

Letter of 20 October 2022 from the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the House of Representatives in response to the AIV's advisory letter on the need for a new Dutch Africa strategy

This letter sets out the government's response to the advisory letter from the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) on the 'Urgent need for a new Dutch strategy on Africa'. The AIV published this advisory letter on its own initiative on 14 July 2022, in response to the announcement in the 2021-2025 coalition agreement that a new Africa strategy would be forthcoming. In drawing up this letter, the AIV sought to contribute to the development of a credible, robust Africa strategy.

Since the advisory letter's analysis and recommendations largely align with the government's overall aims, this response will deal chiefly with the letter's main points. A more detailed elaboration will follow in the Africa Strategy itself.

This response also serves to inform the House about the consultation process prior to the drafting of the Africa Strategy.

Assessment of the AIV's advisory letter

The government would like to thank the AIV for its timely advice. The government endorses the AIV's analysis of current developments, the continent's changing position and the importance of reorienting Dutch and European policy on Africa.

The AIV's advisory letter makes the following points:

Africa has changed substantially over the past 25 years. Geopolitical developments have played a major role in these changes. The geopolitical rise of other global and regional players, together with sensitivities linked to the colonial past, have eroded Europe's influence. In these shifting geopolitical conditions, the territorial proximity of Africa and Europe necessitates cooperation on the basis of complementary and shared interests. Identifying these interests is no simple task, however, given the huge diversity of both continents.

Africa remains a vulnerable continent because of numerous factors: the international division of labour, its rapidly growing population with insufficient employment opportunities, the weakening of African states and the continent's vulnerability to climate change. These factors are now converging in an acute food crisis that demands a rapid response. The AIV also notes that the relationship with Africa cannot be defined solely in terms of development cooperation. The varied interests at stake and the need for cooperation call for a coherent, government-wide Africa strategy.

The government agrees with this analysis.

Shared interests

In the AIV's view, such a strategy can only be successful if it centres on the complementary and shared interests of the two continents. The strategy must explicitly seek to tie in with African needs and wishes, against the backdrop of the current

geopolitical context and with due regard for Dutch and European interests, so as to shape an equal relationship. The AIV recommends working with Africa to jointly identify these interests in all relevant spheres: political, humanitarian, economic, climate-related and technological.

The government fully agrees with the ideas presented by the AIV. A more equal relationship with Africa and an open dialogue about each other's interests are thus among the principles that will be explicitly upheld in the Africa Strategy. Dutch knowledge and expertise in areas such as agriculture, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and climate issues can also be deployed in a way that is useful for African countries, in line with the policy document on foreign trade and development cooperation. The government gratefully acknowledges the AIV's specific suggestions and will use them as sources of inspiration. African organisations and experts will definitely be consulted as the strategy is developed (see below).

Geopolitical context

African and European reality is being influenced by the geopolitical manifestation of global and regional superpowers. In the AIV's view, this geopolitical reality means that national interests and the exercise of power will prevail over the logic of hyper-globalising markets and international law. The stances of China and Russia, globally and on the African continent in particular, are causes for special concern.

At the same time, global crises and geopolitical competition have sparked a trend towards deglobalisation, which makes African countries vulnerable. The AIV believes that African and European countries can increasingly join forces to boost their common strategic resilience. This is all the more essential at a time when the multilateral architecture is being eroded. The AIV recommends taking the geopolitical context seriously, while recognising Europe's waning position in Africa. The defence of shared values and the pursuit of long-term objectives should occupy a more central position in our strategy than the traditional focus on spheres of influence. As possible options the AIV mentions collaboration between Europe and Africa to shorten global supply chains and minimise strategic dependence on Russia and China for raw materials.

The government recognises, as the Coalition Agreement states, that we live in a world where the balance of power is shifting. In the foreign ministry's work on the African continent and within the multilateral system, we must increasingly contend with the influence of new players. Rules-based trade is also under pressure; commerce is increasingly used as a weapon to achieve geopolitical aims. The Ukraine crisis has laid bare these shifts. The Africa Strategy will certainly reflect this context in its analyses and in outlining Dutch opportunities for action, on the basis of a long-term outlook for the next 10 to 15 years.

Coherence

The AIV recommends acting decisively to achieve coherence. This means both addressing coherence in the dialogue with African countries and assessing Dutch policy for inconsistencies. Tackling the lack of coherence in the field of agriculture and climate action should be a priority in both Dutch and EU policy, and a long-term agenda on coherence should be formulated in areas like trade, raw materials, migration and

taxation. In the AIV's view, this calls for government-wide efforts, going beyond development cooperation and trade policy.

