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Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles

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1945 - the present

Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles

Decolonisation in the West

The colourful architecture of Willemstad, the capital of Curaçao, bears witness to the history of this port and trade centre since 1635. Curaçao is one of the six Antillean islands that form part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, together with Aruba, Bonaire, Saba, St. Martin and St. Eustatius. Up until 1975, Surinam was also included.

The relationships between the Netherlands and its colonies in the “West” changed drastically in the second half of the twentieth century. During World War II, Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles remained free. They provided military support to allied operations and supplied raw materials needed for the war industry, like bauxite and petroleum. After the war, the so-called overseas territories were granted regional autonomy and the right to vote. This new relationship was set down in the Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands (*Statuut voor het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*) enacted in 1954, a type of constitution for a transatlantic kingdom with autonomous overseas territories.

In the early 1970s, many African and Asian countries had already been

decolonised and in Surinam too the movement for independence began to gather momentum. The Netherlands, under the leadership of Labour Prime Minister Joop den Uyl, immediately supported this movement. Within two years, together with Henck Arron (Prime Minister of the ruling coalition party in Surinam), Den Uyl had drawn up an arrangement for arriving at independence. After weathering heavy opposition led by Jagernath Lachmon, finally, on 25 November 1975, the arrangement resulted in the unanimous acceptance of independence. The Netherlands agreed to continue to support Surinam with development funding for a long period. These payments were suspended for a few years following the 1982 “December Murders”.

In 1975, the tensions between the different ethnic groups in the run-up to independence, uncertainty about the future and the choice each inhabitant had to make between either Surinamese or Dutch nationality, led to the departure from Surinam of over 130,000 Surinamese for the Netherlands. The Charter of 1954

continued to govern the relationship between the Netherlands and the Antilles. Within this framework, in 1986 Aruba was granted *Status Aparte* (separate status) and since 1996 it has been a nation within the Kingdom. Since 2005, discussions have been held with the other islands about revising their relationships.

In many ways, through their long common history, family ties and the Dutch

language, the Netherlands has strong trans-national links with the multicultural Caribbean societies of Surinam, the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba. Many languages are spoken in those regions, but they all have the Dutch language in common. In 2005 Surinam became a member of the *Nederlandse Taalunie* [Dutch Language Union], alongside the Netherlands and Belgium/Flanders.



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Sub-topics

Primary education sector

Exploring the Caribbean: islands, capital cities, flags
The languages of Surinam and the Antilles;
multilingualism
The cultures of Surinam and the Antilles

Secondary education sector

Citizenship and nationality
The history of relations between the Netherlands and the Antilles
The role of the Dutch language outside the Netherlands (also in South Africa)
The Caribbean in the international power game (including the problem of drug trafficking)
Willemstad and Paramaribo as world heritage sites

Past and Present

Development cooperation and former colonial relations
Dutch citizenship and the subjects of the Kingdom
Roots: the relationship of immigrants with the countries of origin of their forefathers (for example, India, West Africa, Indonesia, and the Caribbean)

In the Treasure Chest

Surinamese flag or clothing
Caribbean music

References

Places to Go

The Hague: Sarnamihuis
Amsterdam: Imagine IC
Kwaku Summer Festival
Antillean carnival in Rotterdam

Books for young people

Henk Barnard, *Kon hesi baka/Kom gauw terug*
Joke van Leeuwen, *Sontjeland* (6+)
Vivian den Hollander, *Spekkie en Sproet en het verdwenen beeld* (6+)
Diana Lebac, *Caimins geheim* (9+)
Lineke Dijkzeul, *Eiland in de wind* (12+)

Background literature

Gert Oostindie, *Het paradijs overzee: De Nederlandse Caraïben en Nederland*. Amsterdam 1997
A. Snijders, *Landenreeks Suriname*, Amsterdam 2003

Websites

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www.antillenhuis.nl