



Speech

by the Vice President of the Senate of the Netherlands, mr. R.S. Croll, during the Eleventh G20 Parliamentary Speakers' Summit (P20) in Kleinmond, South Africa
Working Session 1: Strengthening disaster resilience and responses

datum 1 oktober 2025

Your Excellencies, Honourable Speakers, Distinguished Colleagues,

It is a great honor to be here today and to speak to you about this important topic: Strengthening disaster resilience and responses.

The Netherlands — meaning 'low countries' in English — is largely situated below sea level and forms one of the most densely populated river deltas in the world.

This unique geographical position has made us acutely aware of the importance of water management, climate adaptation, and disaster preparedness.

Our relationship with water is deeply embedded in our national identity.

In fact, the ongoing struggle against water has not only shaped our landscape, but also laid the foundation for Dutch parliamentary democracy — through collective decision-making, cooperation, and local governance.

In the Middle Ages, the water boards were the first elected administrative body in the Netherlands. Even then they realized that good water management is only possible through cooperation and responsibility.

For the Dutch, this has become a normal part of daily life.

They trust the centuries old knowledge and expertise, and trust in the water management by the local, provincial and national governments.

For foreigners though, the situation below sea level is something that amazes them. Tourists visit heritage sites with mills, dikes and canals in our country where the historic relation of the Dutch with the water is visible.

In other parts of the country, the fight against water has been modernized to address today's challenges.

Structures like the Afsluitdijk and the Stormvloedkering are the icons of our water management, protecting the Netherlands from high water levels.

Dutch engineers and aid workers are internationally consulted when it comes to water management. Here in South Africa they advised local water authorities.

Also in disaster response the Dutch knowledge of water is consulted. For example when hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in the US.



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Even in the Netherlands disaster can still strike, despite all the prevention, the dykes and storm surge barriers.

Thirty years ago, in 1995, 250 000 people and 1 million animals were evacuated from an area in the middle of the country when the water in the surrounding rivers rose to a dangerous level, due to heavy rainfall in northern France and Belgium.

Parliament decided at short notice to finance far-reaching measures to prevent a situation like the one in 1995.

Four years ago, in 2021, there was another flooding. This time in the southeastern part of the Netherlands. Again, continuing rains in neighboring countries made the water in the rivers rise to such a high level that several villages were completely flooded.

The Netherlands collaborated closely with neighboring countries Belgium and Germany, which were also severely impacted, to coordinate a rapid and effective disaster response.

Because our country was affected by rain and melting water from other parts in Europe, it is of utmost importance that countries and parliaments work together.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance that countries and parliaments continue to work together:

- To share knowledge and experience;
- To reduce the risk of disasters;
- To ensure preparedness;
- To coordinate responses effectively;
- To reach and protect vulnerable populations;
- To raise public awareness and strengthen education;
- And to foster international cooperation — together!

Thank you for your attention.