

To: The Permanent Committee Kingdom Relations

From: Vito Charles, Coordinator, Saba

Subject: Discussion Point Saba

In 2021, Saba was confronted by what were the first discussions as a community about slavery. What became apparent during these discussions is that slavery and emancipation created a legacy in Saban culture that generations of Sabans have yet to fully understand the repercussions of. During these conversations, which focused on eliciting from the participants - who were from a cross section of the Saban population- an idea of what was known in the community about slavery and secondly, what the community thought needed to be done to address any challenges that were exposed. Since then, Saba has continued to participate in the dialogue groups on slavery as we believe that it is essential to ensuring that this effort was not in vain.

During the dialogue sessions what became immediately clear is that contributors, did not only want to be part of a meaningless discussion but that they expected that there would be tangible outcomes. That these discussions could help bring about new insight in society about what slavery looked like on the island, its racial legacy in Saban society and what we can do to improve awareness of this stain in our collective history. Taking part in this roundtable allows us to continue to move forward with this issue, while keeping the pledge that was made to the Saban community in mind.

We welcome of course this committee's efforts here today, as it is a clear indication that there is some momentum within the halls of government to make a sustained effort to remedy the historical faults. But what is evident from the experience of the previous year is that there is a lot of lost ground to cover. For reasons that will become more evident, there is a lack of consciousness when it comes to slavery on our island, and sadly until now there has been a glaring lack of accountability from the Dutch government to structurally address the wrongs of the past.

Of course there are still some efforts that can be done by the local government, for example on Saba, despite the fact that Emancipation Day has been observed as an official holiday by both St. Eustatius and St. Maarten, it is still not observed on our island. This would require simple coordination between the local and national governments but yet it still remains a wish that has yet to be accomplished. The celebration of Emancipation Day will also recognize the importance of slavery and freedom as part of Saba's history, thus assuring black Sabans that their history and the suffering of their ancestors matter.

I have mentioned that it is important to the community that there is more awareness for slavery and it is important to understand why this desire exists. There is a feeling on the island that when it came to slavery, there was an attempt to minimize, and misinform and deny the experience of slavery. The view from some black Sabans was that the experience and

knowledge were not passed on to them, as well as there seemed to have been a desire to forget and move on for the sake of accommodation and allow bygones to be bygones in a rush to leave slavery in the past. Despite these attempts to bury the memory of slavery, it must be readily acknowledged that there are elements of racism, if not systemic racism still present on the island. If there is one thing we must have learned from global events surrounding racism and discrimination, is that, we cannot change the legacy of our history, if we do not first confront it.

Many descendants of enslaved persons openly question, why the Dutch government, more than 150 years after Emancipation, has not apologized for its role in the Atlantic Slave Trade and slavery in the Dutch Caribbean, and recognize these as crimes against humanity. While also further recognizing that the enslavement of captive Africans and their descendants tremendously impacted and continues to have a lasting negative impact on the lives of at least some Sabans to this day.

Acknowledging these wrongs also means that there is a need to recognize what foundations we must first build to move forward. It is important to note that there is lack of tools and institutions on the islands to address this issue with the justice that it deserves. There is a clear need for more research about slavery so that there is scholarly evidence about the impact it has had within our community. Governments need to develop policies which can help ease perceived racial tensions and help build a more integrated community on Saba.

Reparative Justice would go a long way to providing some form of rectification to the descendants of Saba's enslaved population, but the Dutch government must continue to engage with this discussion as it is only through continuing dialogue will all Sabans be able to build a just, equal and harmonious society. That there be more dialogue with the government, schools, the community, and even other islands in the Dutch Caribbean on issues of slavery, racism, discrimination, is not a request but it is a commitment that must be honored to our ancestors and for those generations yet to come.