

Media release

SECURITY COUNCIL ELECTION: NETHERLANDS FAILS TO WIN MAJORITY

Dutch nuclear weapons policy pulls down vote; Netherlands obliged to share seat with Italy

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The Netherlands' hypocritical policy on nuclear weapons, combined with its stubborn refusal even to discuss the issue with UN member states, resulted in its failure to secure the necessary votes to win a non-permanent seat on the Security Council, Geneva-based nuclear disarmament NGO Wildfire>_ announced today following the 28 June election in the General Assembly.

Despite running a highly visible, sophisticated and expensive campaign, in several rounds of voting the Netherlands repeatedly failed to win the required two-thirds majority for election, and was finally obliged to seek a deal with competing candidate Italy whereby the two countries would share the Security Council seat. (The third candidate for the two vacant seats for the Western European and Other States Group, Sweden, was elected in the first round with a clear majority.)

Since October 2015, Wildfire>_ has lobbied intensively for the 127 states that have joined the *Humanitarian Pledge to stigmatise, prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons* to use their vote in the 2016 Security Council election to encourage the Netherlands to re-examine its nuclear weapons policy and in particular to consider steps to reduce its reliance on nuclear weapons and support international moves to delegitimise and outlaw them. The election result shows that many of these 127 states have followed Wildfire>_'s recommendation and voted accordingly.

Speaking in Geneva following the election, Wildfire>_ chief inflammatory officer Richard Lennane said that the Netherlands' poor result was unnecessary. "If not for its mishandling of the nuclear issue, the Netherlands would have won easily. There was no reason the Netherlands could not have engaged positively with other states on the issue, and at least attempted to answer honestly some of the concerns about its policy of relying on nuclear weapons," said Lennane. "This would also have been in line with the wishes of the Dutch parliament. Instead, the government of the Netherlands has paid a political cost for intransigence and stonewalling, squandering an otherwise effective campaign and compromising a key foreign policy opportunity. Surely this should trigger a thorough review of Dutch policy and diplomatic strategy."

The Netherlands parliament passed a motion on 17 May 2016 urging the government “to devote itself actively ... to taking effective measures, including the launch of negotiations on an international ban on nuclear weapons” and “to encourage other member states of the NATO alliance to get involved in these negotiations”. The Netherlands government has so far ignored this motion, and has continued to resist and obstruct UN efforts to commence negotiations. The Netherlands has refused to join the Humanitarian Pledge, continues to deny that there is a “legal gap” with respect to nuclear weapons (despite the fact that nuclear weapons are the only weapon of mass destruction not expressly prohibited by international treaty), and has voted against nuclear disarmament resolutions at the General Assembly. As a member of NATO, the Netherlands relies on nuclear weapons for its defence and keeps US nuclear weapons on its territory. Despite its obligations as a member of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), and its regular claims to be in favour of nuclear disarmament, it has no plans to change this.

This intransigence is exacerbated by the fact that the Netherlands regularly calls on other states to begin reducing the role of nuclear weapons in their security strategies and defence doctrines, and to provide transparency on their nuclear arsenals, while doing neither itself - and refusing even to discuss the possibility. The Netherlands also declined to respond to a survey of the nuclear disarmament policies of candidate states (the responses of other candidate states can be viewed at www.wildfire-v.org/Consolidated_survey_response.pdf).

Until now, the Netherlands has been able to get away with this hypocritical and obstructive behaviour. But this Security Council election has showed that it is starting to pay a significant price in terms of international reputation and influence. The Dutch parliament, media and public should consider and debate whether their foreign policy is being appropriately managed in the national interest.

The Humanitarian Pledge was launched by the government of Austria at the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons in December 2014. States joining the pledge undertake "to identify and pursue effective measures to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons" and "to cooperate with all relevant stakeholders ... in efforts to stigmatise, prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons in light of their unacceptable humanitarian consequences and associated risks". The text of the pledge and list of endorsing states is available at <http://www.icanw.org/pledge/> .

Further information is available at the Wildfire>_ campaign website:

<http://www.nlinunsc.org>

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