The government concurs on the importance of coherent policy. The Africa Strategy will be aimed at integrated policy focusing on development cooperation, trade and economic partnerships, migration, climate policy, global health, human rights, security and politics. The strategy will build on current and planned policy in all these areas, and will include input from other ministries. The government is also preparing a review of the action plan on policy coherence for development, which addresses a number of the themes mentioned above. The revised action plan will be sent to the House in late 2022.

Food crisis

The AIV devotes a considerable part of its advisory letter to the food crisis in Africa, caused partly by climate change and partly by the impact of the war in Ukraine on the already acute food security threat in parts of Africa. To explain this, the AIV points to African agriculture's lack of self-sufficiency, unfavourable factors in the world market, deficient local infrastructure and low added value. To deal with these problems the AIV advocates closer cooperation, possibly through complementary partnerships on food security. It also strongly emphasises the urgency of the problem, recommending that the necessary short-term emergency aid be provided in addition to solutions for the medium and long term. A basic principle in this regard should be that the Netherlands and the EU must not reduce the food supply by sacrificing food crops for fuel.

The government is well aware of Africa's precarious food security. Food security is also one of the priorities of foreign trade and development cooperation policy,¹ and the current budget includes a spending increase for it. In line with the motion by MPs Joris Thijssen and Suzanne Kröger,² submitted during the debate on the policy document on 28 September 2022, the government's commitment to food security will be fleshed out in the Africa Strategy, which will mainly focus on the long term. In the short term the government is currently offering additional support through various channels to help deal with the looming food crisis. The House was informed about this support in the letter to parliament of 27 September 2022 on progress on aid, recovery and reconstruction in Ukraine.³

The Netherlands and the EU

The AIV attaches great importance to closer collaboration with the EU. EU interests are often logical extensions of Dutch interests (such as enhanced connectivity, climate mitigation and adaptation, infrastructure and security) and the Netherlands should work actively with and within the EU (for instance on the Global Gateway Initiative⁴ and the European Raw Materials Alliance). Working in the EU will enable the first steps to be taken towards coherence. Collaborating with multilateral institutions will also increase our financial clout and create a bigger impact. At the same time, the Netherlands can invest in bilateral activities. This will require a painstaking review of our geographical and sectoral priorities, and the careful selection of state and non-state, national and international partners, on both the Dutch and African sides.

The government agrees with the AIV's vision of progress towards a broader division of

labour with the EU, working on the basis of maximum effectiveness. The government would like to make strategic use of the options that the Team Europe Initiatives offer for this purpose. The government believes that this division of labour can be achieved in accordance with the geographical and sectoral priorities underlying Dutch foreign policy and foreign trade and development policy.

Drafting process for the Africa Strategy

The government would also like to take this opportunity to inform the House about its progress on drafting the Africa Strategy. We refer in this connection to earlier motions adopted by the House⁵ on Dutch-African relations with respect to trade and food security. On the basis of written consultations with Dutch, African and other international knowledge institutions and think tanks, a future-oriented contextual analysis was recently drawn up about developments expected in Africa over the next 10 to 15 years. By means of a series of additional consultations and in-depth interviews in the Netherlands, with international organisations and above all with partners in Africa, in line with the motion submitted by MP Alexander Hammelburg on the expected consultations with African civil society (34952, no. 165), potential avenues for action will be elaborated in the coming months. Depending on the topic and where relevant, inter-ministerial coordination will also take place. The strategy will be completed and shared with the House in late 2022/early 2023.

¹ Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 2021-2022, 36180, no. 1.

² Parliamentary Paper, 2022-2023, 36 180, no. 15.

³ Letter to parliament on progress on aid, recovery and reconstruction in Ukraine | Parliamentary Paper| Rijksoverheid.nl, pp. 9-10.

⁴ Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 2021-2022, 22112, no. 3282.

⁵ Motion submitted by MPs Mustafa Amhaouch and Jan Klink on Dutch-African trade relations (Parliamentary Paper, House of Representatives, 2021/22, 34 952, no. 168); motion submitted by MPs Jan Klink and Mustafa Amhaouch on sustainable food production (Parliamentary Paper, House of Representatives, 2021/22, 34952, no. 166); motion submitted by MPs Anne Kuik and Mustafa Amhaouch on the Africa Task Force and the multiannual agenda for the Dutch relationship with Africa (Parliamentary Paper, House of Representatives, 2020/21, 35 570, no. 27).