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Subject Government response to *Ketenen van het verleden*, the report of findings issued by the Advisory Board of the Slavery Past Dialogue Group

Introduction

On 1 July 2021, the Slavery Past Dialogue Group presented its report of findings, entitled *Ketenen van het verleden* ('Chains of the Past').¹ The Dialogue Group focused on the impact of the transatlantic slavery past on present-day society and on a broader acknowledgement and embedding of this shared past. The Dialogue Group conducted many interviews and consulted a wide range of people and organisations in the European Netherlands in order to flesh out this dialogue. The Dialogue Group also facilitated the discussions held in the countries Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten, and the public bodies Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba, and included the resulting advice in its report of findings. In addition an inter-insular working group, consisting of representatives from all the islands of the Caribbean part of the Kingdom, submitted proposals in respect of these islands.

The government wants to thank the Dialogue Group for the work it achieved under difficult pandemic conditions, and for the report of findings. The report of findings offers unambiguous recommendations and thereby important building blocks for the further development of a joint view of the past, a better understanding of its impact on the present and the formulation of future policies aimed at acknowledgement, psychological processing and social recovery.

In this letter, the government responds to the Dialogue Group's report of findings and presents its vision for the implementation of the recommendations offered. What we want to achieve is a society that has no place for discrimination and racism.

We regard the presentation of this government response as an important step, not as the final element. After all, the process of raising awareness about the slavery past is far from complete. Following the government response, we want to build a foundation with those involved towards a shared future, also in the run-up to and after the start of the Slavery Memorial Year on 1 July 2023.

Apologies

¹ Parliamentary Paper 35570-VII no. 106

On 19 December, I apologised on behalf of the government for the actions of the Dutch State in the past: posthumously to all enslaved people who suffered under those actions worldwide, to their daughters and sons, and to all their descendants until the present day.

As the King put it during the Speech from the Throne:

"In a society that has no place for racism and discrimination, and where everyone feels heard and acknowledged, we need to face up to the less savoury pages in our history. In doing so, we should not judge our ancestors by contemporary standards, but we should realise and understand what our history means for various groups and cultures which are part of our society.

This applies expressly to the entire Kingdom and to all the countries with which we have special ties because of this history. By talking about the past, the government wants to further the necessary acknowledgement and interpersonal connection. However difficult and emotional these talks may be sometimes, our view of the past cannot be a static one."

In this context, the government is aware of its administrative responsibility for the Dutch State in its historical manifestations. It is offering these apologies for the role and involvement of our historical administrative predecessors in allowing, enabling, promoting, prolonging and profiting from the slave trade and slavery that undermined human dignity on a long-term and structural basis. Furthermore, it apologises for the fact that successive governments after 1863 did not sufficiently realise and acknowledge that the slavery past had and has a negative impact.

Slavery meant that people were deliberately reduced to merchandise and ripped from their environment and families in an horrendous, inhuman way. Pursuant to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, slavery and the slave trade are now regarded worldwide as a crime against humanity. By current criminal standards, the government views the slave trade and slavery as criminal because they undermined what it is to be human in a horrendous and structural manner. The government unreservedly acknowledges the immeasurable human suffering, and honours those who opposed slavery. This past that links us all can only be regarded with abhorrence, repentance and shame. While acknowledging this administrative responsibility, the government also wants to stress that present-day society as such cannot be held responsible for the acts committed in the name of the historical administrative predecessors of the Dutch authorities. At the same time, however, we cannot close our eyes to the negative consequences of this history.

The government has opted to offer these apologies verbally. It chose to publicly deliver a verbal apology because it wants these apologies to be offered in person, by the Prime Minister on the government's behalf, posthumously to all enslaved people worldwide, but also directly to descendants of enslaved people. As well as offering these apologies, the government is introducing measures aimed at knowledge and awareness, acknowledgement and commemoration, and the impact and psychological processing of the slavery past. This also involves the formation of a fund that will have a statutory basis.

Role of historical administrative predecessors

Between the start of the seventeenth century and 1863, the historical predecessors of the administrative authorities in the Netherlands were directly and indirectly involved in slavery and the slave trade. Between 1602 and the abolition of the slave trade in 1814, approximately 600,000 enslaved people were transported against their will from Africa to the American continent, Surinam and the Caribbean part of the Netherlands by organisations such as the Dutch West India Company (WIC). The fate of the native populations of Surinam and the Caribbean islands should not be forgotten either: they were the first to be put to work as enslaved people. In Asia, between 660,000 and more than 1 million enslaved people were transported to regions controlled by the Dutch East India Company (VOC). At the end of the seventeenth century, traders from the Republic of the Seven United Provinces of the Netherlands were even among the largest in the world for a while. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the slavery-related trade comprised 5% of the Republic's economy.

