

Slavery Past Programme – Newsletter 4

3rd of July 2023

FOREWORD

The past month was marked by a number of key milestones. On the 15th of June, Hanke Bruins Slot, the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, was presented with the publication *Staat en Slavernij* ('State and Slavery'). This study was carried out after the adoption of the motion proposed by member of the House of Representatives Don Ceder. It shows how the Dutch State and its predecessors were involved in the colonial slavery past and again demonstrates the importance of the apology delivered on the 19th of December. In the evening of the 15th of June, several government members met with stakeholders in the Zuid-Holland provincial government building in The Hague. The topic of discussion was "the steps taken further to the apology delivered on the 19th of December". The parties also looked ahead to the follow-up. The meeting was regarded as highly valuable. A commitment was made that evening to hold another such session later in the year.

The commemorations and celebrations on and around the 1st of July are a fitting conclusion to this month.

This fourth newsletter of the Slavery Past Programme provides an update on the significant steps taken in recent months.

REVIEW OF OFFICIAL OPENING OF SLAVERY PAST MEMORIAL YEAR

Last Saturday was a historic day. It marked the National Slavery Past Commemoration, as well as the opening of the Slavery Past Memorial Year. King Willem-Alexander offered an apology for the Dutch slavery past. He also asked for forgiveness for his ancestors' behaviour. An important subsequent step is to start a mutual dialogue on our shared past.

Before and on the 1st of July, members of the cabinet attended several commemoration and wreath-laying ceremonies in Surinam, the Caribbean Netherlands and the European Netherlands.

Minister Robbert Dijkgraaf looks back at the 1st of July:

"Last Saturday was an impressive and meaningful day. I had the privilege to attend the National Commemoration of the abolition of slavery in Amsterdam. It was a very special experience to feel the emotion welling up among the public in the Oosterpark after the King's words. The whole commemoration programme, including the libation poured by Winti priestess Marian Markelo, the singing by Black Harmony, Linda Nooitmeer's speech and the various wreath-layings with musical accompaniment by Ronald Snijders, left a deep impression.

1st of July also marks the start of the Slavery Past Memorial Year, for which I am responsible in my capacity as coordinating minister. An important year, which must contribute to structural attention, lasting knowledge and acknowledgement of our shared past and its impact on the present."



Photo credits: Isaac Owusu

[Speeches by King and members of cabinet past of slavery | Speech | Rijksoverheid.nl](#)

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

On Friday the 23rd of June, a [progress letter](#) on the government response to the slavery past was sent to the House of Representatives. The letter sets out what steps have been taken since the 19th of December and contains further details of the follow-up process. Work has started on the commitments made in the government response, such as further detailing of the €200 million fund and the Memorial Committee. The government has also stepped up its efforts to fight discrimination and racism, among other things by strengthening anti-discrimination facilities. Concrete procedures have also been set in motion, such as various commitments on the islands, the entry into force of the Equal Treatment Act (*Wet Gelijke Behandeling*) on the BES Islands and the possibility for descendants of enslaved people to change their name. This progress letter was sent on behalf of Hanke Bruins Slot (Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations), Wopke Hoekstra (Minister of Foreign Affairs), Robbert Dijkgraaf (Minister of Education, Culture and Science), Karien van Gennip (Minister of Social Affairs and Employment), Franc Weerwind (Minister for Legal Protection), Alexandra van Huffelen (State Secretary for Kingdom Relations and Digitalisation), Maarten van Ooijen (State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport) and Gunay Uslu (State Secretary for Culture and Media). The letter has been translated into English, Papiamentu and Papiamento.

WHAT FUNDS ARE CURRENTLY AVAILABLE OR WILL BECOME AVAILABLE?

Schemes relating to Memorial Year

Anyone in the Kingdom who wishes to organise an activity during the Memorial Year can apply for a grant. There are two schemes:

Mondriaan Fund – for the entire Kingdom (closed by now)

Cultural Participation Fund – for the entire Kingdom [Heritage: Slavery Past Memorial Year - Cultural Participation Fund](#)

The assessment committee of the Cultural Participation Fund will assess the applications. This committee has knowledge of the slavery past and the communities involved.

The subsidy scheme focuses on projects in which the participants are actively involved. And which:

- highlight elements of history and slavery;
- produce educational material;
- foster healing processes;
- initiate (cross-border) cooperation between institutions.

In addition, there will be an international scheme for countries outside the Kingdom. This scheme is still being elaborated at present.

Subsidy scheme for community initiatives

This subsidy scheme is intended for community initiatives and is still to be elaborated. An amount of €100 million is available for this scheme. The point of departure is that the funds under this scheme should be easily and widely accessible, thus enabling people to contribute to a greater understanding, acknowledgement and psychological processing of the slavery past, both individually and together. In the autumn, meetings will be held in the European Netherlands at which anyone wishing to do so can put forward their ideas about this scheme. Likewise, ideas will be gathered in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom and Surinam among direct stakeholders and government bodies.

