

St. Eustatius, August 15, 2021.

Dear (deputy) government commissioner on St. Eustatius,

Referring to the excavation of the remains of slaves near the airport of St. Eustatius, we see - with reference to <https://excav.jhtm.nl> - the following:

- on 13 July we call for a halt to excavations;
- on 15 July you respond in line with our request (but probably because due to the hurricane season you will not continue with the work anyway), you also report that an independent commission will be established: the Statia Heritage Research Commission [SHRC];
- on 18 July we reacted with three points: the way in which the commission has been or will be composed (by you and therefore by definition not independent), the formulation of the assignment and the economic development of the island for which everything, absolutely everything, must make way; we commented on these three aspects;
- on the same day (July 18) you respond by thanking us for our input on the points for attention; you indicate that a substantive response will take longer;
- on 19 July we emphasize once again that a truly independent group of experts - by definition - cannot be appointed by just one party.

After that there is (by you) no further communication at all, at least not with us. Not a single response follows. On August 1, we addressed the situation once again. But you choose, at least until now, to remain silent.

It is for this reason that we strongly reiterate our letter of August 1 to you. If you are already considering a dialogue with the population, then our remark applies in full that the Statian population, in our opinion, is not used to talk about anything. In practice, it has always been the administrators who acted and decided on, and certainly not in consultation with, Statians.

Note: It is similar to the joke where a company considers a culture change (given the developments) and then announces that the intended culture change will take effect tomorrow at 2:00 pm. A culture change takes time, so does a dialogue on Statia. In short, in our opinion, ample time should be taken to conduct the dialogue (not to mention the aspect of fear and intimidation which, in our opinion, has still not "ebbed away" after it prompted, among other things, the 2018 intervention.

In order to prevent rumors about funding and conflict of interest I would like to ask you additionally and in all transparency to provide the Island Council (as representatives of the people) with insight into the plans for the (near) future, the budget of the project and the extent to which this will be charged to the budget of the Public Entity of St. Eustatius, the decision to make this budget public as well as (again) to make public how exactly the financing of the PR activities of SECAR is done. The plans for the (near) future should provide insight into how the consideration that the rooting in ancestors of the population is subordinate to economic interests was made. More in the short term, these plans should provide insight into how the reburial of the now-excavated human remains will take place.

I conclude and remain in anticipation of your substantive and forthcoming response.

Kind regards,

on behalf of and with the Group Concerned Stations,

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St. Eustatius, Caribbean Netherlands.

W <https://excav.jhtm.nl>

*Cc: Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Committee
National Ombudsman
National Service for Cultural Heritage
Members of the Island Council
St. Eustatius Awareness and Development Movement (SEAD)
Brighter Path Foundation
Ubuntu Connected Front Caribbean
The Daily Herald
DossierKoninkrijksrelaties.nl
Antilliaans Dagblad
Caribbean Network
BES Reporter
ABC Online*