As early as in 1854, a national committee concluded that the State of the Netherlands had not just expressly permitted the slave trade in the previous period, but had facilitated and encouraged this trade. Through patents, the VOC and the WIC obtained general trade monopolies. Upon its relaunch, the WIC even received the statutory mandate for the slave trade from the States General. In order to foster this relaunch, the States General also acted as co-financier.

The members of the States General were involved in the organisation, funding and administration of slavery-related trade. In 1789, the States General characterised the slave trade as *'inseparable from the success and prosperity of those Colonies, and from Commerce as a whole.'*²

After the revolts of enslaved people at the end of the eighteenth century, the States General, and afterwards the Crown, introduced legislation to improve but also prolong slavery. Following the nationalisation of the colonies in 1800, they became the mandate of the Crown in 1814 and came under ministerial responsibility from 1848. Thus, the national government became directly responsible for slavery.

On 1 January 1860, slavery in the Dutch East Indies was abolished by law. Three years later, on 1 July 1863, the same happened in Surinam and on Aruba, Curaçao, (the Dutch part of) Sint Maarten, Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba.³ Upon the abolition of slavery in 1863, the slave owners were compensated by the State. However, the enslaved people in Surinam had to work for another ten years under 'State supervision'. In practice, therefore, slavery continued until 1873. Thereafter, indentured labourers were recruited from Asia and taken to Surinam. The working conditions facing these indentured labourers were appalling and very different from the promises made to them. There was no State supervision in Curaçao, but here

² Ordinance of the States General, 24 November 1789.

³ Slavery on Sint Maarten had effectively ended already in 1848, following a revolt of enslaved people against the local authorities on the French part of the island.

the so-called *paga tera* system came into being and would continue to exist until the end of the nineteenth century. In this system, freed people had no other alternative but to continue living on the plantation, where they cultivated a plot of land in exchange for an amount of unpaid labour.

Social and political awareness

For a long time, the period in which slavery and the slave trade occurred was viewed with a sense of pride: in the seventeenth century, the Netherlands had been an important player on the world stage, which had resulted in great wealth. A downside of this period, slavery, remained underexposed and was regarded at most as something long left behind. By adopting this attitude, we ignored the consequences of this past that are still visible and tangible today, and did a grave injustice to the suffering that was inflicted and still affects the descendants of enslaved people.

However, there is growing social awareness of the effects of the past on descendants in today's society. This change is attributable in part to the tireless efforts of various groups and individuals, who keep drawing attention to this subject with tenacity and often in the face of opposition. The government is very grateful to these people. At the same time, there is still much work to be done.

The government finds with great appreciation that local authorities – from Tilburg to Groningen and several provinces – and organisations all over the country are investigating or have investigated the significance of the slavery past for their own municipality, province or organisation. By now, the municipal executives of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague, the provincial executive of Noord-Holland, the Dutch Central Bank and ABN AMRO Bank have reflected in detail on the role played in slavery by their historical administrative predecessors. This has prompted them to apologise for their historical involvement in slavery. The municipal executive of Middelburg has also announced its intention to apologise for the city's involvement in slavery.

The government, too, has experienced an increase in awareness in recent years. For example, intense discussions have been held with various persons and organisations that advocate the recognition and acknowledgement of the consequences of the Dutch slavery past. These included the meetings at Catshuis, the Prime Minister's residence in The Hague, and the Caribbean Catshuis session. In addition, there have been visits to Surinam and to Sint Maarten, Sint Eustatius and Curaçao in order to hear, see and feel on the scene what this history still means today for the descendants of enslaved people.

These visits showed once again to what extent the slavery past is a living legacy that still reverberates in all these places: personally, socially and in the constitutional relations. What is more, these legacies have not only taken root in the local collective consciousness, but have also left their mark on the landscape. For example on the former plantations in Surinam, the graves of enslaved people on Sint Eustatius, or via the *Rekorido Lucha pa Libertad* ('Freedom Fight Trail') on Curaçao, which includes the Knip plantation where the revolt on Curaçao began.

