



## A LEADER IN SUSTAINABLE INNOVATIONS & CIRCULAR ECONOMY

The UAE and the Netherlands' partnership has come a long way and is becoming futuristic in character. Excerpts from an interview by **Rhonita Patnaik**

**Lody Embrechts**  
Ambassador at Embassy,  
Kingdom of the Netherlands in the UAE



### Your views on the UAE-Netherlands bilateral relations today.

The UAE-Netherlands bilateral relation is 49 years' old and has proven to be a robust one. Even in times of Covid-19, the UAE and the Netherlands has managed to partner with each other and cooperate on strategic matters like food security. The total export value of agro-food from the Netherlands to the UAE in 2019 was €569.8 million. Last year, we observed a number of initiatives by Dutch and UAE companies to build smart farms in the UAE.

We very much hope this trend will continue and will broaden with cooperation in R&D and education as well. However, we have also seen an increase in the number of partnerships in more sectors like water, design, health, logistics and finance. Even during a challenging year, 2020 bilateral trade reached approx \$6 billion. It is our sincere belief that opportunities for further growth are there. The fact that more than 400 companies and 550 participants from the UAE, Oman and the Netherlands took part in the first virtual 'Digital Trade Mission to the UAE' this year proves this point.

One of the focus areas of the Embassy and Consulate General is education. We hope that, in the coming years, we can see an increase in the number of UAE students in the Netherlands as well as Dutch students in the UAE.

Not only is our bilateral relationship built on a strong economic foundation, we are also working hard to build on our cultural relation. For this reason, together we will organise an online 'Cultural Marathon' from May 30 until June 5, 2021. Each day we will discuss a different aspect of the bilateral relationship. Education, culture and art, female entrepreneurship, agriculture, Expo and more topics will be discussed by the Netherlands and the UAE authorities. I invite you all in advance to join!

### How does the relationship between the two governments translate for the Dutch diaspora?

By now, there are around 7,500 Dutch nationals living in the UAE and around 350 Dutch companies are present in the country. This number is still on the rise, even in times of Covid-19. Recently, we are seeing an increase in companies from the service and retail sector setting up in

the UAE. Here, the Netherlands Business Council in Dubai and the BeNeLux Business Council in Abu Dhabi play an important role in connecting the Dutch business communities.

Many Dutch people appreciate the support they have received from the UAE in the past year. As the pandemic hit the world, UAE as a nation reacted promptly with the best interest of safety and well-being of all its people. The Dutch community were included in the vaccine rollout, which was highly acknowledged.

### What sustainability initiatives are the Netherlands implementing across the country, in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

Sustainability is the core aspect of the Netherlands' economic development. As I mentioned about agriculture before, all our policy and industry initiatives are driven by sustainability: a circular economy is the way forward. What this means, is to minimise the impact on the environment, usage of water and energy in a smarter way. In other words, reduce the footprint on the environment as much as possible. This is also our theme for Expo 2020 Dubai — 'Uniting water, energy and food'. The pavilion is designed as a sustainable biotope, a harvesting machine. The Netherlands pavilion at the Expo is built by using recycled as well degradable materials. When the Expo period is over, the pavilion will be demolished and the building materials will be repurposed. Nothing will go to waste!

What is also worthwhile mentioning is that, Dutch companies in the UAE took the initiative to create the Dutch Sustainability Group. This was done to support the UAE in achieving its sustainable development goals.

**Hans Sandee**  
Consul General  
Kingdom of the Netherlands in the UAE,  
and Commissioner General  
Netherlands Pavilion, Expo 2020 Dubai



### What were the repatriation efforts taken by the Consulate and the support provided for expatriates returning to the UAE after the pandemic in 2020?

The Consulate General, in close co-operation with the Embassy, managed to repatriate all the Dutch citizens who requested to leave to the Netherlands when the pandemic started. It was a huge operation, requiring lot of efforts from my colleagues and close liaison with all the relevant stakeholders in Dubai, such as Dubai Airport, Air France-KLM and Emirates airlines. I'm so happy that we succeeded and am very proud of my team for making this possible.

### The role of the Consulate in contributing to the welfare of the Dutch in the emirates?

The most important factor is that we are always available 24/7 in case of any urgent consular matter. And, also during the Covid-19, we would always be of assistance to the Dutch community including general public and business officials.

### The Netherlands' Expo 2020 Dubai Pavilion's theme is 'Uniting Water, Energy and Food', encompassing a naturally controlled climate. Can you please expand on why this was chosen and what is inside the structure?

