

The Hague, December 26, 2022.

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Committee of TK and EK,

Above all, let me be very clear: the prime minister has spoken very nicely. In essence, it comes down to the fact that a very neat start has been made in normalizing the relationship between the country of the Netherlands and the descendants of enslaved people in the colonial past. And as the prime minister very emphatically stated, "*this moment is a comma, not a period.*" So now is the time to follow through.

In so far as I have the right to speak, I would think that step one should be that the Dutch Caribbean nationals are now really considered as real, full-fledged Dutch citizens and that an equal and mutually respectful conversation can take place about "*how to proceed*".

When I see and hear how the government approaches the Caribbean Netherlands, I am so far unimpressed. Indeed, with some fuss State Secretary Van Rij announces that the tax free allowance will increase but when I read next year's CBS brochure on the Caribbean Netherlands I assume that the gap between rich and poor compared to previous years will again not be reduced; on the contrary, still the richer part will have more income than the poorer part; in any case proportionately more than in the European Netherlands. Indeed, the only effect that an increased tax-free allowance creates is that the government receives less tax revenue. The lowest earners notice little to no effect and the higher earners are left with more net. You don't necessarily have to be a tax expert to figure out this consequence. As Kadushi (dossierkoninkrijksrelaties.nl) put it: *the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.*

In two publications <sup>1</sup> I read about how the national apology was received on St. Eustatius as well as how progress is being made in addressing the BES Islands legislation. I know from a very reliable source (on St. Eustatius) that both publications, at least, came about without the involvement of the Island Council of St. Eustatius. *How am I to reconcile this with the second paragraph of this letter?*

When will people actually come along with a *genuine* listening ear and a *truly* constructive attitude (seen from the islander's point of view), without an immediate guiding thought based on "*what is in it for me*".

Let me be clear and objective. I can also see (to my own disappointment) that the various parties on St. Eustatius have some difficulty in giving each other the light in the eyes. There seems to be no Statian word for "cooperation." However, this finding does not alter the fact that it is Dutch people who do live there. Dutchmen like you and me, yet socially they do not have the same frame of reference as you and me. Working on this equality seems to me to have to be one of the first steps in the "*how next*" process. At the same time, I realize that with respect to this "*how next*" I have no right to speak. If in a respectful and equal discussion both parties (i.c. representatives of the island and representatives of the government) find otherwise I too have to live with that. But then, as an observer, I also like to see "The Hague" adopt a different attitude: more empathetic, more listening, less speaking, less determining.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://bes-reporter.com/st-eustatius-urges-netherlands-to-not-move-too-fast-after-apology-for-slavery/> and <https://dossierkoninkrijksrelaties.nl/2022/12/22/wetgevingsoverzicht-comply-of-explain-bes-eilanden-naar-tweede-kamer/>

At the same time, of course, St. Eustatius should be expected to provide (island-wide) input to the dialogue. Of course, it is easy to blame "The Hague" when a plan, or input otherwise, is provided from that side, but the *monologue* becomes more naturally a *dialogue* when the island side of the conversation is working in unison on a vision of the future (and on the relationship with "The Hague").

It seems to me that the islanders exchange views in a townhall meeting aimed at a shared vision. Or the Island Council which, after all, is the elected representation of the people. In any case, not the government commissioner who - see the fourth paragraph - creates her own reality like a Hague potter and does not allow the Island Council to play any role at all.

If I may contribute to the point on comply-or-explain in legislation, I see in the letter of the Secretary of State forty-nine (49) points listed on which an action must follow. If I look by a different route (namely via [wetten.overheid.nl](http://wetten.overheid.nl)) I see 576 laws and regulations that apply specifically to the BES territory (150 laws, 174 AMvB's and other RD's, 231 ministerial regulations, 19 policy rules Rijkdienst and 2 Circulairs Rijkdienst); it seems to me that there is still a lot to clean up, even after the initial 49.

My important and recurring point here is that all these specific BES aspects exist by the grace of *essentially different circumstances than in the European Netherlands* and that there is good consultation between the Island Council and The Hague about this adjusted BES legislation (instead of unilaterally determining as The Hague likes to do).

My personal idea is that The Hague speaks too easily about different circumstances while in reality and in an objective sense this is not the case (this to exploit the second-class status as deeply and as long as possible).

Once again, I wish you much fortitude, vision and strength.

Kind regards,

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cc: *National Ombudsman*