I summarised the significance of this legacy in my speech before the National Assembly of Surinam: *'for us people of the 21st century it is hard to imagine, an absurd thought, how for centuries one human could treat another as merchandise. With all the brute violence and oppression this entailed. Slavery was literally an inhuman system and everything we know about it, every testimony from the past that reaches us, fills us with abhorrence.'* All this makes it a permanent duty for all of us to handle this past carefully.

In addition, a number of MPs representing different political parties in the House of Representatives have recently exchanged views on the way in which the House itself should respond to the Dialogue Group's report of findings and the social discussions. After holding round-table discussions with various organisations, individuals and political representatives, some members of the Standing Committee on the Interior made a working visit to Surinam, Curaçao and Bonaire⁴. In a letter of 16 October 2022, they informed the government of their findings and advice, including the recommendation to apologise. This and other advice has been incorporated into this government response.

This growing social and political attention for fighting and preventing racism and discrimination is reflected in increased focus on and intensification of government policies, such as the appointment of the National Coordinator against Anti-Semitism in April 2021 and the appointment of the National Coordinator against Discrimination and Racism at the end of 2021. Recently, the government also approved the formation of the State Committee against Discrimination and Racism⁵. The State Committee will look at all sectors of society and has been mandated to conduct an interdisciplinary and scientific investigation into fundamental issues relating to discrimination and racism in the Netherlands. The mandate includes the performance of comprehensive review of discrimination and ethnic profiling at government bodies, in conformity with the motion proposed by Farid Azarkan MP *et al.*⁶

Fair and equal treatment must also come first in laws and regulations. To this end, a broader anti-discrimination test has been developed. This test comprises a manual on "constitutional assessment of new laws and regulations", an implementation assessment, an integrated assessment framework and a data protection impact assessment in connection with the development of risk profiles/algorithms.

Report of findings of Slavery Past Dialogue Group: 'Chains of the Past'

In order to gain a better understanding of the working of racism and discrimination, and acknowledge and recognise their consequences, we also need to reassess our own history.

⁴ These were the MPs Kiki Hagen, Salima Belhaj, Inge van Dijk, Renske Leijten, Kati Piri, Jesse Klaver, Don Ceder, Sylvana Simons and Marieke Koekkoek.

⁵ Parliamentary Paper 30950, no. 301

⁶ Parliamentary Papers II, 2020/21, 35510, no. 33

Prompted in part by those who have for years drawn attention to the consequences of the slavery past and fought for their acknowledgement, the previous government set up the Dialogue Group on 1 July 2020 with the task to start a dialogue about the slavery past and its impact on the present, and to lay down its findings in a report. This dialogue and the findings in the report will make an important contribution to the further development of government policy in the years ahead.

In its report, the Dialogue Group makes a series of recommendations aimed at acknowledgement, apologies and recovery. The Dialogue Group states in its report that acknowledgement is a vital step for the Netherlands as a whole. On the one hand, acknowledgement will offer redress to those who suffered in slavery, while on the other it will promote a critical view of Dutch history in a wider sense and of our current society. This is about the acknowledgement that the slave trade and slavery that took place between the seventeenth century and 1 July 1863 under Dutch rule, whether directly or indirectly, were crimes against humanity by present-day legal and moral standards. There were always people during that period who spoke out against and resisted these practices, for that matter. In this context, we must also acknowledge the suffering of all people who fell victim to these crimes and the distress of their descendants.

The Dialogue Group believes that apologies will not only foster the healing of historical suffering, but will also and especially help us build a shared future. What matters is not that individual persons are identified as the perpetrators, but that the Dutch government acknowledges the suffering caused by slavery and assumes responsibility.

In the opinion of the Dialogue Group, recovery means that the consequences of the slavery past for society "must be tackled comprehensively in an integrated and systematic manner".

The government's vision

The government shares the Dialogue Group's core belief that acknowledging and apologising for historical suffering will constitute the basis for present-day social recovery. This is why the government will launch an integrated package of measures in the coming years which together will give a permanent impulse to policies aimed at:

- knowledge and awareness;
- acknowledgement and commemoration;
- a better understanding of the impact of the slavery past and the psychological processing of that past.

