

The Shape of Things to Come Europe Presentations
Blog : The Hague, by Tyler LePard

Introduction:

Staff from Population Action International are presenting “The Shape of Things to Come: Why Age Structure Matters to a Safer, More Equitable World” at several events in Europe. Join Tyler LePard, PAI’s Media Manager, for an inside look!

Peace Palace

Our first stop on the European tour was The Netherlands. We were invited by the World Population Foundation to present “The Shape of Things to Come.” Amy Coen, Claudia Kennedy, Tod Preston, Liz Leahy and I arrived in The Hague on December 2, met WPF staff for dinner and got ready for today.

Wednesday morning, we traveled to the [Peace Palace](#), a beautiful and prestigious venue. Before the official event began, we met with Rob Vreeken, a reporter for *De Volkskrant*. Each member of our PAI team contributed their expertise to the interview, highlighting key findings and recommendations from “[The Shape of Things to Come](#)” and its implications for policy, development, and security, as well as the report’s connections with other aspects of PAI’s work.

The two-hour panel briefing began with a welcome from Frans Baneke, the Director of the World Population Fund (WPF). [Claudia Kennedy](#) (Lt. General U.S. Army Retired and PAI Board Member) introduced the report. She said, “The international development community – and organizations like WPF and PAI – have long recognized that improving the well-being of individuals aren’t just investments in people; they’re investments in creating a more peaceful and developed world.”

Elizabeth Leahy (PAI Research Associate and lead author of the report) presented “The Shape of Things to Come,” focusing on the leadership of the Netherlands in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and touching on several countries of interest to the Netherlands. For example, the Netherlands is a country that has completed the demographic transition to reach the fourth and final category – mature age structure – with 36 percent of the country younger than 30 years of age and 19 percent older than 60. It is also one of the safest countries for women’s health – skilled care at childbirth is universal, contraceptive use is high, abortion is unrestricted, and HIV, adolescent fertility, early marriage, maternal mortality and infant mortality are all rare. The top recipients of the Netherland’s development assistance have very young age structures (with the exception of Indonesia) and higher reproductive risk: Iraq, Sudan, Ghana and Tanzania.

Professor Joris Voorhoeve (former Defense Minister for the Netherlands and the chair of WPF) gave the reaction portion of the panel. He affirmed the importance of prioritizing SRHR in

development assistance, saying that family planning and reproductive health “are essential for the reduction of wars” and that “family planning is peace politics – is longtime security.”

After a quick coffee/tea break, the discussion with the audience began, moderated by Frank Kalshoven (*De Volkskrant* journalist/Argumentenfabriek). The audience was comprised of Dutch academics, government officials, journalists and international students. The panelists fielded some challenging questions, but emphasized that the report does not imply that age structures *cause* instability/stability – demographics are an important factor that contribute to the complex picture and must be included in the solution. As Liz, reminded us, “Demography is not destiny... the problem is not too many young people, but too few investments in opportunities for them.”

[Amy Coen](#) (President/CEO of PAI) made closing remarks, making the connections between “The Shape of Things to Come” and PAI’s other recent report “[A Measure of Survival: Calculating Women’s Sexual and Reproductive Risk](#)” – these are both advocacy tools intended to make the world a safer, better place for all women and their families. She applauded the Netherlands for their leadership on these issues, acknowledged that the United States is no longer setting a good example, and encouraged us to find integrated solutions and new ways to work together.

Many thanks to the World Population Foundation, PAI’s Dutch NGO partner, who sponsored this event.