



> Return address

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Re. Progress slavery past

Introduction

With the apologies for the Dutch slavery past, an important step was taken in the recognition of this crime against humanity. Following up on these apologies is also very important to me; by creating more awareness about this painful history, we can look forward together to a future that is equal and just for everyone. In doing so, I find it important to have conversations with descendants and other directly affected persons. One of the things I did was hold a round-table discussion on the different perspectives that exist within the communities involved on the apologies and their follow-up. And I attended the progress meeting on 27 January last, where I was introduced to guests from the relevant communities and we discussed the follow-up of the apologies and the Slavery Past Memorial Committee.

With this letter, I inform the Honourable House, also on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Education, Culture and Science about the follow-up process on the apologies for the slavery past. I discuss the status of the Slavery Past Memorial Committee, the subsidy schemes for social initiatives, and other awareness and recognition measures. I shall also inform you about the progress of the follow-up processes in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom and Suriname.

Slavery Past Memorial Committee

I am pleased to announce that the Slavery Past Memorial Committee was established and is setting to work on the important task of further shaping the memorial and recognition of the Dutch Slavery Past in the Kingdom. An important milestone in the follow-up to the apologies, arrived at after intensive consultations with descendants and other directly affected persons.

After the 30-day scrutiny procedure in the House of Representatives and the Senate, the deed of incorporation was executed by the civil-law notary on 6 January 2025. Since then, the Slavery Past Memorial Committee Foundation has formally been in place.

With the execution of the deed, the nominated members have become the first board members of the Committee. They are: Mrs A. Elburg (chair, nominated by the Minister of the Interior), Mr N. Oleana (nominated by Bonaire), Mr S. Ortega (nominated by Curaçao), Mrs C. Reyes (nominated by St. Maarten), Mr R. Richardson (nominated by St. Eustatius), Mr D. Whitfield (nominated by Saba), and Mrs L. Callender (nominated by the NiNsee). Aruba and Suriname have not nominated a member yet, the invitation to these governments to nominate a

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member stands. The Committee is discussing this with them. The Foundation operates independently. The articles of association provide that there shall be no political steering.

An interim director was appointed by the Ministry of BZK on 1 November 2024 to build the working organisation that shall support the Committee. This interim director operates independently of the Ministry and builds a working organisation on both sides of the ocean. In addition, the interim director shall work with the Committee to find a secretary-director, who is going to lead the working organisation of the Committee for several years. From March 2025, the working organisation in the European Dutch part is going to relocate to The Hague, to the same building as the War Graves Foundation.

The Committee works closely with the NiNsee to organise the National Slavery Past Memorial on 1 July in Amsterdam, under the responsibility and supervision of the Committee.

Subsidy schemes for social initiatives

Following publication of the social initiative schemes for the European Netherlands and the Caribbean part of the Kingdom on 1 July 2024, work has been underway to elaborate the schemes. To develop feasible regulations, the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK) has held intensive discussions over the past months with the intended implementing agency: Policy implementation, (Uitvoering Van Beleid) part of the Directorate for Services, Partnerships, and Implementation (DSU/UVB) within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW). The aim is that these discussions with the intended implementing agency will result in revised regulations that can be published and opened later this year. However, several outstanding issues remain. A condition for engaging the intended implementing agency is that the revised regulations must be workable for them, ensuring efficiency and legality in spending while keeping implementation risks at an acceptable level. Therefore, DSU/UVB will conduct a final implementation assessment on the final regulations and submit it to me and the ministers of SZW.

It is important that the communities are informed about the schemes and the application process in a timely manner. To reach as many people as possible, various communication tools, e.g. physical information sessions throughout the Netherlands and a webinar, are deployed. The relevant communities in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom shall also be informed by various means of communication.

Following the opening of the scheme in the European Netherlands, an important next step in the process is the recruitment of the members of the Advisory Committee. The aim is to finalise this in the first quarter of 2025. The Advisory Committee issues a written opinion on the applications that do not appear to be eligible for a subsidy. With due consideration of that opinion, the final decision is taken by the Minister. A key requirement is that the members are involved in the communities and are knowledgeable of the developments within them. At the same time, the members are independent and advise without mandate or support.

Other awareness and recognition measures in the European Netherlands

Free name change

The implementation of the temporary regulation on free name changes for descendants of enslaved persons was successfully launched in the European Netherlands on 1 July 2024. In the first six months since coming into force, 127 applications were submitted to Justis. Of these, 88 were assessed positively, and in 23 cases this has now resulted in a name change. To further raise awareness of the scheme, active communication with the interest groups and information shall continue to be provided to the target group in 2025.

