of its Southern partner countries or to country-specific developments.

The evaluation finds that the Netherlands has responded to the deteriorating international context by stepping up efforts on priority themes such as impunity, online human rights protection and the rights of LHBTIQ people. However, the lack of flexibility to contribute to the (temporary) protection of human rights defenders in crisis situations was a recurring concern. In addition, there was little room within the human rights policy to pay attention to country-specific developments that did not fall within the six priority themes of the Netherlands. Respondents pointed out to IOB that this particularly applied to the lack of attention to the relationship between human rights and climate change, security and business in countries where the Netherlands operates.

The strong emphasis on its own priorities also meant that the ambition to strengthen cooperation with countries in the South was only partially achieved. The Netherlands managed to broaden international support somewhat for its own themes. However, it made little effort to align with socio-economic or other priorities of its Southern partners during the period under review. By contrast, authoritarian states engage more actively and at higher levels, enabling them to build stronger ties with these countries.

On some human rights issues, the Netherlands took positions during the period under review that proved counterproductive to its aim of close cooperation with Southern countries. One striking example highlighted in the evaluation is the Netherlands' decision to vote against an anti-racism resolution in the UN Human Rights Council.

This issue has been high on the international agenda since the death of George Floyd in the United States (2020). Many Southern countries see the anti-racism resolution as an important part of the global fight against racism. The resolution is based on the final declaration of the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) held in South Africa in 2001. During side meetings at the conference, anti-Semitic remarks were reportedly made. However, the final declaration itself contains no such references; on the contrary, it explicitly states that the Holocaust must never be forgotten. Due to controversies following the conference in South Africa, the Netherlands abstained from voting in the Human Rights Council for

a long time. In 2021, however, the Netherlands changed its position. Following political lobbying by Israel, the Netherlands voted against the anti-racism resolution. This decision caused widespread miscomprehension among Southern countries and, according to diplomats and experts, undermined Dutch efforts to strengthen mutual cooperation.

Sub-conclusion 5

The two key organisational factors that facilitated policy implementation during the period under review were (1) the willingness of the political and senior civil service leadership to personally commit to human rights, and (2) the external networks that the Netherlands maintained with civil society and diplomatic actors. However, rapid staff rotation at the MFA was a major limiting factor. While multilateral engagement had clear strategic direction, efforts at the country level lacked coherence and guidance.

Strategic direction

The evaluation shows that the Multilateral Organisations and Human Rights Department (DMM) within the MFA managed the policy effort on human rights in multilateral forums in a strategic and results-oriented manner. There were clear procedures for guidance, consultation and reporting. The contrast with the management of policy implementation at country level was stark. Embassy staff identified this in the evaluation as the weakest organisational capacity in this policy area. Responsibility for managing country-level human rights efforts lies with various regional directorates, which oversee broad bilateral relations within ‘their’ respective regions. However, these directorates generally lack specific human rights expertise and capacity.

Human resources

The evaluation finds that the human resources capacity at the MFA during the period under review was insufficient to achieve the many objectives of the human rights policy. In addition to the thematic priorities, the Netherlands also aimed to intensify cooperation with countries in the South and strengthen coherence with other policy areas. Moreover, the worsening global climate for human rights forced staff to work even harder to achieve results. The DMM and Permanent Representations (PRPs) in particular faced significant – and at times unhealthy – workloads.

Rapid staff rotation had a detrimental effect on the effectiveness of policy implementation during the period reviewed. Several human rights posts in embassies and PRPs were designated as training posts for entry-level staff, who rotated as frequently as every two years. Staff turnover was also high within the DMM. External diplomatic and civil society partners in The Hague and at the country level told IOB that this rapid rotation of staff had a negative impact on cooperation with the Netherlands.

The evaluation also shows that the personal commitment from political and senior officials significantly influenced the effectiveness of Dutch human rights policy. In complex negotiations, such as the establishment of the EU Human Rights Sanctions Committee and the UN Commission of Inquiry on Yemen, engagement at this level was critical to success. When this commitment was lacking, Dutch diplomatic influence weakened.

External networks

The evaluation consistently highlights building external networks as one of the MFA’s strongest organisational capabilities. Among international organisations, foreign governments, think tanks and human rights organisations, Dutch diplomats have the reputation of being approachable and cooperative. These external networks also improve the Netherlands’ information and negotiating position. This organisational capacity facilitated the effective implementation of the human rights policy in the period 2017-2022.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions discussed above, IOB arrives at recommendations for the three main components of human rights policy that are central to this evaluation: (1) multilateral engagement, (2) bilateral diplomatic and financial efforts, and (3) policy coherence.

These recommendations focus explicitly on Dutch policy and not on the individual cases covered by the evaluation.

