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Statement by

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of

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**on the occasion of the 63rd General Assembly, Third Committee
under the agenda item 55 b) Social development, including
questions relating to the world social situation and to youth,
ageing, disabled persons and the family**

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Mr. Chairman,

‘We cannot pass over the fact that the world is a hard world for youth and that so far we have not really given their problems as much attention as we should.’

These are not my words, but those of Eleanor Roosevelt, spoken more than 70 years ago. But her ideas are just as relevant today as they were then.

Eleanor Roosevelt was an advocate for human rights, civil society and youth. Her concern for human wellbeing made her the driving force behind the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This year we are celebrating its sixtieth anniversary. But is there actually cause for celebration? Progress has indeed been made in the field of human rights and regarding the position of young people, but we still face many challenges. I would like to highlight two that need our urgent attention: youth participation and access to water and sanitation.

Firstly, youth participation

Being able to speak to you today is an opportunity that I share with only a lucky few. This year, less than ten percent of the 192 countries on this committee were able to send a Youth Delegate. At this rate, it will take forever for the entire world’s youth to be represented at the UN. Young people under 25 make up half of the world’s population. Last year you adopted a resolution on ‘youth in the global economy’ reaffirming the importance of youth participation in decision-making. Given the strong commitment in 2007, the lack of progress since then is even more disappointing.

Youth participation is about young people being the ears and the voices of their generation in order to help governments to direct their policies as efficiently as possible for those who are most in need.

In this context and, in achieving the Millennium Development Goals as well, it is extremely relevant and important to work with youth. Empirical evidence shows that investing in the needs of young people is perhaps the single best and the most cost effective way to reach the Millennium Development Goals. In our efforts to realise these goals, we must focus on young people and do it together with young people.

Young people should have the opportunity to participate on a regular basis.

- We, are the ones who have to deal with the consequences of today's decisions.
- We are the ones who understand our problems best, because we live with them and
- We are the ones who will sit here in the near future to find solutions for a better and more equal world, without making the same mistakes over again.

Wherever and whenever decisions are made that affect us and our future, we want to be involved – in our home towns, in our capital cities and here in New York, to make sure that solutions are sustainable and relevant to us and to the world at large.

The first precondition for young people to participate fully in society is to be in good health. This brings me to my second point: access to water and sanitation.

This year, for the first time ever, the number of people without proper access to drinking water has dropped below one billion. This is a milestone indeed, but it still means that millions have no clean water to drink. Imagine a hot summer's day at your office, with no water supply. Wouldn't you long for the luxury of a long cold drink straight from a tap? So do millions of young people all over the world. They'd love to change places with you and drink from that tap!

The problems of sanitation are even bigger - two and a half billion people still have no proper toilet facilities. Imagine a hot summer's day at your office, with no sanitary facilities at all. Wouldn't you long for the luxury of a proper toilet? So do millions of young people all over the world. They'd love to change places with you and use that toilet!

The human tragedy behind contaminated water and poor sanitation is enormous, especially for children and young people. More die from the effects of contaminated water than from AIDS or armed conflicts. 80% of the diseases in developing countries that affect young people are water-related and many young people do not go or drop out of school because of lack of sanitation, especially girls. The lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation is a major obstacle to the health of young people worldwide.

In the Netherlands, most infectious diseases were wiped out more than a century ago, with the construction of sewerage systems and toilets. Today, many parts of the world still lack well-designed, properly financed action plans for proper access to water and sanitation. The world has the financial and technological means, and the logistical capacity to end the water and sanitation

crisis. In order to win this battle, cooperation is key to capacity and exchange best practice between developed and developing countries, and also between developing countries.

Young people should be involved in designing water and sanitation schemes in order to create the best possible access to water and sanitation for them, at their schools for example. And they should be involved as peer educators in teaching others about the importance of hygiene.

All young people should have proper access to water and sanitation. They have the right to good health and a life of human dignity.

This March, the Netherlands recognised the right to water and sanitation as a human right. I call upon you to follow this example and recognise access to water and sanitation not only as a basic human need, but also as a basic human right.

Mr Chairman,

Young people don't want promises and resolutions. We want solutions. Not good intentions, but action. Without action, our thirst will not be quenched and participation will remain nothing more than a buzzword.

I call upon you to take young people seriously. Involve them in achieving the MDGs and fulfil your commitments to the resolution on 'Youth in a Global Economy': include young people in your delegations and allow us to participate at all levels of decision-making. Let's make youth participation a fact of life!

I hope that as a result of your commitment, Eleanor Roosevelt's words will soon no longer apply. And that in the near future, a Youth Delegate standing here before you will be able to say 'our problems have been given as much attention as they should.'

I'll drink to that!

Thank you Mr. Chairman