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The start of a new year offers room for reflection. We can look back on a year in which significant steps were taken in the 'filling in the gaps' process. Together, we are working hard on a future which acknowledges the legacy of the slavery past. Although these steps were not always directly visible, they are essential for further progress. Our aim is to find a balance between achieving concrete results and taking a careful and inclusive approach in doing so.

At the end of 2023, the election results raised questions about the political support of a new government for subjects such as the slavery past. As long as the formation is in progress, the answers remain uncertain. Until a new government is installed, this outgoing government will not waver in continuing its current efforts. Together with descendants and others, we will keep detailing the actions resulting from the government responses and take as many concrete steps as possible.

But back to the content of the 'filling in the gaps' process: in collaboration with the research agency TrueTalk, we had 270 discussions with direct stakeholders in the last three months in respect of the slavery past. In particular, we talked about the prevailing ideas on commemoration and what social initiatives would help us increase knowledge, raise awareness, recognise, commemorate and address the impact of the slavery past. We will need to use the input from the communities to give shape to the scheme for social initiatives and the Memorial Committee. In this way, we will ensure that the conclusions drawn are correct and as objective as possible. Elsewhere in this newsletter we will tell you about the outcomes of these discussions, and what we will do with them.

We started this year with another valuable session, in which around 70 descendants and direct stakeholders gathered at the Diligentia Theatre in order to share their views on the steps that had been taken until now in the 'filling in the gaps' process. Together, we also discussed the draft scheme for social initiatives in the European Netherlands and the current parameters for the formation of the kingdom-wide Memorial Committee.

Would you also like to have a say in the draft regulation? You can. In February an internet consultation is taking place for a period of 30 days. This newsletter contains more information on the subject, as well as on the kingdom-wide Memorial Committee.



Dialogue sessions

Our fellow officials had many discussions in the past year with descendants and direct stakeholders, which left them with clear impressions of the aspects to be borne in mind when shaping the ‘filling in the gaps’ process, concerning among other things the scheme for social initiatives and the Memorial Committee.

The next step was to ‘validate’ and record these impressions by means of a qualitative survey. On this occasion we extended the range of our discussion partners beyond the persons already involved in the programme, by engaging in dialogue with people in the street, of all ages, both within and outside the Randstad area. The role of the government is sometimes viewed with distrust. A dialogue initiated by a neutral research agency is therefore a powerful way to obtain insights.

Discussions were held with 270 descendants, divided across 18 dialogue days and a number of online sessions, based on the premise that participation should be open to anyone. The principal dialogues were individual discussions, although these were supplemented by roundtable talks and Café Bepp. The latter is a method applied by research agency TrueTalk, whereby people are engaged in dialogue in their natural environment. For example, TrueTalk visited community centres or markets at various locations in the Netherlands, where they put up a small on-site research facility in a homely setting.

The survey involved people of different ages, organisational and emotional involvement and cultural backgrounds. In this context, the research agency made sure that all descendant communities were included.

During the discussions, we heard and saw that the consequences of our past are still visible and palpable in the present. We heard and saw that communities feel socially disadvantaged in areas such as accommodation, education and the labour market.

This fact sheet provides a summary of the impressions generated by the survey. The subsidy scheme was drawn up with these outcomes in mind. For example, the scheme had to be a low-threshold scheme accessible to grass roots organisations, without them getting bogged down in complicated application procedures.

The insights will also be taken on board where commemoration is concerned. The kingdom-wide Memorial Committee will develop its activities based on the insights we obtained.

The widely held view is that commemoration should be for everyone. As is the case for 4 and 5 May. Something that touches all Dutch nationals. Because this of all things will strengthen mutual understanding and may bring ‘white’ and ‘black’ communities together. “It will lead to solidarity. Recognition and equality.” Another important point, finally, is that joint commemoration should also make allowances for the great cultural diversity within the various communities.



State of affairs – subsidy scheme for social initiatives

In the Dutch government’s response of the 19th of December 2022 to the ‘Chains of the Past’ report, the government announced a subsidy scheme. The purpose of the scheme is to support social initiatives aimed at raising awareness, recognising, commemorating or addressing the impact of the transatlantic slave trade.

A one-off sum of €100 million has been set aside for this scheme. The available

sum of €100 million has been divided into three parts: €33.3 million for the European Netherlands, €33.3 million for the Caribbean part of the Kingdom, and €33.3 million for Suriname.

In order to find the right points of departure for the subsidy scheme, we spoke with various persons and organisations from involved communities. The dialogues with 270 descendants, scattered all over the European Netherlands and across a range of age groups, resulted in clear insights. For example, the scheme had to be a low-threshold scheme accessible to grass roots organisations, without them getting bogged down in complicated application procedures.

The scheme will pay particular attention to supporting the grass roots organisations of descendants and involved communities. By using a voucher, they can further professionalise and strengthen their organisations.

In addition, the scheme is intended for social initiatives aimed at strengthening the community of descendants of enslaved people, as well as celebrating and increasing their resilience.

It also encompasses larger projects that have a significant effect on increasing knowledge, raising awareness, recognising, commemorating and addressing the impact of the slavery past.

Separate tailor-made schemes will be established for the Caribbean part of the Kingdom and for Suriname. The scheme for the Caribbean part of the Kingdom can proceed from the same points of departure as the scheme for the European Netherlands.