In addition, the government will continue its efforts to create equality of opportunity and fight discrimination and racism. We must learn lessons from the past in order to be able to look ahead and commit to a society in which there is no space for racism and inequality of opportunity. The Slavery Past Memorial Year is a very appropriate time to give further shape to these ambitions. The government intends to use this memorial year as an opportunity to talk with those involved on how to flesh out the objectives outlined below.

Knowledge and awareness

The government aims to enhance the knowledge and awareness about the slavery past. Although an increasing number of people within the Kingdom are aware of the role of the Netherlands in the slave trade, experiences and opinions differ on how to deal with this past and its impact. On the one side are those who are still affected by the suffering their ancestors had to endure. On the other there are people for whom the scars left by the slavery past are not self-evident, or who know little about this past. People who do not quite realise that many Dutch citizens are over here at present because the ancestors of other Dutch citizens were over there in the past. As a government, we aim to shed more light on our joint history, so that our shared slavery past, with all the injustice and pain it includes, is widely known and acknowledged. The government will endeavour to increase knowledge and awareness about the slavery past and its impact on the present, both within the Kingdom as a whole and in relation to countries with which we share this history. This starts at school, the very place where young people learn about history. The government will do so by making themes such as the colonial past, slavery, racism and discrimination a staple element of the curriculum for primary and secondary education, which is currently being reviewed.⁷

In addition to this focus on education, the government will endeavour in the coming years to increase knowledge and awareness through the preservation and further development of museums and archives and the protection of cultural heritage, both in the European Netherlands and in the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom and other countries involved. Various proposals have been put forward by the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom. Further consultations will be held with Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba about their specific wishes in these areas.⁸ The government will also contribute to the development of a national slavery museum, which will have a pivotal function in deepening and disseminating the knowledge and awareness about this past in the Kingdom and beyond, for instance via the knowledge centre associated with the museum. Finally, we intend to support this knowledge centre by linking it to a multi-year research programme aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the complex impact of this past.

Development of national slavery museum

The government endorses the importance which the Dialogue Group attaches to a national museum and knowledge centre, entirely dedicated to our slavery past and its impact on the present. A museum will be realised in Amsterdam, where current and future generations can learn about our colonial slavery past, extending from the East to the West⁹.

⁷ Knowledge about the colonial past also finds its way to the education sector via the Canon of the Netherlands: the VOC, WIC and slavery windows were the most visited Canon windows in 2021 and (until now) 2022.

⁸ Likewise, the Culture Covenant for 2022-2025 recently concluded with the Caribbean Netherlands gives special consideration to heritage that fosters the dialogue about our joint history. Government Gazette 2022, no. 26750

⁹ The State Secretary for Education, Culture and Science already announced in her Multi-Year Policy Letter that, on top of the total contribution of €4 million already awarded to

The museum will also be a place that offers descendants of enslaved people an area for commemoration and contemplation. The museum will develop, stimulate, gather and exhibit knowledge about our colonial slavery past. In addition, the museum will be a place that fosters dialogue about our shared past and its impact on the present. Artists will have an important role in feeding that dialogue. The National Museum for African American History and Culture is an important source of inspiration for this museum, certainly in terms of the manner in which communities are involved in its development. The government shares the Dialogue Group's emphasis on the connecting role which this museum is to fulfil: bringing together and involving relevant parties throughout Kingdom and beyond, so as to present the complete story of our slavery past from all existing perspectives. In this context, the government sets great store by collaboration with initiatives and organisations in the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom and Surinam. This process will build on the valuable proposals put forward by the inter-insular working group in this connection.

Research

An important way to increase insight into the slavery past is through research. Scientific research into the slavery past has both widened and deepened in recent years. A key development, for example, is the additional insight gained into the global scope of the Dutch involvement in slavery and the slave trade. This involvement was not limited to the transatlantic triangular trade, but extended to the Eastern colonies and elsewhere in the world. Likewise, recent urban studies have charted the large-scale involvement of administrative elites, at both urban and national level, in slavery and the slave trade.

At the same time, more research is required. For instance on parallels in the Dutch involvement in slavery in the West and East respectively, or on the ways in which this past can have an impact on the present.

For this reason, the government commissioned a wide-ranging exploratory study by scientists and social parties at the end of 2021 around the core questions: what do we know about the past, and which aspects need much more investigation? This study was commissioned in response to the motion proposed by Ron Ceder MP, which called on the government to carry out an independent scientific study into the Dutch slavery past.¹⁰ An important outcome of this study was the wish for collaboration between scientific and social parties, and for a multidisciplinary perspective with space not just for the historical aspects but also for the anthropological, psychological and spiritual aspects.