The Netherlands Pavilion's theme has been chosen after consultations with

key stakeholders in the Expo project, not only semi-government institutions but also the private sector and knowledge institutions. The Netherlands is an important global player when it comes to food security, water management and renewable energy, and the Netherlands is the coherent partner for addressing the global challenges that we face. In order to be able to provide for the growing world population (projected to be almost 10 billion by 2050) with food, energy and clean water, you have to find smart and sustainable solutions. That is what we showcase at the Netherlands pavilion. Our pavilion is basically a biotope, an architectural embodiment telling our story of uniting water, energy and food. We'll do this by bringing in top-notch Dutch technology and innovations.



### INTERESTING FACTS

Population: 17,469,635  
GDP per capita: €50,518  
Bilateral trade in goods (2020):  
Approx. €4.8 billion

Most competitive economy in Europe (by WEF, 2019-2020)  
Most connected country (by DHL Index, 2020)  
Largest port in Europe (Port of Rotterdam)

The Netherlands is world's second largest exporter of agricultural products

### WORLD-CLASS CREATIVE & SUSTAINABLE INNOVATIONS

**WATER**  
Reliable data forms the basis of effective water management and the Netherlands has a unique position in the development of 'Smart Information Solutions'. The 'Netherlands' Water Partnership (NWP)' and 'The Water Alliance' consists of a partnership between private enterprises, NGOs, research institutes and government agencies that act as a centre for water-related expertise, provide information about latest policies, technologies and market opportunities

**ENERGY**  
Netherlands has strengthened its top position in renewable energy R&D and is now testing with energy from waves, algae and biomass. The Netherlands being the largest energy hub of Europe is heavily investing to become the major hydrogen hub too — a second gas revolution. It is expected a major part of green hydrogen needed in Europe will be produced in the MENA region

**FOOD**  
Netherlands is known as an 'Agri-food Powerhouse' — a small country with global reach in feeding the world — from farm to fork. The massive developments in innovation as a whole has impacted the Netherlands over the years and it has aided the to drive more modernised farming methods for a safer, healthier and sustainable future

### Participation in Expo 2020 Dubai

The **Netherlands Pavilion**, located at the Sustainability District, Expo 2020 Dubai, will be open to visitors starting from October 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022. The pavilion has a massive food cone known as the 'Biotope' as the centre of attraction. The vertical farm is covered with edible plants and irrigated water harvested from the air using innovative Dutch technologies. With these high-tech and more in offering, the pavilion aims to be a true platform for sustainability and circularity initiatives thus, enabling visitors to experience the Netherlands' expertise in 'Uniting water, energy and food'. Possessing a naturally controlled climate, the pavilion's structure is constructed using locally sourced materials that will be recycled after the Expo period, minimising its ecological footprint.

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The Netherlands' business climate, strategic location, well-connected, highly educated and skilled workforce, makes it one of the best countries for expanding your business into Europe. 'Invest in Holland' aims to contribute to an innovative and sustainable economy of the Netherlands.

The Netherlands is one of the world's leaders in renewable energy and hydrogen. The Dutch energy industry offers world-class R&D facilities and outstanding incentive programmes that support and stimulate innovation. In R&D, Dutch companies and research institutes are working together with foreign companies to develop new energy technologies, food production based on plants, IT solutions that reduce power consumption and synthetic fuel for the transportation sector. The high-tech sector is one of the best in the world with Dutch companies like Philips, ASML and NXP being the stars in the state-of-the-art innovation ecosystem.

The Netherlands is also at the forefront of the ground-breaking integrated photonics, one of the key technologies for data communication and optical sensing. The Dutch Integrated Photonics Cluster will contribute significantly to developing this key technology, further strengthening the competitive Dutch knowledge economy. For example: By substituting the radio waves of radar with light detection, creating LIDAR, lasers can be used to guide self-driving automobiles.

### NL Business Council, UAE

assists Dutch companies with operational support when entering the global market, set up a strong business and network of local contacts. They offer services including networking events and seminars in Dubai, B2B matchmaking, market exploration, HR recruitment, renting flexible workspace, educational trips, etc.

### Dutch Sustainability Group, UAE

is a group formed with NL Business Council, supported by the Embassy and Consulate General. This initiative integrates expertise from sectors that deliver sustainability projects in the UAE. It consists of firms with origins in the Netherlands like Unilever Gulf, ING Bank, Air France-KLM, Signify, Boskalis, Vopak, etc.

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## VALUING QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY



**FrieslandCampina**, as a brand, is ingrained in the UAE's DNA with its popular products such as the Rainbow Milk. How did the Dutch company come so far? Excerpts from an interview with **Sumeet Mathur, Managing Director, FrieslandCampina Middle East**

### Rhonita Patnaik

**A unique purpose**  
Our purpose is guided by three important pillars: better nutrition for the world, a good living for our farmers, now and for generations to come. These form our guiding compass and the foundation of our strategy. We contribute to nutrition and food security for millions of people all over the world; our member dairy farmers maintain healthy farming operations; and we assume responsibility for maintaining the natural living environment.