The implementation of the scheme in Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba is underway. The specific context and administrative structures on the islands require customisation. The aim is to achieve this implementation by the end of 2025 at the latest. This ensures that residents of these islands also have equal access to the scheme. The implementation on the islands is prepared in cooperation with Justis, which also implements the scheme in the European Netherlands.

Public communication anti-discrimination facilities

The Ministry of BZK commissioned research on strategies in order to increase the willingness to report discrimination. The research agency conducted a literature review and interviews with experts and experiential practitioners, with a focus on the frequency of discrimination, reporting behaviour, and current developments. A behavioural analysis shed light on important factors, including lack of knowledge about Discriminatie.nl, coping styles, and scepticism regarding reporting. Hence, a strategy was developed to increase knowledge of the reporting options, strengthen the trust in authorities, and remove the barriers for reporting. The final report forms the basis for the public communication and interventions of the Ministry of BZK in 2025, e.g. campaigns to increase knowledge, improvements to the website, and the reporting form of Discriminatie.nl. Examples are the visualisation of the reporting procedure in order to remove scepticism and the inclusion of a chat function in order to lower the threshold.

Knowledge synthesis

The knowledge synthesis commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) was launched in December 2024 by Verwey Jonker and Movisie, in equal collaboration with the initiators of the Zwart Manifest. The study shall be delivered before summer 2025. The knowledge synthesis focuses on understanding the impact of the (transatlantic) colonial and slavery past on contemporary racism and discrimination in various domains in Dutch society. In addition to the knowledge synthesis, an accessible and creative publication of the findings is produced for a wide audience.

Propagating of social norm

The feasibility study commissioned by the Ministries of SZW and BZK from Tabula Rasa on the propagation of a social norm against racism and discrimination in society shall be delivered by the summer of 2025. It is then considered how the results of the feasibility study can be applied.

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Slavery past learning network

Commissioned by SZW, the Slavery Past Learning Network for municipalities was successfully set up, implemented by Radar Advies. Eighteen municipalities are participating in the Learning Network. Through thematic meetings and substantive assignments, they learn about the topics that touch on the impact of the slavery past at the local level. In this way, participating municipalities can give recognition and reflection of the slavery past a structural place in their policy plans.

National Slavery Museum, Knowledge Centre, and Heritage

On 30 May 2024, the then Minister of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) informed the Honourable House of the progress of the establishment of the National Slavery Museum¹. Besides its museum function, the museum is also given a knowledge function where descendants can conduct family and ancestor research. A museum knowledge network is also being developed and the options for digital access to the museum are being elaborated. This knowledge function shall be developed further in the next phase of the development of the museum, in a way that strengthens its networking function. This implies that institutions from across the Kingdom and internationally shall actively be involved, covering the international history of colonisation and slavery.

Sources on the slavery past can be found in existing museum and archive collections. Therefore, the focus is on the investment in the preservation and further development of museums, archives, and protection of cultural heritage. In addition to the regular cultural policy, the Ministry of OCW supports institutions that tap into and preserve new sources with the help of a heritage community, and widely share and discuss the stories about them.

Health and welfare

The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) commissioned an exploratory study into possible influences of the slavery past on health and welfare. The social and scientific attention to issues of equality and discrimination within health and welfare is growing². An increasing number of insights suggest that historical events, e.g. the slavery past, can have lasting effects on successive generations. An example is intergenerational trauma, in which psychological effects are passed on from generation to generation³, which is due to start in the first quarter of 2025, VWS aims to combine existing knowledge but also develop new insights to better understand and address these complex issues.

¹ [Parliamentary letter on progress National Slavery Museum | Parliamentary Papers | Rijksoverheid.nl](#)

² Allen, Rose Mary; Captain, Esther; Rossum, Matthias van; Vyent, Urwin. Staat en slavernij: het Nederlandse koloniale slavernijverleden en zijn doorwerkingen ('*State and slavery: the Dutch colonial slavery past and its impact*') (2023), page 31

³ Staat en slavernij, page 31: "A cultural archive, also referred to as mental heritage, was formed among white Dutch people and descendants of enslaved people during and after the period of slavery and colonialism, which created a culture in both groups that internalised feelings of perceived superiority and perceived inferiority, respectively. The result is anti-Black racism in all layers of Dutch society."