Based on this study, an editorial team/steering group was set up, comprising scientists from four institutes: the Royal Institute of Linguistics, Geography and Anthropology (KITLV), the International Institute of Social History (IISG), the University of Curaçao, and the National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and its Legacy (NiNsee).

Amsterdam in 2021-2024, the government will continue the partnership with Amsterdam and set aside another €29 million for the construction of this museum.

¹⁰ Parliamentary Paper 30950, no. 259.

This editorial team drew up a research proposal that provides for wide-ranging collaboration and a pluralistic structure in which there is attention for different perspectives on this subject, with comprehensive involvement of social parties and of the Caribbean part of the Netherlands and other countries, including Surinam, in which the slavery past still reverberates in this day and age. The research covers the broad colonial slavery past of the Netherlands and will result in a social agenda for multi-year follow-up research on this theme. The aim of this research is not only to provide more insight into this past, but also to foster collaboration within the Kingdom and with other countries, including Surinam. The point of departure must be that this research expressly encourages pluriformity in the approach taken towards the past.

This agenda will also serve as the basis for multi-year follow-up research on this theme, and thereby provide important input for the slavery museum's future knowledge centre.

Acknowledgement and commemoration

In order to reflect on this episode from our history and keep the spotlight on the slavery past, it is essential that we commemorate together.

Memorial Committee

The government intends to set up an independent Memorial Committee that will supervise the detailing and organisation of a large-scale, dignified commemoration of the slavery past. One of the questions to be considered is whether the annual commemoration on 1 July could be held in coordination with the Caribbean part of the Kingdom and Surinam. Obviously it is up to those countries, islands and communities themselves to decide on what date and in what manner they wish to give shape to this commemoration. The government subsequently wants to build on the experiences of the Slavery Past Memorial Year by examining, together with the NiNsee and others, how the Memorial Committee can keep organising the annual commemoration on a larger, more dignified and more coordinated scale. The government will make resources available for this on a structural basis.

Slavery Past Memorial Year

The Slavery Past Memorial Year will run from 1 July 2023 to 1 July 2024¹¹. The King feels a strong personal involvement in this event and will attend the commemoration and celebration in Amsterdam on 1 July 2023. In this year, we want to reflect throughout the Kingdom on the important, painful and until recently underexposed legacy of our shared slavery history. The purpose of the Memorial Year is to ensure that this subject receives permanent attention.

Our society accommodates a wide range of important perspectives on the shared history of the slavery past. All those perspectives deserve attention. The government is therefore eager to ensure that the Memorial Year reflects the

¹¹ Through the Memorial Year, the government implements the motion proposed by Jesse Klaver MP and Rob Jetten MP (Parliamentary Paper 30950, no. 205).

perspectives of all communities that have a relationship with the slavery past and the year 1873.

Among other things, the Slavery Past Memorial Year will comprise Kingdom-wide opening and closing ceremonies of the year, organised by the NiNsee, combined with ample space for social, cultural and educational initiatives of communities throughout the Kingdom¹². To this end, two subsidy schemes will be rolled out via the Mondrian Fund and the Culture Participation Fund to support Memorial Year activities by institutions, individuals or small-scale local initiatives based in the Kingdom of the Netherlands¹³. By now, these funds have stated via a prior announcement that these schemes are available for initiatives relating to the Slavery Past Memorial Year.

They who resisted

During the slavery and slave trade period, there were many people who revolted against the system that oppressed them. The government wants to reflect on these revolts, pay tribute to these people and honour their resistance. Thanks to the strength of these people, both known and unknown, slavery and the slave trade were eventually widely regarded as unacceptable. Resistance occurred in many forms and in particular helped change the narrative about the slavery past.

An example would be this striking description by the Surinamese writer Anton de Kom, who recorded the struggle of the Maroons in his work *We Slaves of Surinam* (1934): "*who escaped the slavery of the plantations despite the chains and guards; the rebels who defied gruesome punishments and the white people's threats; the insurgents who braved the horrors of the jungle in order to find death or freedom at the end of their arduous journey*". De Kom gave a voice to women such as Flora and Séry, who resisted the slave traders by fleeing and had to pay the price. By writing down their stories, he made a significant contribution to a change in the perception of the slavery past.

