

June 4, 2015

Answers by Minister Ploumen of Foreign Trade and Development Co-operation, on behalf of the Minister for Housing and the Civil Services, to

Parliamentary Questions by the members Voordewind (ChristianUnion) and Van Laar (Labour Party) to the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Housing and the Civil Services on slavery and child labour in quarries.

[submitted: May 19, 2015]

Question 1

Are you familiar with the broadcasts of *Keuringsdienst van Waarde* ⁽¹⁾ [‘Inspection Service of Values’] on the origin of gravestones and with the report *Rock Bottom - Modern Slavery and Child Labour in South Indian Granite Quarries* ⁽²⁾?

Answer 1

Yes.

Question 2, 4

Are you willing to talk with Dutch companies and trade organisations in the granite- and gravestones sector to encourage them to undertake active due diligence with regard to combatting slavery and child labour and improving working conditions?

How do you intend to promote that agreements are made in the three high risk sectors mentioned in the ‘CSR Sector Risk Analysis’ that using or trading in natural stone (construction, wholesale and retail) about preventing and combating violations of labour – and human rights?

Answer 2, 4

Yes, I am prepared to do so. The extraction of natural stone is classified in the Sector Risk Analysis (SRA) of KPMG as an activity with a heightened risk of unsafe and unhealthy working conditions in the sectors construction, retail and wholesale. These three sectors have been given priority within the SRA. I am discussing with the relevant trade associations about the support that the government can offer to these sectors to reach International CSR agreements, including agreements on combatting and preventing of slavery and child labour in their production chains and improving labour conditions. I will also encourage these sectors to implement their *responsibility to respect* and to start a multi-stakeholder dialogue. Hereby I want to cooperate with existing CSR initiatives in this area. For example, *The Forest Trust (TFT)* has a Responsible Stone program in the field of the extraction of natural stone; fighting violations of human and labour rights is part of this program (see <http://www.tft-earth.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/About-the-TFT-Responsible-Stone-Programme.pdf> and <http://www.duurzamenatuursteen.nl/>).

Question 3

Are you willing to raise the issue of slavery and child labour in granite quarries, which are also supplying to Western companies, with your Indian colleagues during your forthcoming visit to India and jointly take initiatives to combat these abuses?

Answer 3

The importance of taking responsibility by both Dutch and Indian companies to eliminate child labour will be discussed during the visit to India. An appropriate occasion to discuss this is during the India-

Dutch Platform on Corporate Social Responsibility, which I will launch during the trip. This is a platform where Indian and Dutch companies, NGOs and the two governments exchange experiences about corporate social responsibility and how companies are doing this. Companies can learn from each other's approaches to various themes, such as supply chain responsibility, anti-corruption, environmental impact, forced and child labour, gender, but also how to implement the Indian rule that companies must pay two percent of their profits to social development.

Question 5

How will you make sure that the Dutch Government and other governments that use granite from India (or elsewhere) for - among others - buildings, monuments and paving, will prevent and combat the violations of labour rights as described in the report? How will you appeal to other authorities such as municipalities, provinces and water boards to address this issue?

Answer 5

Since the beginning of 2013, the so-called international social conditions (ISV) are applied to all major contracts of the government, unless there are specific reasons not to use them. These conditions oblige contractors who are tendering in cases which involve risks of violating human rights to take measures to prevent these violations or – preferably – eliminate them. At the moment, for a number of product groups - such as catering (coffee and tea), drink dispensers (cocoa), workwear (textiles) and flowers - additional ISV are formulated by the government. In those cases, contractors should also take into account the risks of violation of a number of specific standards, such as health and safety in the workplace and a livable income. In 2014, the implementation of the ISV within the procurement of the government was evaluated. A key recommendation in the evaluation report is to bring the ISV in line with the OECD Guidelines. I have promised to the Parliament to examine how this can be done in relation to the procurement of the government. After this alignment is completed, basically all risks associated with a particular product or service will be included in the contract or program requirements. The difference between the current generic and additional conditions will be then lapse. Another recommendation in the evaluation report is to encourage the uniform application of the ISV in all sectors of government and semi-government. This recommendation will be included in the action plan for sustainable procurement as promised by Secretary of State Mansveld to the Parliament during the General Consultations on Sustainable Procurement on February 5. (Parliamentary Document 30 196, no. 299)

Question 6

Do you think that, given the seriousness of the issue in India, there should be an investigation into the labour conditions at suppliers in relation to recent and ongoing projects in the field of granite, also resulting in recommendations for companies involved and the procurement of government agencies?

Answer 6

The government welcomes the research by the India Committee of the Netherlands and considers this as an important signal that will be included in the discussions on International CSR arrangements in the above-mentioned sectors. I believe that is more important than conducting more research.

Question 7

Do you believe that the broadcasts of *Keuringsdienst van Waarde* and the report *Rock Bottom* provide additional reasons to fully implement the recommendations presented to the Parliament in January 2015 in the report *Evaluatie sociale voorwaarden Rijksinkoopbeleid* ('Evaluation of social conditions Government Procurement')? Are you prepared to inform the Parliament about this prior to the Parliamentary Consultation scheduled on the 3rd of June?

Answer 7

The broadcasts of the *Keuringsdienst van Waarde* and the report *Rock Bottom* show that there is a lot to be improved. The government is taking these signals seriously. In the government's response following the evaluation is indicated that will be examined how the recommendations can be adopted. Part of this is the implementation of a number of pilot contracts by the government. These contract trajectories will come to an end later this year. The experience gained in both the contracting authorities and the market players involved are will be included in the procurement framework for international social conditions for the central government. As recommended in the report and the Minister for Housing and Civil Services reported to you in his letter of January 30, the implementation date will be aligned with the date of the new European directive on public procurement in April 2016.

Question 8

How did you fulfil your commitment to engage with municipalities, provinces and water boards to promote socially responsible procurement, including by means of the *Toolkit Kinderarbeidvrij Inkopen door Overheidsinstanties* ("Toolkit Child Labour Free Procurement by Government Agencies") of the Stop Child Labour coalition?

Answer 8

PIANOo, the expertise center for procurement is engaged in getting the international social conditions widely known and applied. In this context, in 2014 two practical knowledge expertise sessions were organised for government purchasers, in which purchasers of local authorities were well-represented. During these sessions the available tools were extensively dealt with and also the *Toolkit Kinderarbeidvrij inkopen door overheidsinstanties* was presented. In addition, a roundtable meeting was organised on November 17, 2014 by the Ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs and Social Affairs and PIANOo, where was spoken with a number of purchasers and policy makers from various municipalities and a province on the opportunities to involve local authorities better in the procurement in the field of international social conditions. In the beginning of 2015 PIANOo developed a simplified guide for international social conditions, and it is also currently working – together with MVO Nederland – to develop a new version of the CSR Risk Checker especially for government procurement. During the development of both instruments government purchasers of local authorities were asked for input. On the website of PIANOo articles appear regularly in the context of international social conditions, like the article published in April 2014 on the *Toolkit Kinderarbeidvrij inkopen door overheidsinstanties*. The toolkit itself is also available on the website.

Question 9

Are you prepared to answer the above questions prior to your working visit to India?

Answer 9

Yes.

Notes:

(1) See: <http://www.npo.nl/artikelen/de-keuringsdienst-van-waarde-onderzoekt-de-grafsteen>

(2) See: <http://www.indianet.nl/pb150511e.html>