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DAC AID REVIEW OF THE NETHERLANDS

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD reviewed the Netherlands' development co-operation programme and policies on 15th June 1994. The delegation of the Netherlands was headed by Mr Ruud Treffers, Acting Director-General for International Co-operation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The examining countries were Germany and the United Kingdom.

The Chair of the DAC, Mr James H. Michel, summarised the main points discussed in the review:

a) The recent Netherlands Government White Paper, "A World in Dispute", explores how peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance can be integrated into the basic development co-operation framework of the Netherlands. That basic framework is set out notably in the 1990 White Paper "A World of Difference". These issues were of considerable interest to the Committee. While many other donors are also adapting their aid efforts to confront new challenges in difficult regions, the measures taken by the Netherlands to bring a wider range of policy areas and actors into the orbit of development co-operation and of the aid budget go further than most. There was some discussion as to whether this new dimension of development co-operation would succeed in its aim of promoting developmentally oriented approaches to conflict resolution, or whether it might rather detract from longer-term development objectives. There was also the question as to whether allocations from the aid budget to other government departments would reduce the funds available for longer-term development spending.

b) The Netherlands' aid volume is fourth among DAC Members in terms of the ODA/GNP ratio. Public and parliamentary support for a high level of aid remains exceptionally strong. The DAC noted, however, that aid volume has slipped from 0.99 per cent of GNP in 1986/87 to 0.81 in 1993, falling in this last year by 5 per cent in real terms to $2.5 billion. In this context, the debate on the implications of the wider definition of development

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co-operation for the Netherlands' aid volume target was discussed. The Netherlands Delegation explained the various options under consideration for matching the new scope of development co-operation with a new set of aid targets, and stated that this would be a matter for an incoming Government to determine.

c) The Committee learned of a number of recent developments in aid programming and management. This included the streamlining of the list of partner countries, with twelve former recipients dropping off and the creation of new categories of aid partnership for "countries in conflict", "countries in transition" and "countries entering into a bilateral sustainable development contract". More systematic efforts are being made to integrate the special themes identified in the 1990 White Paper "A World of Difference" -- Environment, Women in Development, Development Research and Urban Poverty -- into the country programmes. Expertise in these areas has also been strengthened, including at field level. One question raised was whether the frequent introduction of new areas of policy emphasis might impair the capacity, on both the Netherlands and the partner country side, for coherent aid management. The DAC welcomed the move to strengthen project and programme evaluation by managers, a process found to be in need of improvement in a recent internal report. There is also great interest in the forthcoming publication of the results of three innovative evaluations of the results of the Netherlands' aid effort in three partner countries -- India, Mali and Tanzania.

d) Finally, the Committee was favourably impressed by the participatory orientation of the aid programme of the Netherlands, with the strong role of the NGOs and volunteers and by its increasing emphasis on good governance, democratisation, human rights and the role of civil society.

The DAC’s summary and conclusions of the review will be published together with the report by the OECD Secretariat on the Netherlands’ aid programme.