

Brug says Reparations can be very instrumental in eliminating poverty on Sint Maarten.

PHILIPSBURG---In a press statement this weekend Richinel Brug made his position known on the debates surrounding Emancipation Day activities in the Kingdom, apologies by Dutch Government in 2022, reparations and poverty on Sint Maarten.

On July 1st, 2023, the Kingdom will be commemorating 150 years of abolishment of slavery in Suriname and the islands in the Caribbean side of the Kingdom. The King himself is set to apologize on this day. This day is an official Holiday 'celebrated' throughout the Kingdom with festivities. On Sint Maarten this day is commemorated annually with the Diamond 26 Run for Freedom.

Brug explained: "Currently there is a public debate concerning: the €545 million the Dutch Royal family is said to have earned from slavery and colonialism, whether or not the Netherlands should be held financially accountable for their role in slavery, if yes, the amount the Netherlands should be held accountable for and what these funds should be used for and who should receive and manage these funds."

"Even though there are no official answers to these questions, what we know for sure is that the Dutch Government will make €2 million euros available for the organization of activities during the Slavery Memorial Year 2023-2024. Institutions or individuals would be able to apply for funding to organize these social and/or cultural activities."

"As a person vying for legislative office, I question whether the €2 million euros is not missing a few more zeros behind the 2. Nonetheless, I would rather these funds and any other funds that might become available in the near future, as a result of this matter, be invested in programs and projects on Sint Maarten that would actually combat poverty in a strategic and structural manner.", reiterated Brug.

In Brug's opinion, there are many ways the Netherlands can contribute to poverty alleviation on St. Maarten. First and foremost, debt cancellation is a must. In addition to debt cancellation: in the same manner that Country Packages were created during a period of Cost Cutting Measures, as part of reparations: a Country Package can be created to eradicate poverty. Some examples of projects that could go into this Country Package are:

- "a project to transform our University into a national accredited University ensuring that our students would not have to leave the island to follow tertiary education on an accredited level. In doing so, also make Sint Maarten an attractive place for students in the region to come and study.
- Programs that would be beneficial to our districts and neighborhoods that focus on for example agriculture in the different neighborhoods.
- Rehabilitation/second chance programs for our prisoners to ensure a smooth transition back into the society after they serve their term.
- Projects that would transform loans of students from the Dutch Caribbean countries, who finish their studies in a reasonable timespan in the Netherland, into free scholarships.
- Creating multi-purpose sport facilities that meet international standards. In such facilities we would be able to host recreational and educational activities on Sint Maarten and preferably in every district. The focus of these projects is to ensure our kids are continuously engaged in activities that would keep them on the right path, while their parents work one or two jobs to provide for them.

- Other examples are projects that focus on the development of safety-net programs for our children, seniors, single parents and the unemployed, such as nutritional programs for seniors, breakfast programs in our schools and after-school activities for our students.”

“In my opinion this would be the only real way to actually show regret and finally tackle the effects of centuries of physical and mental slavery. I sincerely believe that these types of investment projects would pave the way for next generation Sint Maarteners to have a true opportunity to be successful, while we simultaneously attempt to alleviate and possibly eliminate poverty on Sint Maarten.