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Address by the Hon. President of the Parliament of Sint Maarten on the occasion of Emancipation Day on July 1st, 2022

Fellow Soualigans, dignitaries, boys and girls, good evening and welcome to this event.

First of all, I would like to thank the Honorable Minister of Education for the invitation to participate in this reenactment of the Diamond Estate 26 escape.

It is the duty of the President of Parliament to ensure that the rules of Parliament are upheld at all times. It is in Parliament, the people's house, where laws are passed in the people's interest.

It is an honor to hold this highest of all offices, and as President, I take my duties very seriously. I do this by upholding the Constitution of our territory, which today can still be considered a colony of the Dutch state.

On July 1, 1863, the people of the Dutch colonies in the Caribbean, then referred to as the "affranchised population of Curaçao and dependencies," were told that in October of the preceding year, the King of the Netherlands had decreed that on July 1st Slavery would be forever abolished in the Curaçao and the dependent islands.

In congratulating the people on them entering into society as free persons, the Governor told the people that they had to show themselves "worthy of this benefit." Imagine that. Humans who were put on this planet as free beings by our Creator, after being enslaved for centuries, now had to prove themselves worthy of being free, a state natural to all of Nature's creatures.

When the Dutch state granted emancipation to its colonies, it was done for a number of reasons but ultimately with the acknowledgement that Slavery was anti-humanity and could not be maintained. However, the most convincing reason for the abolishment of slavery was the unwavering resistance of our ancestors.

This is what we are here to celebrate this evening with the reenactment of the Diamond 26 escape from the Diamond plantation. While remembering the courage of the Diamond 26, we must also honor the heroism of the others like Lohkay, Quasheba, Abraham, and countless nameless others who relentlessly resisted their enslavement in countless forms, whether it was via running away, refusing to work, using their own languages, or even poisoning the enslaver. It is because of their bravery that we can stand here now in this setting.

Today as we participate in the various Emancipation Day celebrations, we must remember them all, and the sacrifices they made so that we can stand here as free people today. I also ask each of us to reflect on what this day really means to us as individuals and as a people who inhabit 37 square miles of paradise.

More significantly, in the context of Parliament, I ask: “what does Emancipation mean to Parliament? What laws must we still enact to give our people total freedom as we continue the decolonization process? What law proposals will we also reject when they prevent our people from becoming completely self-governing?

Just like slavery was anti-humanity, so too are all imperialism and all forms of colonialism, no matter how they are disguised. They are anti-humanity because they take free beings and turn them into colonial subjects instead of allowing them to take charge of their destiny. This Emancipation Day, let us not only reflect on the past but also reflect on how we want to envision and shape our future.

Because ultimately, it is us who have that future in our own hands. Just like our heroic forefathers who liberated themselves from slavery, so that we may enjoy the freedoms that we have today. They did not wait or depend on their enslavers, and neither should we wait on those who keep us from achieving a full measure of self-government and receiving formal apologies and reparatory justice.

Let us never lose sight of that important fact, and jointly work towards these common goals by completely eradicating all remnants of colonialism in all its shapes and forms from the world.

So today, as we reenact the Diamond Estate 26 escape to freedom, let us as Soualigans continue to always fight for our freedom like the 26 brave souls we are honoring tonight.

Let us make sure that their sacrifices and all the sacrifices made since were not in vain.

I thank you for your attention, and I wish you a pleasant evening commemorating Emancipation day and the Diamond Estate 26 escape.