Press release Utrecht, 15 June 2023

Roman Catholic bishops in statement on slavery: incompatible with human dignity

**This year marks the 150th anniversary of the complete abolition on slavery by the Netherlands. The commemoration will last a year and begin on July 1. The Roman Catholic bishops wrote in a statement to mark the commemoration: ‘We want to face the slavery past. And we realize that the lead in economic development in the part of the world we live in was partly made possible by slavery and colonialism.’**

The bishops named in the statement that Catholics also enslaved fellow human beings and participated in the slave trade or were themselves enslaved. ‘That contradicts 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.’

The statement cited the unimaginable suffering that resulted from slavery as well as the consequences that continue today: ‘As limited human beings, we build on limited structures. We are aware that people living today can suffer from the sinful structures of the past.’

**Slavery in the present**

The bishops point out that slavery persists in our times, where there is political and economic oppression. ‘Slavery has taken new forms including exploitation, child labour, forced labour, prostitution and forced marriage. The number of people who are now victims of this ‘modern’ slavery is nearly 50 million worldwide, according to surveys 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 siters.’

The statement concludes by facing up to slavery’s past: its injustice and dehumanization. And, the bishops add: ‘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.’

[Read the entire statement.](https://www.rkkerk.nl/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Verklaring-Slavernij-EN.pdf) Read further also:

* [The statement on slavery](https://www.rkkerk.nl/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/verklaring-RvK.pdf) from The Council of Churches’ in 2013.
* Previous post: [Bishop van den Hende at memorial service on slavery past Council of Churches on 30 June.](https://www.rkkerk.nl/herdenkingsdienst-slavernijverleden-onder-auspicien-van-de-raad-van-kerken-op-30-juni/)
* An[interview with Duncan Wielzen](https://www.bisdomrotterdam.nl/nieuws/netwerk-van-liefde-nieuws/interview-herdenking-slavernijverleden-op-30-juni-en-1-juli), pastoral worker in The Hague. He is one of the pastors at the 30 June celebration and talks about his involvement in this topic and also about slavery in his personal family history.
* [An article on the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and slavery](https://www.bisdomhaarlem-amsterdam.nl/pdf/sk202305.pdf), in the diocesan magazine ‘Samen Kerk’ of Diocese of Haarlem-Amsterdam starting on page 8
* [An article on the backgrounds of slavery](https://www.bisdom-roermond.nl/slavernij), in diocesan magazine ‘De Sleutel’ of Diocese of Roermond