



ST. EUSTATIUS AFRIKAN BURIAL GROUND ALLIANCE

Manifesto

What the FARO Convention means for St. Eustatius

**KENNETH CUVALAY, ON BEHALF OF THE ST. EUSTATIUS AFRIKAN BURIAL
GROUND ALLIANCE**

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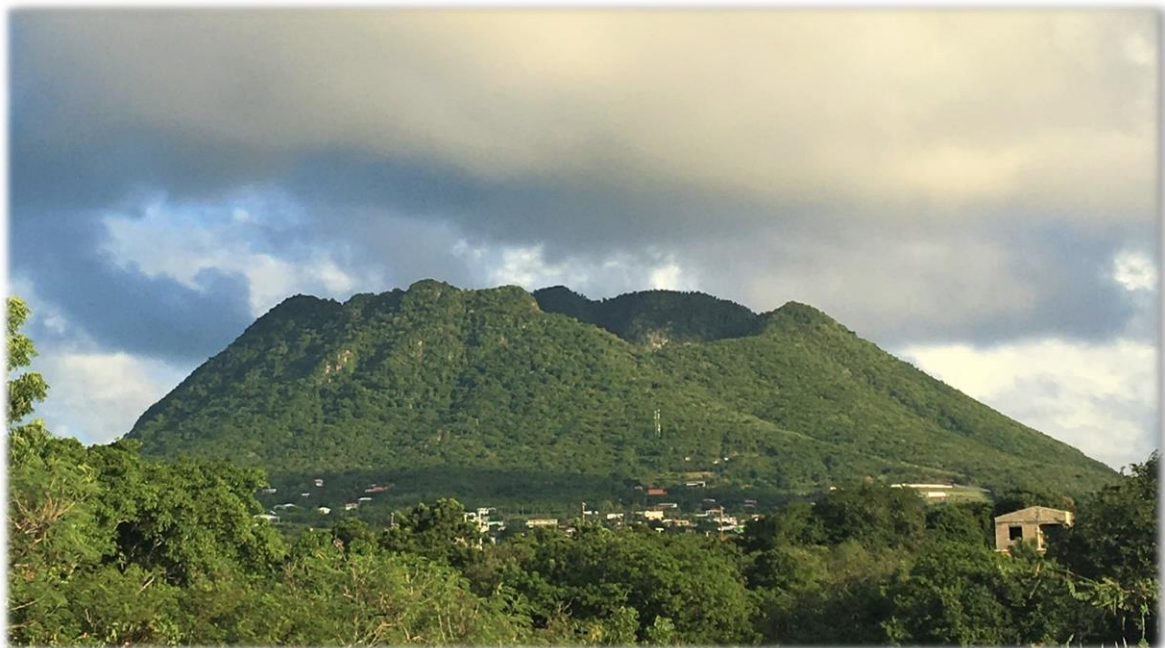


Photo: View of the Quill, St. Eustatius' dormant volcano, from former Godet plantation

Ancestors, give me your hands

It is I, who come into being through you.¹

COLOPHON

In the period April - July 2022, the *St. Eustatius Afrikan Burial Ground Alliance* held a series of talks with the *Cultural Heritage Agency* of the Netherlands about the FARO heritage participation program and the position of the public entities Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba within it. Out of these discussions followed the decision that the Alliance would prepare a vision paper that was published in August 2022 under the title "**Manifest: Visie op de betekenis van FARO voor St. Eustatius**". The English translation is entitled: "**Manifesto: What the FARO Convention means for St. Eustatius**". The Manifesto is published as a living document of which an updated version is published regularly to keep the overview of current and planned activities up to date. The most current version can be found at <https://afrikanhistoryandconsciousness.blogspot.com/2022/08/manifesto-what-faro-convention-means.html>

¹ Kimani S. K. Nehusi *Libation: An Afrikan Ritual of Heritage in the Circle of Life*. – University Press of America, 2015, p. 97.

“Memory has the power to heal. It nourishes our sense of belonging. It is the basis of community formation, and it teaches us what we are capable of and what power we possess. Memorialization is the essence of our humanity. Our ability to influence and understand narratives of our collective past stems from the relationship between memory, community, and power.”

Michael Blakey, Professor of Anthropology involved in the creation of the African Burial Ground National Monument in New York

Vision statement

The value of cultural heritage for society is the primary focus of the [Faro Convention](#). The signing and implementation of this convention could prove to be of great significance for the community on the island of St. Eustatius. A community-based approach to heritage has the potential to strengthen the position of the local population who are of Afrikan descent and by doing so to contribute to an engaged and more democratic society, in which there is a place for the voice of the Afrikan diaspora. This vision statement can be seen as a direct response to the excavation of Afrikan ancestral remains in June 2021, without the involvement of the local community. In order to prevent any future recurrence, a plan needs to be developed in order to ensure that Afrikan-Caribbean culture is supported by the local population and ultimately becomes part of future policy on heritage.

To achieve a community-based approach to heritage, the tangible and intangible heritage of St. Eustatius residents of Afrikan descent must be (re)discovered, valued and protected. It is vital that the community itself plays a key role in this. We believe it is important to strengthen our mutual links with the community, our ancestors, with the Afrikan diaspora worldwide and with the Afrikan motherland. The aim of our activities is to reconnect with the past through self-discovery and to revisit history, but this time from our own perspective as a means of communicating and preserving existing heritage, enriched by the (new) insights, knowledge and spirituality only we can add. Part of the mission of the *St. Eustatius Afrikan Burial Ground Alliance* also involves working with experts in the conservation of cultural heritage to gain experience on the island in order to contribute to recognizing, charting, highlighting, enriching and protecting Afrikan cultural heritage on St. Eustatius.

