

PRESS RELEASE



Director Max Havelaar Foundation pleased by verdict

Dutch Province of Groningen wins summary proceedings brought by Douwe Egberts and can continue specifying fair trade coffee

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The Dutch Province of Groningen may require of its coffee suppliers that their coffee meet the criteria for fair trade. That is the judgment pronounced by the preliminary injunction court in the summary proceedings brought recently by Dutch coffee supplier Douwe Egberts against the Province of Groningen. Coen de Ruiter is director of the Dutch division of the Max Havelaar Foundation, which is the organization behind the quality label for Fairtrade: "We are very pleased by this verdict. It gives governmental institutions the freedom in their purchasing policy to require suppliers to provide fair trade coffee, so that a substantial and meaningful contribution is made in the fight against poverty through the daily cup of coffee. I hope that many institutions will lay down this requirement."

Civil servants working for the Province of Groningen have been drinking coffee with the Max Havelaar Fairtrade label because it is good and because they want to be sure that it is bought from the small-scale farmers in developing countries who receive a cost-effective price for it. Fairtrade is a proven system. Quite rightly, the Province wishes to continue this form of sustainability and the fight against poverty in its purchasing policy. However, Douwe Egberts believes this requirement works in a discriminating manner because it excludes other initiatives, and therefore instigated proceedings.

"Fortunately, Douwe Egberts has been found to be in the wrong," says Coen de Ruiter. "I would have found it strange if a governmental body that places a high value on sustainable development had been called to account for this. It's precisely this sort of organization that should be stimulated to support sustainable development. And that is what has happened." About the alleged discrimination put forward by Douwe Egberts, Coen de Ruiter says: "There are indeed other initiatives in the coffee market, and I applaud them. But the Max Havelaar Fairtrade hallmark is the only one that is directed specifically at small farmers and the only one that ensures that they receive at least a minimum price that covers their costs and also provides a fixed investment allowance. That is the fair trade that the Province of Groningen asked for and can continue to ask for, as is apparent from the verdict of the court. Incidentally, I extend a warm invitation to Douwe Egberts to become a Max Havelaar Foundation licensee, as the majority of the Dutch coffee suppliers are. They will then meet the requirements for fair trade as set down by the Province of Groningen."

The verdict fits in perfectly with the growing support for fair trade. The Netherlands Minister for Development Cooperation Koenders wrote in a letter to the Dutch House of Representatives about the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): 'Consumers' purchasing habits have a direct effect on MDGs. If a fair price that takes into account the true costs of sustainable production (people, planet, profit) is not paid, a non-sustainable society is perpetuated.' And further in the letter: 'The Dutch Government is itself a major consumer, and should continue to fulfil an exemplary role in this area.'

Coen de Ruiter continues: "The European Parliament has also called on the European Commission to support fair trade and on the Member States to integrate fair trade criteria in all their calls for tender and in their purchasing policies. Fair trade clearly deserves a place in purchasing policy. And that place has been confirmed today."

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