That the legacy of the past involves pride and fighting spirit as well as pain also came to the fore in the many discussions which the Minister and State Secretary for the Interior and Kingdom Relations held on Sint Maarten, Sint Eustatius and Curaçao. For example, students in Sint Eustatius explained how they were confronted on a daily basis with the effects of this past on the island. But also how they felt a strong pride when thinking of their ancestors' fighting spirit at the time of slavery, and how this very fighting spirit had forced the authorities in 1848 to accept what was tantamount to freedom for all people on the Leeward Islands.

This was not because of a legislative amendment, but was due to the heroic resistance by those who were oppressed, by people such as One-Tété Lokhay in Sint Maarten, but also people whose names have remained unknown.

¹² The government already made a €7 million budget available in 2022 for the organisation of the Slavery Past Memorial Year.

¹³ Meanwhile the government has made €2 million available for the implementation of these subsidy schemes.

On Curaçao, the fight for freedom and equality is symbolised by Tula. In 1795, Tula led the largest slave revolt in the former Netherlands Antilles, for which he was inhumanely punished by the Dutch colonial authorities of the time, resulting in his death. Nowhere is the essence of this fight reflected more clearly than in the impressive plea by Tula himself, which has come down to us via the documents kept in the National Archives on Curaçao: *"We have been abused too much as it is, we do not seek to harm anyone, but just want our freedom... Did I do evil by liberating 22 of my brothers from their shackles, which had been put on them without justification? The French freedom has been our torment. If one of us was punished, he was invariably asked 'do you want your freedom too?' ... even an animal is treated better than we are. If an animal breaks a leg, it is looked after."*

Because of his exceptional courage, Tula was proclaimed a national hero on Curaçao in 2010, and 17 August is now a national memorial day on Curaçao. The Dutch government has been requested to fully rehabilitate this freedom fighter. The government unreservedly acknowledges the justice of Tula's fight, and that of others who resisted slavery, and looks back with regret and shame at the manner in which they were treated by our historical administrative predecessors. The government is happy to rehabilitate Tula posthumously and to give this freedom fighter the honour to which he is entitled. The government is in talks about this with Curaçao.

Obviously, the proposed fund also provides for opportunities to honour other freedom fighters in an appropriate manner.

Impact and psychological processing

Apart from research, the government proposes to support social initiatives by setting up a fund, intensifying anti-discrimination facilities and providing the option to change slavery-related surnames.

Fund

History cannot be undone. Acknowledging the suffering of enslaved people and their descendants does not end with an apology. In this context, the Dialogue Group indicates that what matters is not *"financial compensation for all the damage sustained in the past, but appropriate structural funding for initiatives to end the harmful impact of that past on the present"*. This is why the government proposes to set up an appropriately sized fund. The aim is a low-threshold and widely accessible fund.

The fund will have a statutory basis. The specific purpose and concrete details of the social initiatives financed from this fund will need to be determined in dialogue with, by and for the relevant communities in the Netherlands and the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom. The government believes that the Slavery Past Memorial Year and the run-up to this year should be used as a springboard for this joint design. We would like to explore with Surinam how they wish to be involved in this process. Obviously, the Dutch government's aim in this context is to identify Surinamese initiatives that are eligible for funding.

Anti-discrimination measures

We must keep fighting for a society in which all people have equal opportunities and are treated equally. An important element in this context is the battle against discrimination and racism in all layers of society. The National Programme against Discrimination and Racism aims to actively fight discrimination along three lines: acknowledgement and prevention, recognition and reporting, assistance and protection. The government already supports strong, visible anti-discrimination facilities that may play a central role in tackling discrimination at local level. Discrimination takes place in people's living, residential and work environments. An anti-discrimination facility will be the hub that connects municipal authorities, social initiatives and criminal justice bodies. This is in line with the measures already announced in the National Programme. Likewise, a facility must be set up in the Caribbean Netherlands where residents can report discrimination. In order to encourage such reporting, both in the European Netherlands and in the Caribbean Netherlands, the government will develop a multi-year, recurring campaign. This campaign will help enhance equality in a society where everyone is treated the same, while also drawing attention to the bodies that can provide assistance.

