

**Speech of the Ambassador of the Netherlands, Dr. Nikolaos van Dam,  
on the occasion of a dialogue with Islamic Parties and Organisations at the  
Muhammadiyah Head Quarters on the film *Fitna*, Jakarta, 7 April 2008**

Dear Professor Din Syamsuddin,

Dear Dr. Hedayat Nur Wahid,

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

It will not have gone unnoticed that, after much debate and controversy, the long anticipated Dutch opposition Parliamentarian Wilders' anti-Islamic film *Fitna* has been released. The release created widespread reactions and debate, also in Indonesia.

Mr. Wilders' approach concerning Islam and the Qur'an, as conveyed through this film, has insulted many people, Muslims in particular. The film equates Islam with violence. Let me begin by emphasising that these views do not in any way reflect the perspective or policy of the Dutch government. The Dutch government emphatically dissociates itself from this film because of its invidious generalisations and its insulting and polarising effect. We are actually on the same side in denouncing this movie. Islam must not be equated with the commission of atrocities or violence. We regret that Mr Wilders has released this film. We believe it serves no purpose other than to cause offence. But feeling offended must never be used as an excuse for violence and aggression. The government is heartened by the initial restrained reactions of both Dutch Muslim organisations and the majority of organisations in Indonesia.

It is clear that the Dutch Government does not stand alone in rejecting this film. The majority of the Dutch population also denounces this movie and so did the majority of the Dutch media outlets. Mr. Wilders could therefore only show his movie through an internet provider outside the Netherlands.

Leaders worldwide, including the Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki Moon and all the ministers of Foreign Affairs of the European Union, have rejected this movie. Also, an overwhelming majority of Dutch parliamentarians has rejected and criticized it, the main exception being the small opposition party of Mr. Wilders himself. Last Tuesday, there was a long debate in the Dutch parliament about this movie. All political parties and the Dutch Government rejected the movie and also rejected Mr. Wilders' polarising and one-sided view on Islam.

The approach taken in the film *Fitna* contradicts all that the Dutch Government envisages for and aspires to in its society, this being a society in which people can live together peacefully. Islam has a clearly visible place in Dutch society. Out of a total population of almost 17 million, there are more than 800,000 people in the Netherlands with roots in the Islamic world, about 5.3% of our population. Islamic institutions, associations, media and schools have become familiar features of our country. Over 450 mosques have been built on Dutch soil. There is also an Islamic University. This development reflects the well-established Dutch tradition of religious tolerance. Muslims make a major contribution to dialogue within Dutch society, notably through their participation in consultative bodies. Two members of the Dutch government have roots in the Islamic world: Ahmed Aboutaleb, State Secretary for Social Affairs and Employment, and Nebahat Albayrak, State Secretary for Justice. I mention these

facts to show that in general, Muslims in the Netherlands work together well and live in harmony with non-Muslims.

Freedom of religion is a universal human right, a right guaranteed by the Dutch Constitution. It goes without saying that Muslims in the Netherlands enjoy freedom of religion. The Dutch Constitution also protects freedom of expression. This means that all the inhabitants of the Netherlands can publicly express their views without prior permission from the authorities. There is no censorship in the Netherlands. That is also why the Dutch Government could not ban the movie on beforehand. It is impossible to forbid something of which the contents are not yet known. Whoever has criticisms of the doctrines of a specific religion has the right to express them. Only the courts can determine whether the law has been broken after utterances have been made. However, we should not interpret freedom of expression as a licence to insult other people at will. Everyone has the responsibility to show respect for the rights and reputations of others. The Dutch government repeatedly drew the attention of Mr. Wilders to the possible consequences of his film and appealed to his sense of responsibility. The Dutch government strongly regrets that he nonetheless decided to release this film. The film serves no purpose whatsoever other than to trample on people's feelings.

Further polarisation is in no one's interests. Our top priority is to ensure that there is enough space to engage in dialogue, on the basis of mutual respect and the principles of the rule of law. The Dutch government will pursue an open, mature dialogue and cooperation among the communities in the Netherlands and among societies internationally. I trust that we will not let the film distract us from this shared responsibility. Let us keep a cool head while preserving the warmth of our relationships. As I already said, we have the same opinion about this movie and the way we should respect each other. We both sharply reject this movie.

In this regards, I would also like to thank His Excellency the President of the Republic of Indonesia, Dr Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono for his statement on this movie and his appeal to all Indonesians to abide by the law and react within the confines of the law.

The Dutch Government rejects the anti-Islamic approach of this film, and stands open for dialogue whilst calling for freedom of expression and mutual respect. The Netherlands wish to stay in open contact with all those who are in favour of a peaceful dialogue. Only through these means will we be able to cooperate successfully in building towards a society more firmly grounded in mutual understanding and respect, elements which are so precious in our present-day world.

Thank you.