1. Promote the implementation of international human rights agreements and the use of related instruments.

- a) Provide more targeted guidance from the MFA (DMM) to embassies to promote and monitor the implementation of international human rights guidelines and the use of related instruments. Options include:
 - developing a concise handbook for embassies, explaining how multilateral instruments can support their human rights efforts on priority issues;
 - providing clear instructions on how embassies should implement priority multilateral resolutions, action plans, agreements and instruments once they have been adopted;
 - mandating embassies to explicitly address the implementation of relevant multilateral directives and instruments in their annual plans and annual reports;
 - mandating embassies to provide targeted support and monitor the implementation of Dutch recommendations to priority countries in the context of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).
- b) Maintain sufficient human rights capacity in embassies and invest in embassy staff knowledge of (among other things) the multilateral instruments. To strengthen continuity, extend the rotation period of diplomats responsible for human rights missions beyond the current two-year cycle.
- c) In various thematic coalitions, strike a better balance between Dutch contributions to international standard-setting and promoting the practical application of these standards in the countries concerned.
- d) In the EU context, emphasise the need for the operational translation of overarching human rights policy frameworks and guidelines into country-specific strategies. Promote action-oriented plans with clear objectives and intervention strategies, developed and implemented on a country-by-country basis in cooperation with (inter)national partners. Ensure independent external monitoring of progress.
- e) Maintain the capacity to uphold the Netherlands' leadership role at the UN in resolutions combating impunity in specific countries. Preserve the core concept of accountability for all parties and avoid selective application. Limit the number of thematic resolutions the Netherlands prioritises in the UN Human Rights Council.

2. Improve the focus and strategic direction of human rights policy in country practice.

- a) Increase geographical focus by limiting the number of partner countries based on an analysis of:
 - (i) human rights trends ('demand side') and (ii) Dutch influence/expertise in a country ('supply side').Maintain sufficient flexibility to respond to unforeseen developments.
- b) Limit the number of themes prioritised by the Netherlands to a maximum of three per country. In doing so, also respond to context-specific issues that may not align with Dutch priorities.
- c) To implement the human rights policy, first define the *what*: the medium-term goals for priority partner countries. Be realistic, given the downward trend on many human rights issues. Then specify *how*: the influence and policy instruments the Netherlands can and wants to use in cooperation with national and international partners. Involve human rights experts in the development and implementation of this strategic approach.
- d) Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of financial commitment by (i) merging funds with partially overlapping objectives into a single 'Human rights, democracy and international legal order' budget or by (ii) avoiding overlaps between the thematic objectives of these funds.
- e) Strengthen national human rights organisations in priority countries, as a strong civil society is essential for achieving Dutch human rights objectives. Provide multi-year, flexible support with a focus on building the capacity of these organisations. Maintain some scope for a limited number of short-term innovative pilot projects.

- f) Ensure the context-sensitive implementation of human rights policy as it requires guidance from a country-specific perspective. Therefore, ensure a strong role for embassies and country teams in priority setting, policy development and decision-making on the use of financial resources.

3. Embed human rights more firmly and structurally in wider foreign policy.

- a) In the multi-year country strategies, clearly define how human rights can be protected and promoted through other policy areas, thereby strengthening the strategic guidance for policy coherence. Also specify how the Netherlands will prevent and address negative human rights impacts resulting from other policy priorities.
- b) Migration and human rights
- For each migration partnership that the Netherlands enters into, on its own or in a multilateral context, carry out a risk analysis of the potential impact on the rights of displaced persons.
 - Include clear safeguards and concrete criteria for the protection of human rights in every migration partnership, such as ensuring access to dignified and safe accommodation.
 - Ensure independent external monitoring of compliance with human rights agreements and make these reports public.
 - Attach consequences to migration cooperation with countries that fail to protect human rights.
- c) Trade promotion instruments and human rights
- During trade missions, consistently include human rights in economic consultations with the authorities of countries where there is a high risk of human rights violations.
 - Make it standard practice to provide comprehensive information on human rights conditions and risks of human rights abuses to companies participating in trade missions to high-risk countries. Use the expertise of civil society organisations and other external experts before and during these missions.
 - Make the publication of individual companies' CSR self-scans a condition for participation in trade missions to high-risk countries. This will not increase the reporting burden on companies, as self-scans are already obligatory. However, it increases transparency on how social risks are identified and addressed. The recently adopted EU Directive (2024) on 'Corporate sustainability due diligence' also emphasises the importance of transparency.
 - Increase the MFA's commitment to human rights when the government becomes involved in large-scale economic projects in high-risk countries through trade instruments. Prioritise policy coherence and support (inter)national organisations that help protect the rights of people living and/or working in project areas.
 - Explore legal options to publish human rights impact assessments (and plans to address these risks) for projects in high-risk countries supported by government export credit insurance. This increases transparency for local stakeholders, in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and serves the public interest. As no commercially sensitive information is involved, disclosure will not harm the competitive position of Dutch companies.
- d) Development cooperation and human rights
- Strengthen the coherence between the policy commitment to civil and political rights (MFA) and socio-economic rights (development assistance, DA). This will also better align efforts to intensify cooperation with Southern partner countries.
 - Allocate sufficient capacity within DA directorates to operationalise this link with human rights engagement and institutionalise collaboration between DMM and relevant DA directorates.

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