WHAT IS THE TIMETABLE?

The aim is that the subsidy scheme for community initiatives should be in place by the spring of 2024 or as much earlier as possible, and that the Memorial Committee can start its work in the summer of 2024. The government will stay in touch with descendants and other parties at every stage of the schemes, which includes the appointment of the Memorial Committee members.

The infographic (see attached file) sets out the steps in which the subsidy scheme for community initiatives and the Memorial Committee will be realised, and the moments at which input can be provided. Input can be given at a series of meetings that will be organised in the autumn and beyond. Direct stakeholders and government bodies in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom and Surinam will also be asked to provide input.

WHAT ARE WE DOING WITH THE FINDINGS OF *STAAT EN SLAVERNIJ*?

The [study](#) again demonstrates the importance of the apology delivered on the 19th of December. The study shows that the involvement of the House of Orange was considerable. As the Prime Minister also pointed out during the press conference of 16 June, however, the specific relations between the State and the House of Orange are "virtually inextricable", certainly in the period before 1848. It is therefore a good development that the Royal House has now commissioned its own study on this subject. This study is currently in progress and the results are expected in three years' time.

Historical suffering cannot be undone. What the authorities can do, however, is to direct its efforts at increasing awareness and acknowledgement of this past, and mitigating its impact. The government indicated on the 19th of December that it would not be paying reparations but would focus on means that increase acknowledgement, awareness and psychological processing of the impact of the slavery past.

The book is a stepping stone for follow-up studies. To give shape to this process, the government will hold talks in the autumn with scientists, descendants and other parties.

APOLOGY AND REHABILITATION OF ANTON DE KOM

On the 19th of June 2023, Foreign Affairs Minister Wopke Hoekstra offered an apology on the government's behalf to the children and other relatives of Anton de Kom for the suffering inflicted on him and his family by the Dutch authorities of the time. To mark Anton de Kom's rehabilitation, the government has decided in consultation with his family and the Anton de Kom Foundation to

institute a chair at the Free University of Amsterdam. This chair will deal with the psychological processing of the Dutch slavery past and its impact on the present. All this will be based on Anton de Kom's legacy of thoughts. Through this measure, the government wants to make Anton de Kom's rehabilitation tangible and known to a wider public. The chair, funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, will commence in the academic year 2023-2024.

UPDATE FROM THE SPECIAL ENVOY FOR THE SLAVERY PAST / SURINAME

Since her appointment in March, the Special Envoy for the Slavery Past (SESP), Frédérique de Man, has made four visits to Suriname. Her most recent visit was on the 1st of July, when the Foreign Affairs Minister was in Suriname as well. During her visits, she met with various groups in Suriname, such as descendants' organisations, representatives of the native population, Marron representatives, women's groups, church communities and young people's representatives. These talks were about the way these groups perceive the apology of the 19th of December 2022 and the present-day impact of the slavery past. It was discussed how Suriname and the Netherlands can face the future together and how the available funds can support this process. The Special Envoy also spoke with the Surinamese National Commission for Memorial Years (*Surinaamse Nationale Commissie Herdenkingsjaren*), the National Slavery Commemoration Committee (*Nationaal Comité Herdenking Slavernij*), and the National Reparations Commission (*Nationale Reparatie Commissie*). In May, the Surinamese government appointed Mr Silvano Tjong-Ahin as National Coordinator for the Slavery Past (*Nationaal Coördinator Slavernijverleden*). In the coming period, the Special Envoy and her discussion partners in Suriname will look in more detail at the wishes and options with regard to the €200 million fund. She will also hold talks in the Netherlands with descendants and other parties.

ARUBA, CURAÇAO, BONAIRE, ST. MAARTEN, ST. EUSTATIUS AND SABA

Last week, the State Secretary for the Interior and Kingdom Relations sent a letter to the Parliaments of Aruba, Curaçao and St Maarten and the Island Councils of Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba: [Progress letters to the islands on apology for slavery past | Publication | Rijksoverheid.nl](#) (including translations into Papiamentu, Papiamentu and English). In this letter, she described the follow-up which we and the islands have given to the apology in the past six months. An example is the proposal of Curaçao for the rehabilitation of Tula on the 3rd of October 2023 in the presence of the State Secretary for the Interior and Kingdom Relations. Another example is the funds provided to the Aruban National Archives which will help them increase the searchability of their colonial archives. At the same time, all the islands are working in various forms, such as in committees and working groups, on the ideas about the follow-up to the apology and the commitments made on the 19th of December. These committees involve community organisations, descendants and government bodies. It is the islands who direct this process and who determine its pace.