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Education

At the end of 2024, the draft key objectives of the learning pathway Man and Society were delivered. This includes, more specifically than in the current key objectives, that students should gain knowledge about the colonial and slavery past, migration history, and the entire Kingdom of the Netherlands. In addition, assignments for education in the first half of 2025 shall include the development of a resources bank, a guide for teachers, and the boosting of an organisation providing guest lectures on the slavery past. Research into the stories of anti-colonial freedom fighters and resistance heroes in primary education in the European Netherlands and the Caribbean part of the Kingdom is also due to be launched in the first half of 2025. This implements the Simons motion⁴.

Caribbean part of the Kingdom

Based on the recommendations of the Chains of the Past report, a number of commitments were made to St. Maarten, Curaçao, Aruba, St. Eustatius, Saba, and Bonaire on 19 December 2022. These commitments form the foundation for shaping the so-called action agendas. The Ministry of BZK facilitates the designated representatives in shaping the action agendas, including by providing writing capacity.

A working week took place at the end of October 2024 to come up with concrete details of the action agendas, specifically where the museum infrastructure and archives are concerned. In attendance were the representatives of Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, St. Eustatius, and St. Maarten appointed by the local governments. In addition, island experts with expertise in heritage, culture and/or archives also joined in for substantive support. Given the diversity of the countries (islands), customisation is required. The representatives and other stakeholders are now working to further concretise the action agendas, which shall be presented to the State Secretary of BZK by 1 July 2025 at the latest.

Suriname

In order to give shape to the dialogue about the follow-up of the apologies, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BZ) appointed a Special Envoy Slavery Past from March 2023 up to July 2024. With the conclusion of the Slavery Past Memorial Year, the mandate also came to an end. The conversations that the Envoy had during their seven trips to Suriname sparked the dialogue between the Netherlands and Suriname on the follow-up to the apologies, focusing on the perspectives of the Indigenous and Maroon communities. The Dutch embassy in Paramaribo and the Ministry of BZ are currently continuing this dialogue at the pace of Suriname. They are doing so pending the announced installation of a Surinamese platform, with a number of representatives from the most affected groups.

The Ministry of BZ is working on the framework for the social initiatives scheme, which defines the conditions for granting subsidies. The premise is that the funds should be accessible in a low-threshold manner, whilst safeguarding the efficiency and legality of the spending. The scheme is expected to be published in the course of 2025. The policy intensifications are also elaborated further.

⁴ Parliamentary Papers, Session Year 2022-2023, 36200 VIII, no. 142.

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The apologies are seen in Suriname as an important step towards healing and reconciliation. Following the apologies and the plea for forgiveness from His Majesty the King, the traditional authority figures of the Indigenous and Tribal People (*Fiti Makandra*, Fight Together), proposed to respond to the apologies by means of a *Gran Krutu/Gran Komparsi* – a plebiscite. To this end, two hundred delegates from the various affected communities in Suriname shall engage with each other. The gathering is expected to take place in the first half of 2025. The Ministry of BZ supports this initiative because it is of utmost importance to the process of healing and reconciliation in Suriname. The Ministry made funds from the Slavery Past Memorial Year available for this.

BES Protection Against Discrimination Act

The bill to make the equal treatment legislation applicable to the Caribbean part of the Netherlands was notified for plenary consideration in the House of Representatives in early February 2025. The BES anti-discrimination facility is embedded with the legal aid facility. Together with the State Secretary for Legal Protection, I am pushing for the joint establishment of a new, local, foundation. This foundation is going to be responsible for providing legal aid and shall also serve as an anti-discrimination facility. In the coming time, the intention to set up a foundation shall be submitted to the Minister of Finance and the Netherlands Court of Audit, followed by a scrutiny procedure before the Honourable House and the Senate. The Netherlands Institute for Human Rights is preparing for its ruling role on the islands. Regional, deputy institute members shall be used.

'Who are we' conversation starter

In 2024, the 'Who are we' conversation starter was deployed at 25 locations across the country, e.g. festivals, markets, and squares. At 10 locations, we organised in-depth programming in addition to the conversation starter. An ongoing social dialogue is needed to increase knowledge about the slavery past and to create awareness about how this past continues to affect society. The conversation starter unites different perspectives, provides space for exchange of experiences, and promotes understanding between different groups. By opening up the conversation to all walks of life, more people feel heard and involved. These interactions help create shared understanding to take the necessary steps for the future and contribute to collective awareness.

