

Slavery is incompatible with human dignity



Statement of the Dutch bishops on the occasion of the commemoration of the abolition of slavery

This year we commemorate one hundred and fifty years since slavery was completely abolished by the Netherlands. The commemoration lasts a year and begins on July 1.

Catholics also enslaved fellow human beings, participated in the slave trade or were themselves enslaved. This is contrary to the Christian message. People are brothers and sisters because they are all created in God's image and likeness. Therefore, all people are equal in dignity.

Slavery brought unimaginable suffering. We also listen to the few other voices of the time, voices of protest and hope, such as those of Father Petrus Donders in Suriname who spoke dismissively of slavery, and of believers who bought slaves to set them free.

We want to face the history of slavery. And we realize that the lead in economic development in the part of the world we live was made possible in part by slavery and colonialism. As limited people, we build on limited structures. We are aware that people living today can suffer from these sinful structures of the past.

Even today, slavery exists wherever there is political and economic oppression. The Second Vatican Council spoke out strongly against it (*Gaudium et spes*, 1965, no. 29, cf. 27). Slavery has taken new forms that include exploitation, child labor, forced labour, prostitution and forced marriage. The number of people who are now victims of this "modern" slavery is close to fifty million worldwide, according to studies by international labour and migration organizations. The victims come from all sections of the population, but most are among the poorest and most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters.

We face the past of slavery, the injustice, the dehumanization. To condemn any form of slavery is to recognize the dignity of every human being. We stress and continue to propagate that structures of modern slavery, which deny this dignity, are inconsistent with the message of the gospel of Christ.

We commemorate the past of slavery to build together a future of justice, reconciliation and peace.

The Roman Catholic Bishops of the Netherlands
Utrecht, July 1, 2023