As part of the ongoing dialogue on the follow-up to the apology, the State Secretary will organise a 'Catshuis goes Caribbean' meeting for the stakeholders involved on one of the Caribbean islands. This follows on from the meeting held on the 23rd of November of last year. If you have any ideas to contribute, then please do not hesitate to contact us via postbus.slavernijverledenKR@minbzk.nl.

WORKING VISITS

Several ministers and state secretaries have recently made working visits in the context of the slavery past. This newsletter will highlight some of them.

Minister Dijkgraaf's visit to Surinam

Robbert Dijkgraaf, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, visited Suriname on the invitation of his Surinamese colleague Henry Ori, the Minister of Education, Science and Culture. This visit was made in preparation for the Slavery Past Memorial Year.

While he was there, Minister Dijkgraaf met with various groups, such as young people, knowledge and heritage experts, and activists. He also held talks with the National Coordinator for the Slavery Past, Mr Tjong-Ahin, and members of the committee of ministers dealing with this subject. In

addition, the Minister visited the Onverwagt and Vierkinderen plantations, which are part of the Federation of Para Plantations.

The Minister found the trip very impressive and special. He obtained a picture of a society in which the slavery past still reverberates and in which people are keen to engage in dialogue with the Netherlands. They want to take concrete steps to tackle the shared past. The talks with Surinam on how to proceed together will be continued in the months ahead.

Minister Dijkgraaf said: "What has stayed with me the most is the way in which residents of former plantations dedicate themselves to their community and thus pass on the places, stories and family histories to their children."

Minister Bruins Slot's working visit to Rotterdam

On the 20th of June, Minister Bruins Slot visited Rotterdam. At the Schielandhuis, she spoke with members of the Sabi Network (*Netwerk Sabi*), a Rotterdam organisation which focuses on creating a long-term network of Afro-Caribbean Rotterdammers, and members of the Shared Past - Joint Future Foundation (*Stichting Gedeeld Verleden Gezamenlijke Toekomst*), which aims to increase knowledge and awareness of the history which Rotterdam residents share with each other. This meeting was also attended by Deputy Mayor Faouzi Achbar and by civil servants of the Rotterdam colonial and slavery past programme. The main topic of discussion was the impact of the slavery past on the present, the role of education and the manner in which young people in particular could be helped to overcome their disadvantaged position. After these valuable talks, the Minister also visited a number of locations that had played a significant role in Rotterdam's colonial past.

Prime Minister and Minister Hanke Bruins Slot in conversation with children and teenagers

On the 28th of June, Prime Minister Mark Rutte and Minister Hanke Bruins Slot engaged in talks with children and teenagers at the Mauritshuis about the slavery past. During this visit, the results of a survey were presented which the *Kindercorrespondent* had conducted among children throughout the Dutch Kingdom about the slavery past. Among other things, this survey had revealed that 90% of the children surveyed considered the slavery past an important subject, while 80% wanted to know more about it.

What followed was a meaningful discussion about the survey and the slavery past of the Netherlands. This survey, which was carried out in the Netherlands, Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, St. Eustatius and St. Maarten, has been a positive step. After all, children are the future. It is important that they have knowledge of the past and engage in dialogue about its significance in the here and now.

State Secretary Alexandra van Huffelen visited St. Maarten, Saba, St. Eustatius, Curaçao and Aruba

On the 1st of July, the State Secretary attended Emancipation Day and the opening ceremony of the Slavery Past Memorial Year 2023-2024 on St. Maarten, St. Eustatius and Saba. On Curaçao she held talks about identity and the slavery past, and on Aruba she spoke with several members of the Aruba Slavery Past Awareness Committee (*Commissie Bewustwording Slavernijverleden Aruba*) and other stakeholders. She was pleased to mark this special day on the three Leeward Islands, 160 years after the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom. In addition, Minister Hugo de Jonge, Minister Ernst Kuipers and State Secretary Eric van der Burg attended the commemoration ceremonies on Bonaire, Curaçao and Aruba respectively.

EXPLANATORY VIDEO ABOUT THE SLAVERY PAST

Communication research has shown that the majority of participants want to learn more about the slavery past, because they feel they know too little about it. As a first step, an explanatory video has been made on behalf of the central government. This video has been posted on the central government's website and on the social media channels of various ministries. Its aim is to transfer knowledge: what exactly happened back then, and how does this affect people in this day and age? Of course we realise that the slavery past cannot be summarised in a two-minute video. It is a first view of our shared past. However, we hope that this video will encourage people to listen to each other's stories. In the coming period, more communication resources will be developed and deployed to increase the amount of knowledge about the subject.

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/videos/2023/06/30/animatie-slavernijverleden>

FINALLY

The next newsletter will appear early in September. Meanwhile, work is continuing behind the scenes.

If there is any particular subject which you would like to see addressed in this newsletter or which you would like to discuss with us, please let us know.

You can contact us via: PostbusProgrammaSlavernijverleden@minbzk.nl