The wrap-up took place in January 2025, with a national wrap-up meeting. That is where all the content came together from what we heard during the conversations around the country. Although a shift in paradigm cannot be accomplished within a year, this is a step in the right direction. The conversation starter appeared to be an effective tool to enter into discussions about this sensitive topic in a low-threshold manner. This result, also laid down in an evaluation report, provides, inter alia, input for the Slavery Past Memorial Committee, which is continuing to work on increasing knowledge and awareness of the slavery past.

Slavery Past Memorial Year

The Slavery Past Memorial Year ended on 1 July 2024. This year marked an important step in the recognition and the sharing of our shared history. The NiNsee, with funding from OCW, organised scaled-up National Memorials in 2023

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and 2024, which acted as a symbolic opening and closing of the year. These activities were expanded to include memorial moments in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom and local initiatives throughout the Netherlands. Due to the relocation of the Ketí Koti Festival to the Museumplein, the National Memorial could start an hour later. This made the memorial more accessible to people from the Caribbean and Suriname and allowed for a larger and diverse audience. New elements, e.g. speakers from indigenous communities and Saba, reinforced the inclusive nature.

The subsidy schemes of the Mondriaan Fund and the Cultural Participation Fund supported more than 250 projects in the European Netherlands and the Caribbean part of the Kingdom. Accessible conditions, translation budgets, and local support also gave grassroots organisations a fair chance. This approach led to a diverse spread of projects and improved the understanding of the needs of communities. In addition, through the structure of the International Cultural Policy, OCW supported projects in countries with historical ties to the Dutch slavery past, including Suriname and the United States. These initiatives strengthen the international connection and emphasise the shared nature of this past.

The stakeholder approach of OCW gave space to underexposed perspectives, e.g. those of Maroon and Indigenous communities, descendants of contract workers, and representatives of the slavery past in the Indonesian archipelago. This resulted in initiatives like the *Contract Labour from the Shadows* conference. In addition, the *History, of All of Us* campaign reached more than 40 million people and stimulated a national dialogue. The campaign was also deployed in the Caribbean in the form of documentaries.

Multi-annual research and international knowledge sharing

Multi-annual research programme

The Ministry of OCW and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research are jointly investing €3 million in a multi-annual research programme on the Dutch colonial slavery past. This is a thematic programme within the National Science Agenda. The preparations for the programme are at an advanced stage. A preliminary announcement is expected to take place midway through the first quarter of 2025, highlighting the core of the programme and providing information on the facilitated process and deadlines. This is followed by a call for the submission of proposals. Knowledge institutions and social stakeholders are invited to jointly develop research proposals with different disciplines and varied research forms, so that the programme meets the knowledge needs of the social stakeholders.

International knowledge cooperation Dutch slavery past

Sharing knowledge about the slavery past and giving space to multiple and new perspectives and insights about it cannot be done without the involvement of knowledge institutions and partners in the areas with which the Netherlands shares a colonial history. The Ministry of OCW therefore asked the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) to shape an international research programme consisting of scholars from countries with

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which the Netherlands has a colonial history. KITLV shall enable researchers in Suriname, South Africa, and Indonesia to research the Dutch slavery past and its impact from the perspective of the local context and research needs. This programme continues until 2027. OCW made €924,000 available for this purpose. The Honourable House was previously informed⁵ about the possibility offered by OCW to the six islands in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom to conduct research on the Dutch slavery past. Since October 2024, an alliance of higher education institutions in the Caribbean countries, has been giving substance to a shared Slavery Past Chair. In addition, with the funds made available for the Caribbean Netherlands, a research programme is expected to be developed by 2025, in close consultation with the Public Entities of the islands. A total of €455,000 has been set aside by OCW on its own budget for research into the Dutch slavery past in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom until 2027.

Finally

During the past period, intensive work was carried out on the further elaboration of plans surrounding the Slavery Past Memorial Committee, the subsidy scheme for social initiatives, measures to promote awareness and recognition, and the progress of follow-up processes in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom and Suriname. 2025 marks a crucial year when we are going to take the next steps together with communities and other stakeholders to bring these plans to life and to shape them further.

The Minister for the Interior and Kingdom Relations, also on behalf of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Education, Culture and Science.

J.J.M. Uitermark

⁵ Parliamentary Papers II, 36410-IV, no. 68