

SPEECH – EMANCIPATION DAY – 160TH ANNIVERSARY – JULY 1, 2023

Good morning, fellow citizens/people of Sint Maarten. Protocol having been established; I would like to wish everyone a Happy Emancipation Day!

Today, we gather to commemorate the 160th anniversary of the Proclamation of the Abolishment of Slavery, a historic moment in our island's history, a historic moment in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. On this special occasion, we celebrate our freedom and the courage of those who fought for it.

As we reflect on the past, we must acknowledge the pain and suffering that our ancestors endured during the era of slavery. We must remember their struggle and honor their resilience. But we must also recognize the progress that we as a people have made since then and the opportunities that lie ahead for us.

Today, we are Born Free! We have the right to pursue our dreams and aspirations without fear of oppression or discrimination. We are free to express ourselves, to worship as we choose, and to participate in our democracy.

The Dutch Governments' apology on December 19, 2022, for their role in the slave trade was a significant and meaningful step towards acknowledging the harm caused then and now by the transatlantic slave trade. However, it is not the end of the conversation, but rather the beginning of a larger dialogue that should include discussions on reparations and reconciliation.

The discussions that have taken place since the apology have centered around how to move forward in a way that acknowledges the legacy of slavery and its ongoing impacts. Reparations are an important part of

this conversation. It is not enough to simply acknowledge the harm caused by slavery; we must also take concrete steps to address the ongoing impacts of that harm. This may include financial compensation or investments in programs that ensure that we the people and our country Sint Maarten can develop in the right way.

Education is also critical in this conversation. We must ensure that our history is accurately taught in schools and that the legacy of slavery is not erased or minimized. This includes teaching about the contributions of enslaved people and their descendants to our society. But we must also ensure that our people can get the best education possible in order to pursue those dreams and aspirations they may have.

Finally, commemoration of this day is an important part of the healing process. We must acknowledge the trauma and pain caused by slavery and ensure that it is never forgotten. By acknowledging such we can realize that we were Born Free, and we can instill in the generations to come that they are Born Free!

On this Emancipation Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to freedom, justice, and equality. Let us honor our past, embrace our present, and work towards a brighter future for all. By continuing to engage in meaningful dialogue and taking concrete steps towards education, reconciliation, reparations, and commemoration, we can work towards a more just and equitable society for all.

Happy Emancipation Day!

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