

The Netherlands' Double Standard: Human Rights as a Neo-Colonial Weapon

News:

The Dutch King Willem Alexander discusses human rights concerns during state visit to Kenya.

Comment:

The Netherlands likes to present itself on the international stage as a defender of so-called human rights. During his state visit to Kenya, for example, King Willem-Alexander expressed concerns over human rights violations in the country. But this supposedly principled stance is highly selective—if not downright laughable. While the Netherlands lectures other countries, it remains silent or even actively complicit in serious human rights violations elsewhere—particularly in Palestine—and allows structural discrimination at home to persist. This is no coincidence, but rather a reflection of a deeper colonial reflex.

Since October 2023, tens of thousands of Palestinians—including thousands of children—have been killed by the Jewish army in the Gaza Strip. The UN, human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, and even the International Court of Justice (ICJ), have referred to possible acts of genocide and grave violations of international humanitarian law.

Nevertheless, the Netherlands continues to support the Jewish entity politically, diplomatically, and economically. In March 2024, President Isaac Herzog—the face of an occupying regime that was bombing civilian targets daily—was warmly welcomed in Amsterdam during the opening of the National Holocaust Museum. Protests against his visit were marginalized.

In early 2025, the Dutch House of Representatives also withdrew its invitation to Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian territories. Albanese had been invited by MPs to meet with foreign affairs spokespersons, but the meeting was cancelled due to “allegedly controversial” (i.e., critical of the Jewish entity) statements. Minister Caspar Veldkamp also refused to meet with her. In doing so, a voice critical of the Jewish entity human rights violations and genocide was systematically excluded from Dutch parliamentary debate.

The contrast with the public condemnation of Kenya is therefore stark. It reveals that the “human rights” is a tool, used selectively—depending on geopolitical interests and loyalty to Western allies.

Within its own borders, the Netherlands also violates “human rights”—especially those of Muslim minorities. The UN has repeatedly criticized the country for racism, ethnic profiling, and Islamophobia. In 2021, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) highlighted structural inequality for people with a migration background, particularly those of African and Islamic descent.

Examples include:

- The childcare benefits scandal, in which thousands of parents—mostly with migrant backgrounds—fell victim to institutional racism.
- Ethnic profiling by police and the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee, which until 2023 explicitly selected people based on skin color and “non-Dutch appearance.”
- Political anti-Islam discourse, in which framing Muslims as a “potential threat” has become normalized, along with targeted anti-Islam policies.

The selective application of “human rights” fits into a broader Western strategy in which so-called “universal values” are used as instruments of geopolitical control. The Netherlands, as a “former” colonizer, seems intent on maintaining that position: morally superior, self-proclaimed guide to the world—yet structurally complicit in oppression, as long as it serves the right interests.

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