FrieslandCampina has a long history and exists in a cooperative tradition. We rely on cooperation and work together with partners, governments, and customers for the purpose of collectively adding value. A farming cooperative is community-orientated and can only thrive with a focus on the long term. That is why we are future focused and committed to our consumers, our customers, our farmers. As such, everything we do at FrieslandCampina is guided by our purpose: nourishing by nature.

### An established presence in UAE as a dairy provider

FrieslandCampina has been in the UAE for more than 65 years and we are proud to have been a part of the visionary growth of such a progressive and future-forward nation.

As the UAE's population continues to grow and dairy consumption increases, there are many opportunities for companies to support this demand and development in a sustainable way. We believe that working together with governments and customers will enable us to keep developing new standards for a dairy sector that over the long term offers bet-



**Sumeet Mathur, Managing Director, FrieslandCampina Middle East**

ter nutrition in balance with nature to the wider public throughout the world.

Over recent years and especially during the pandemic, we've seen evolving and changing consumer habits, which also presents opportunities for our industry. For example, last year, we saw consumers becoming more health conscious and reaching more readily for organic products. As a result, we launched our newest product offering Campina Organic — a new organic milk. Additionally, we saw an increase in people cooking at home. That's why we started offering new packages and sizes of Frico cheese, while also launching healthy recipes that could be used with Rainbow Milk.

### Fast-moving SKUs in the UAE and the GCC regions?

FrieslandCampina has been known in the UAE for Rainbow Milk in its evaporated format. Rainbow Milk reached UAE shores in 1955, even before the

UAE was formed, and has been a household brand since then.

We also have Frico cheese available in the UAE market. Frico cheese incorporates more than a century of Dutch cheese makers experience, made from 100 per cent pure cow's milk from cattle that has grazed on the green meadows of the Dutch countryside. It is concentrated nutrition — we use 10 litres of high quality milk to produce 1 kg of Frico cheese.

### Beating its competition

We have been in the region for more than 65 years and have become ingrained in the culture of the UAE. For example, we know that Rainbow Milk is a popular ingredient used in the famous *karak* — a favourite traditional tea made with spices and milk loved by both Arabs and Asians.

Additionally, it is our purpose and strategy. We care and value everyone along our supply chain, from the farm-

er to the consumer. Our value lies in producing good and healthy dairy products and FrieslandCampina has a unique grass-to-glass proposition for our customers and consumers.

### Vital role in the renewable energy revolution

In the Netherlands, our farms and factories count on renewable energy to reduce the negative impact on nature, which took a lot of time, efforts and investment.

We are trying to share that knowledge with UAE, leveraging on our Dutch origin, so we joined hands with The Dutch Sustainability Group — a group of Dutch companies operating in the UAE with one objective; to bring Dutch sustainability knowledge to the region and help the UAE to achieve its sustainability ambitious agenda.

We are planning a series of knowledge-sharing webinars between experts in the

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Netherlands and main stakeholders in the UAE, such as Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, Ministry of Energy and Industry and Ministry of Food Security.

### Sustainable initiatives from 'grass to glass'

At FrieslandCampina, we want to 'lead with sustainability' by providing healthy and sustainable nutrition to all people, at all ages, now and for generations to come. To us, sustainability entails having a positive impact on farmers, societies and on our planet. It is about realising a better living for farmers, producing in balance with nature and nourishing the world's growing population with better and affordable nutrition. To make our work and that of farmers around the world more sustainable, to work with clean energy and to create a sustainable future, we align ourselves to the SDGs established by the United Nations to our priority work.

In the past decade, we have worked on a set of goals to build a better future and have achieved a lot both as a company and as a cooperative.

In the Netherlands, member dairy farmers have tremendous influence on the biodiversity of their farm and in surrounding nature reserves. They even have influence on areas further away, for example, through the purchase of feed. To measure this influence, we created the Biodiversity Monitor, which uses key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure a dairy farm's influence on diversity. The KPIs are greenhouse gas emission, soil nitrogen balance, ammonia emission, share of protein produced by own land, share of permanent grassland and share of nature and landscape management. The monitor is aligned with the guidelines of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO-LEAP).

Our sustainability strategy also focuses on better packaging by moving into 100 per cent recyclable materials in the coming few years, needless to say that we always aim for responsible resourcing of materials that always take environmental impact into consideration.

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