

Election candidates lay out vision for future of Dutch leadership in human rights and global health

How can the Netherlands maintain and strengthen its role in human rights and global health? This was the focus of a pre-election event in The Hague, hosted by the DGHA and the SRHR Platform. Candidate Members of Parliament (MPs) from seven political parties discussed their vision and commitment to advancing (sexual) health and rights in the Netherlands and worldwide.



The coordinators of this initiative – the Dutch Global Health Alliance (DGHA) and the SRHR Platform – seek to maintain and strengthen the Netherlands’ leadership role in global health and SRHR. Below, we share some key moments and most striking messages from the event.

Impact of USAID budget cuts on the global HIV/AIDS response

Moderators *Mickey Andeweg (Hivos)* and *Roman Baatenburg de Jong (Plan International)* opened the event with an introduction on the importance of the

discussion.

Next, *Mirembe Jovia Birungi* (*Global Fund Advocates Network*) introduced the first case, on the impact of the USAID budget cuts on the global HIV/AIDS response. In her remarks, she emphasized that political decisions can have far-reaching consequences for people's health, in the Netherlands and abroad. "If you already know who you'll be voting for, ask them to stand up for the financing of global health. Because viruses don't need a visa," she said.



Mirembe Jovia Birungi (Global Fund Advocates Network).

In their responses, *Eric van der Burg* (VVD), *Emre Gungor* (Volt) and *Michel van Winden* (SP) laid out the differing visions of their respective parties:

"We need to move much more toward a world in which greater self-reliance is created. That can be achieved, for example, through development aid or trade agreements."

Eric van der Burg (VVD).

"The Netherlands should take a leading role. "We want a world in which every person can live a life of dignity. That's why we must invest in support for Africa. So people can build a decent life there, while also contributing to a safer Europe."

Emre Gungor (Volt).

“The loss of USAID funding is disastrous for the people that are affected by this. It’s absurd that US funding is a matter of life and death for so many people. Out of solidarity, the Netherlands should help fill the funding gap caused by the US cuts. But at the same time, we must also address the systemic issue: healthcare is not seen as a public good, but as a market.”

Michel van Winden (SP).



From left to right: Michel van Winden (SP), Eric van der Burg (VVD), moderators Mickey Andeweg (Hivos) and Roman Baatenburg de Jong (Plan International) and Emre Gungor (Volt).

Growing influence of anti-rights movements on SRHR

Up next were *Daniëlle Hirsch (GL/PvdA)* and *Ria de Korte (NSC)*, who were asked about the growing resistance to sexual and reproductive rights worldwide:

“When women’s rights are under pressure, it’s a sign that democracy is deteriorating. We are facing the most powerful coalition at the moment –

of the far right, religious extremists, and parts of the corporate sector. I believe the Netherlands can make a big difference with relatively little effort, by showing leadership. Abortion is still part of the Criminal Code, which is absurd. There is still a lot to be gained there. I'm shocked that our Parliament voted against the right to abortion. This only fuels the conservative movement that refuses to take women's rights seriously."

Daniëlle Hirsch (GL/PvdA).

"All around the world we see conflicts, and it's especially women who suffer the consequences," she said. "The rape of women and children is a horrifying example of how closely conflict and sexual and reproductive rights are interconnected. That's why the Netherlands and Europe must do more than just mediate conflicts. Where there is peace and stability, there is also more safety for women."

Ria de Korte (NSC).



From left to right: Ria de Korte (NSC), Mickey Andeweg (Hivos), Roman Baatenburg de Jong (Plan International) and Daniëlle Hirsch (GroenLinks/PvdA).

Neglected pillar of global health security

In the final round, on global health security, *Elles van Ark (CDA)* and *Fatimazhra Belhirsch (D66)* shared their perspectives on the Netherlands' role in strengthening global health systems.

This discussion was introduced with a short video in which *Amanda Banda* (health advocate in Eastern and Southern Africa) spoke about the challenges that low- and middle-income countries face in financing their health systems. Systemic issues such as high debt burdens and lost revenues due to illicit financial flows, such as tax evasion, hinder these countries from making much-needed investments in healthcare. She concluded with a question to the Members of Parliament: what can the Netherlands do to support countries in strengthening their health systems, without creating dependency?



Amanda Banda (Wemos health advocate in Eastern and Southern Africa) spoke in her video message about the challenges of low- and middle-income countries in financing their health systems.

“It is essential to make countries less dependent on donors and to invest in their resilience and self-reliance. We need to support them in financing their own healthcare systems. I believe the Netherlands can play an important role by putting this higher on the agenda in Europe and by engaging with the World Bank.”

Elles van Ark (CDA).

According to *Fatimazhra Belhirsch* it is also essential to look at the relation with national security.

“Investing in development cooperation is also essential for our own security in the Netherlands. You can’t achieve peace through hard power alone, with tanks and drones. For sustainable peace, you also need development cooperation. It’s strange that some political parties want to cut back on this, while diverting funds to international trade or defence. These issues are in fact interconnected.”



From left to right: Elles van Ark (CDA), Mickey Andeweg (Hivos), Roman Baatenburg de Jong (Plan International) and Fatimazhra Belhirsch (D66).

The conversation doesn't end here. With the elections approaching, we remain committed to keeping global health and SRHR high on the political agenda. We look forward to continuing the dialogue after the elections and hope that the newly elected MPs will champion these priorities for the Netherlands.



The DGHA and SRHR platform want to extend a big thank you to the MPs and to our guests!

We will also share a video with an impression and short interviews with the Parliamentarians. Keep an eye out on DGHA's website, [LinkedIn](#) and [YouTube](#) channel!

The DGHA is a network of 19 Netherlands-based organizations committed to advancing global health. Investing in global health saves tens of millions of lives, provides people in low- and middle-income countries with access to treatment, and helps prevent the worldwide spread of infectious diseases such as HIV and tuberculosis. The SRHR Platform is a collaboration of 11 NGOs working on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in the Netherlands and around the world. SRHR empowers people to make their own decisions about their bodies, relationships, and sexuality. It includes access to quality healthcare, reliable information, and the means to support good sexual and reproductive health, such as safe abortion care, access to contraception for young people, reducing sexually transmitted infections, and providing care for survivors of sexual violence.