

Reflection

Dear sisters,

I am Nadra Echteeld, I greet you, as chairperson of the Central Women's Council of the Moravian Church in the Netherlands. I warmly welcome you in Doorn, at our 12th European Women's Conference. I assume that your travel to Doorn went well.

On behalf of the women's groups within the Central Women's Council, I wish you a very inspirational conference.

I am sure that there are several reasons for each of you to be here. I myself had my reasons; one of them was the theme: **"Freedom in Christ"**. Freedom can be understood in various ways. For instance: Freedom to do whatever you would like to do. I guess that as a child you dreamed about adulthood, that you could do anything you wanted, even the things not allowed by your parents. Hopefully you also thought of the presence of God who sees and hears everything.

"Freedom in Christ": a theme chosen because it fits this time of the year.

Imagine you are living somewhere far away from here. You are chained and beaten; you have to work hard without being paid; you are separated from your family and not even allowed to practice your own religion. You are treated so inhumane, that you are really yearning for freedom.

One day there is that much desired freedom and the first thing you do is go to church and fall down on your bare knees to give thanks to the Lord; for many of the enslaved had found solace in the gospel, brought by the Germans. How is this possible? The enslaved were brought to Suriname with their own religion, in which there was no church. And still they went to church to thank the Lord.

This is exactly what happened 155 years ago in Suriname on the 1st of July 1863. Suriname: the country where I come from, my country; the country, where my ancestors were living under the yoke of slavery. Involuntarily enslaved and from whom some had to pay their life with death, when they fled. Nothing more than live under harsh conditions. Away from all misery, or was going back not an option either?

In my early school years in Suriname, their story was told us -children-, again and again. Just as the story from Exodus, the story of Moses, who had to lead his people out of slavery to the Promised Land. They themselves thought there was no other choice than die of starvation in the desert or going back to their oppressors.

My ancestors kept being strong, because of their prayers and their songs, no matter punishment.

Their singing still sounds to me.

A boro gron,
Watra lon na m'ai
Fadon na mi ati tap'
a boro gron
Di yu yere mi dyeme
San de y'n'aksi mi san du mi

Piercing the ground
Tears falling from my eyes
Falling on my heart
Piercing the ground
When you heard me sigh
Why didn't you ask me what is wrong with me

Here I am as a descendant of these courageous ancestors, Baron, Boni, Jolie Coeur. Codjo, Mentor, Present and also of Alida, Cato, Seri en Kala. And it may not surprise you that I'm in the Netherlands.

The Netherlands and Suriname are connected with each other because of their past. We have a shared past and our future remains intertwined, therefore we have a shared responsibility, to pass on the history at home, at school and also in church. Unfortunately my son had to deal with the stories and books at home. The school did not pass it on and not even the church. **"Freedom in Christ"**?

Dear sisters, I really would have liked to take you along traces of the past. Silent witnesses in Africa and Suriname and also in the Netherlands. I myself followed the trail in Gambia, Africa. Together with others I made a boat trip to the birth island of Kunta Kente, known from the book *"Roots"*. Unfortunately, the boats man only wanted to make money and he took us into an unsafe boat. It was a harsh trip. The boat could have sunk. It

was dark around us. We have constantly sung and prayed. The Lord answered our prayers, since we have taken it off alive. Was this what my ancestors had experienced on their way to the Unknown Land?

With me many Surinamese sisters are linked with each other through our religion and our women's groups. As Moravian sisters, but also as human beings we have to share joy, sorrow and pain. We must give each other care and attention respect each other and treat them equally.

We are obliged to each other and to our God to take care of one other. Only than we can truly say: "We are free".

Together we are on the way to the future. The chains are broken by Ketí Koti and we can remember our acquired freedom. It is our collective responsibility and task, with the choice to show our "**Freedom in Christ**". The question is: "Are we as sisters, willing to accept the shared responsibility? Which are the commitments we make?"

I conclude my reflection and ask you to pay attention to the song "Oh Freedom" by Chris Rice.

Thank you.

Nadra Ehteld