



To the Island Council of Saba
Powerstreet 1
The Bottom
Saba, Caribisch Nederland

**Ministry of the Interior and
Kingdom Relations**

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Our ref.
2022-0000698030

Your ref.

Enclosure(s)
1

Date 19th December 2022
Re History of slavery- Cabinet's response to 'Chains of the Past'

Dear Members of the Island Council,

Today, 19 December 2022, the Prime Minister, on behalf of the Government of the Netherlands, made apologies for the role of the historical predecessors of the Dutch authority in slavery.

In this matter, as the historical successor, the Government is fully aware of its administrative responsibility for the State of the Netherlands in its historical manifestations at the time. It makes these apologies for the role and involvement of our historical, administrative predecessors in the allowing, facilitating, promotion and continuation of, and benefiting from, slave trade and slavery, which have long and structurally undermined human dignity. Furthermore, for the fact that the successive governments since 1863 have demonstrated insufficient recognition of the fact that the slavery past has had a continued negative effect.

In slavery, people were deliberately reduced to trading goods and torn away from their environment and family ties in a way that was as abhorrent as it was inhumane. The Government fully recognises the immeasurable human suffering and honours those who resisted slavery. We can only look back on this past, with which we are all connected, with horror, remorse and shame. With this recognition of its administrative responsibility, the Government would also like to emphasise that society today, as such, cannot be held responsible for the acts committed in the name of the historical, administrative predecessors of the Dutch authority. At the same time, we cannot close our eyes to the negative effects of that history.

In his speech in Saba, State Secretary Van Ooijen for Health, Welfare and Sport emphasised that the Netherlands would like to continue discussions about what the history of slavery has meant to the island, and how the Cabinet can contribute to mending that today, and how we can continue to build on a common future.

Date

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19 december 2022

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Cabinet's response to the report 'Chains of the Past'

At the same time, the Government of the Netherlands has sent its response to the report 'Chains of the Past' by the Dialogue Group on the History of Slavery to the Eerste and Tweede Kamer. Enclosed please find that response, an English translation will be made available as soon possible.

In its response to the report, the Government endorses the vision of the Dialogue Group that recognition of, and apologies for, the historical suffering are the basis for reparations today. Therefore, in the coming years, the Cabinet will commit to an integral package of measures that, together, will give a sustainable impulse to reinforcement of the knowledge and awareness, recognition and commemoration, as well as the continued effects of, and coming to terms with, the slavery past. This will be done, among other things, by contributing to the development of a slavery museum with a local impact on all the islands, a broad scientific study of the colonial slavery past of the Netherlands, the establishment of an independent Committee to oversee the detailing and organisation of a grand and dignified commemoration of the slavery past, the rehabilitation of Tula, and anti-discrimination measures. This does not alter the fact that there are also other things that are being done, and that there is still much to be done, to fight inequality. One may think of combating poverty, and improving education and access to good social security.

Saba

On 1 July 2021, the Public Entity of Saba took an important step in respect of the recognition and commemoration of enslaved persons in Saba, by reflecting on the slavery past in Saba. In 2022, 159 years after the abolition of slavery, they did so by reading out the names of 159 of the over 700 enslaved persons who were freed after the abolition of slavery. To keep the memory of the slavery past alive, it is important to commemorate together. The Cabinet would like to support this with the promise of a names memorial, in which the names of the enslaved persons of Saba will be engraved for all eternity. Not only they, but also the enslaved persons whose names have remained unknown, may never be forgotten. In the lead-up to the Slavery Memorial Year 2023 - 2024, I would like to start a dialogue with the Public Entity of Saba about the realisation of the names monument.

History has made the community to what it is today. That is also true for the inhabitants of Saba and the community of Saba as a whole. The slave trade and the slavery past runs through the personal histories of the people of Saba. Many questions about origin and identity have remained unanswered so far. Research is an important way to gain more insight into the slavery past and its continued effects today, but also to increase the understanding of the personal history and identity of descendants of enslaved persons. The Cabinet would like to support this search for origin and identity, by reviewing, together with the people of Saba, how this history can be reconstructed carefully and thoroughly. To that end, we will jointly look at all the available possibilities, such as genealogical research in the archives, investigating ships reports, but also DNA research.

Date

19 December 2022
19 december 2022

Our ref.

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The Cabinet's response emphasises that we value a close cooperation with the Caribbean Islands in the development of the national slavery museum. That cooperation is not a one-way street, but should come about with a local impact on all the islands.

Fund and Committee

In order to support social initiatives, the Cabinet will set up a Fund. It is emphasised that this should be worked out in concrete detail in dialogue with, and for the benefit of, the Caribbean part of the Kingdom and Suriname, which, through this shared past, are forever connected with the Kingdom.

To fund the package of measures, the Cabinet intends to make a total amount of EUR 200 million available. Furthermore, the Cabinet intends to make an annual contribution of EUR 8 million available for the establishment and support of the activities of the Committee to be set up.

Slavery Memorial Year (1 July 2023 - 1 July 2024)

The history of slavery is a very painful, important, and underexposed aspect of our shared past. Starting next year, from 1 July 2023 to 1 July 2024, the whole Kingdom will pay extra attention to this aspect during the Slavery Memorial Year.

The National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and its Legacy (NiNsee) intends to mark the grand opening of the Slavery Memorial Year in June and July 2023, and to mark its closing in July 2024. NiNsee intends to start a dialogue with Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten about a joint marking of this grand opening and closing.

In addition, the Cabinet will make an amount of EUR 2 million available for the organisation of activities during the Slavery Memorial Year. This will be implemented through two cultural funds: the Mondriaan Fund and the Cultural Participation Fund. It is stressed that these grant schemes are also available to initiators in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom. Applications can be submitted in Papiamentu, Papiamentu, English or Dutch.

The Cabinet envisages a year in which the entire Kingdom will feel included and which will create a connection that will last until long after the end of the year. We would like to invite Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten to make a contribution, as they see fit.

Common future

The apologies made by the Government of the Netherlands mark the beginning of a process that we would like to go through together with the Caribbean Netherlands and the Caribbean Countries of the Kingdom. The first step in the process are the apologies, with which the Government wishes to account for the horrible suffering that its historical predecessors caused. We thereby wish to use the Slavery Memorial Year to develop further plans together with all the parties involved.

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This process will, however, not end after 1 July 2024, but will form the basis for a common future. A common future in which we can look back on the past with an open mind, and look ahead to a future that is based on knowledge and awareness, recognition and commemoration, as well as the continued effects of, and coming to terms with, the slavery past.

Yours sincerely,

State Secretary for the Interior and Kingdom Relations,

Alexandra C. van Huffelen