Surnames

An example of the way in which the slavery past is still clearly visible in this day and age is the surnames originating from this part of our history. One of the topics discussed during the Discrimination and Racism Committee Debate on 30 June 2021 was the desire among some descendants of enslaved people for a free change of a surname that derives from or refers to slavery. The government understands that this option has great emotional value for a number of descendants of enslaved people. When enslaved people were shipped and sold, they were stripped of their own name and thereby of a part of their cultural identity. Only when they were freed did enslaved people acquire a surname – a name which they usually could not choose themselves and which related to the name of the slaveholder or the plantation where they worked. Such surnames are still borne today by the descendants of enslaved people, which some experience as very painful. On 15 November 2022, the Verweij-Jonker Institute, on the instructions of the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC), completed the report entitled *Verkenning basis voor naamswijziging in verband met het Nederlands slavernijverleden* ('Exploring the basis for name changes linked to Dutch slavery'), which investigates whether and how it can be ascertained which names have their origin in slavery. The Minister for Legal Protection submitted this investigation report to the House of Representatives on 5 December 2022. This investigation reveals that the available name sources reflect the colonial past and the unequal power relationships at that time; people were not free to choose their own name. The investigation also shows that the level of completeness and availability of name registers varies among the former colonies of the Netherlands. Thus, the registers in Surinam seem to be more or less complete, the registers in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom contain more gaps, and few to no such records exist with regard to the slavery past in the former Dutch East Indies. In anticipation of a structural provision, a temporary scheme is currently being prepared under which descendants of enslaved people can change their name free of charge. The point of departure is that the scheme:

a) entails as little stress as possible for the applicants – that is, no heavy burden of proof and no expert statement regarding the psychological distress experienced;

- b) makes the least possible distinction in the applicants' procedures. People with their roots in former colonies where only sketchy name records were kept should not, in principle, bear a heavier burden of proof than people with their roots in former colonies where name records were more extensive;
- c) can be implemented responsibly.

Measures

The government already endeavours in different ways to create a society where all people have equal opportunities and are treated equally. Earlier we referred to the fight against discrimination and racism in all layers of society. The shared past and future in the Kingdom and the efforts to achieve equality in that context were also mentioned in the coalition agreement.

A low-threshold and widely accessible fund will be set up with a view to dealing with the transatlantic slavery past, which fund will comprise €200 million and have a statutory basis. A subsidy scheme will be introduced for social initiatives, which will be financed from this fund. In addition, this fund will finance measures relating to awareness raising, involvement and impact. The aforementioned temporary scheme for a free name change by descendants of enslaved people is an example of such a measure, as is the multi-year research programme. The programming and purpose of the fund, and thereby also of the subsidy scheme and the other measures, will be decided in consultation with descendants and persons involved, among others. An amount of €100 million has been earmarked for the subsidy scheme, and another €100 million for the measures relating to awareness raising, involvement and impact. The government will submit these plans to Parliament in the forthcoming Spring Memorandum.

On top of this, the government will structurally make an annual contribution of €8 million available to support the activities of the Memorial Committee. The establishment and co-funding (€29 million) of the national slavery museum was already included by the State Secretary for Education, Culture and Science in the aforementioned Multi-Year Culture Policy Letter and is not part of the €200 million either.

Future

Recently, the public debate on our joint slavery past and the impact of this past has focused primarily on offering apologies. The way in which we perceive our joint past has changed significantly, while simultaneously a social debate has developed about the form and necessity of these apologies.

The apologies on 19 December are an important first step. At the same time, they mark the start of a follow-up process in the memorial year. In this context, we will hold large-scale joint commemorations on 1 July 2023 and together determine the specifics of the Memorial Committee and the fund. The ultimate goal is to permanently ensure greater attention for this shared past, but especially to work towards a shared future.

Office of the Prime Minister

Date

19 December 2022

Our reference

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Conclusion

Our shared history contains parts which fill us – living in the twenty-first century – with astonishment and abhorrence.

We cannot expunge this history with apologies, and this is by no means the government's objective. We cannot change the past, but we can face it.

As indicated earlier, we regard the presentation of this government response as an important step, but not as the final element. After all, the process of raising awareness about the slavery past is far from complete. Following the government response, we want to build a foundation with those involved towards a shared future, also in the run-up to and after the start of the Slavery Memorial Year on 1 July 2023.

The government hopes that this response and this moment will help us, across the Kingdom and together with Surinam and other countries, to fill the pages in front of us with dialogue, acknowledgement and healing.

THE PRIME MINISTER,
Minister of General Affairs,

Mark Rutte