Timetable

- In February, the scheme will be the subject of a 30-day internet consultation. You will be able to respond in February via this [link](#).
- The scheme will be published in the Government Gazette on the 1st of June.
- The first window for submitting applications will open on the 1st of July. Altogether, there will be six windows.
- The scheme for the Caribbean part of the Kingdom is expected to be announced in the summer of 2024. The scheme for Suriname will be published at a later time, although the aim is to do this in 2024.

State of affairs – Memorial Committee

As announced in the government's response of the 19th of December 2022, a kingdom-wide Memorial Committee is to be set up that will supervise the detailing and organisation of a permanent large-scale, dignified commemoration of the slavery past.

The Memorial Committee is meant to be operational in the summer of 2024. The committee will be set up in consultation with the community. In addition to stakeholder advisors, 270 descendants were surveyed on this subject during the dialogue sessions.

By far the greater part of the discussion partners had no concrete picture of commemorative activities or initiatives. The central theme was at a deeper level: many discussion partners spoke about the larger problem of inequality which initiatives or commemorative activities would have to address. The keywords here were 'recognition' and 'connection'. Recognition not only involves recognition of the whole story of slavery, but also recognition of the socioeconomic, social and psychological impact which the slavery past still has on the lives of descendants. Recognition also creates space for connection within and between (white and black) communities.

Many interviewees felt that in ten years' time commemoration should be such that white Dutch people would also feel involved. Something "that belongs to everyone". Something "that touches all Dutch nationals". This will strengthen mutual understanding and may bring 'white' and 'black' communities together. "It will lead to solidarity. Recognition and equality."

Commemoration should also make allowances for the great cultural diversity

among the various communities.

The survey shows that commemoration is important: it provides an opportunity for reflection, and for standing together. For sharing stories. And also, for celebrating freedom together (although not everyone needs to do so on the same day).
“Commemoration is not forgetting the past. Showing respect for what has been.”

These and other insights provide the Memorial Committee with a good starting point from which to proceed. At present, the composition of the committee is being considered.

Online campaign ‘History, of every one of us’

Encouraging discussions between people and raising awareness of our shared past. With this aim, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science launched the online campaign ‘History, of every one of us’ in December. This campaign focuses on people’s personal stories about the slavery past and its impact on the present. [Singer Shirma Rouse and film maker Safi Graauw](#) gave the kick-off, or indeed rap-off, by engaging in dialogue about their family histories and the importance of commemoration. The conversation between lecturer [Lucelle Comvalius and illustrator George Adegite](#) can now be viewed on line as well. Sharing these stories is part of the Slavery Past Memorial Year. More duos will be telling their stories in the months to come. Thus, Hesdy Lonswijk (film director), Carmen Felix (author), Lukas Eleuwarin (fashion designer), Jill Mathon (author), Professor Soortkill (author, among other things), Lex Bohlmeijer (presenter), Stefanie Albertzoon (actress and performer) and Charissa Chotoe (presenter and poet) will talk about the slavery past from their perspectives. The stories will be shared on OCW-verhalen.nl and the Ministry’s social media channels.

Robbert Dijkgraaf (Minister of Education, Culture and Science) said about this campaign: “We have known about the power of storytelling from the beginning of mankind. From my own experience, I know that many people are open to discussions about our shared past, but sometimes struggle to find the right words. That may be a real threshold. I hope that these personal stories, told from a range of perspectives, will help us lower that threshold and bring about connection. Now this may be even more important than ever before.”



Special Envoy for the Slavery Past for Suriname

Frédérique de Man, the Special Envoy for the Slavery Past, made her sixth visit to Suriname together with Thomas Zandstra, the Head of the Democracy Department of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. This joint visit proved very useful for sharing views and experiences, among other things because it involved intensive knowledge exchanges between descendants in Suriname and the Netherlands.

Many of the discussions revolved around the Slavery Past Platform (in formation). This platform, consisting of representatives from a number of social organisations, will take the lead in the dialogue on the specifics of the ‘filling in the gaps’ process and the deployment of the two funds.

Frédérique de Man and Thomas Zandstra also visited a number of plantations, where they spoke with descendants.

State Secretary Alexandra van Huffelen talks with descendants in Leeuwarden and Vlissingen

As the coordinating cabinet member for the Slavery Past programme and the 'filling in the gaps' process, State Secretary Alexandra van Huffelen visits several places each month where the slavery past played a major role historically. In recent months, she has been to Leeuwarden and Vlissingen.

On the 13th of December 2023, she spoke in Leeuwarden with the 30 June/1 July Committee and Mayor Sybrand Buma about the impact and consequences of the slavery past. She also attended the theatrical performance '*Tinten*' ('Shades of colour'), which breaks the taboo on the role of skin colour by sharing a personal story and having a frank discussion with young people.

"I hope that this is the last generation to encounter discrimination and racism. This visit shows that we should continue investing in this aspect so as to facilitate true equality for all in our society", said the State Secretary.

On the 8th of January 2024, she visited the Maritime Museum in Vlissingen. Here she discussed the impact of the slavery past on the present with a number of descendants. These were impressive discussions, which showed that recognition and commemoration are essential for a fair and just society.

On the 29th of January 2024, the State Secretary visited Delft, the city which on the 19th of December 2023 had offered its own apology for its role in the slavery past. Here she met with researchers and the responsible alderman, but also and especially with the coordinating committee and descendants living in the city. They spoke about the local impact of the slavery past on present-day society, and the steps that were required in their opinion. One of the initiatives planned by the city is the creation of a memorial site.



Conclusion

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