We are doing all this as a tribute to and in commemoration of the sacrifices made by our ancestors and in order to build the foundations of our cultural identity that strengthens and connects us. The cultural heritage of the Afrikan diaspora goes much wider than slavery and colonialism alone and concerns the origins of our cultural identity, with a wealth of Afrikan history as its cornerstone.

Our philosophy and mission focus on the heritage of Afrikan descendants in the diaspora and the effort to enable these descendants to participate fully both in the Caribbean area and in the Netherlands. We are placing special emphasis on decolonizing the institutions of society in order to challenge the Western-dominated discourse and add our own perspective to it. The conservation of and control over our heritage is the central theme of the Alliance.

In summary: the Faro Convention has the potential to contribute to community engagement and community building and the exploration of our own history (Afrikan roots). It also provides us with a long-term opportunity to engage in meaningful exploration, recording and

conservation of our tangible and intangible heritage and its significance for us now and in the future.

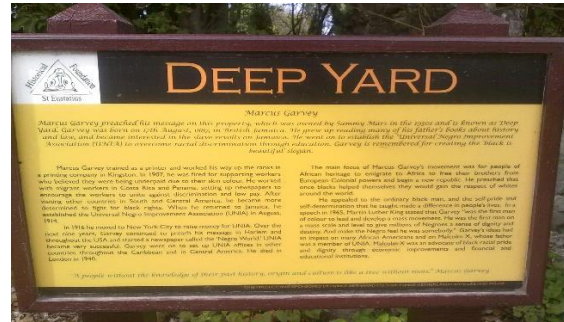


Photo left: Ruins of the Waterfort with in the background the Godet Afrikan Burial site

Photo right: Memorial plaque to Marcus Garvey's visit to St. Eustatius in the 1930s

St. Eustatius as an Afrikan diaspora community

St. Eustatius is a Caribbean island with 3,500 inhabitants and has been a public entity of the Netherlands since 2010, in common with Bonaire and Saba. Whereas the laws of the (former) Netherlands Antilles applied to the island until 10 October 2010, constitutional reform at that time led to the introduction of numerous so-called BES laws, covering the islands of Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba. The three islands fall under the jurisdiction of the *Monuments and Historic Buildings* (BES Islands) Act ([Monumentenwet BES](#)) and only parts of the Heritage Act ([Erfgoedwet](#)). Identifying which parts of the Heritage Act actually apply to the public entities is a complex process. In response to our request, the Information and Heritage Inspectorate (*Inspectie Overheidsinformatie en Erfgoed*) provided the following information:

“The Heritage Act does not apply to the BES islands. At the time of the reform, a choice was made with regard to which Dutch legislation should or should not apply to the BES islands. As far as the conservation of monuments and historic buildings (which includes the conservation of both monumental buildings and archaeology) is concerned, it was decided that the BES islands should retain their own legislation. Currently, this means that the *Monuments and Historic Buildings* (BES Islands) Act applies. In the Netherlands, quality assurance for archaeological research is partly shaped by rules in the Heritage Act and partly by a system of certification based on the Dutch Archaeology Quality Standard (*Kwaliteitsnorm Nederlandse Archeologie*). These kinds of regulations do not apply to the BES Islands: the *Monuments and Historic Buildings* (BES Islands) Act is relatively sketchy, similar in that respect to the Dutch legislation in force before 2002. The above also has implications with regard to supervision. The *Monuments and Historic Buildings* (BES Islands) Act provides for supervision through the designation of supervisors by the Executive Council. There is no Netherlands-based supervision of compliance with the *Monuments and Historic Buildings* (BES Islands) Act. The Netherlands Information and Heritage Inspectorate is however tasked with supervising compliance with the BES Archive Act (*Archiefwet BES*). The supervisors responsible for compliance with the BES Archive Act are not designated by the Executive Council, but instead by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science (OCW).” [*Email exchange with the Information and Heritage Inspectorate, October 2021*].

There has been an increasing trend in recent years for executive tasks to be taken on by ministries in the Netherlands (e.g., the management of the population register). Since the

dissolution of the Island Executive by the Dutch government on 5 February 2018, local government has consisted of two government representatives. Although an elected council remains in place, it does not have full powers as it would in a democratic system. It has now been more than four years since the inhabitants of St. Eustatius have been living under an anti-local, undemocratic system.

In response to protests against the controversial excavations on an 18th-century burial ground for enslaved Afrikaners (the Golden Rock plantation) starting in June 2021, the government established a commission known as the *Statia Heritage and Research Commission*. The report published by the Commission² highlighted a shortfall in terms of legislation to protect cultural heritage. The report's findings mark an important step in the right direction, but much remains unclear with regard to the implementation of its recommendations. This issue is compounded by the current political situation because the island council and citizens are complaining about a lack of transparency and involvement in decision-making on the part of the government representatives. February this year saw the appointment of two mediators aimed at improving relations between the island council and the government representatives. In the meantime, the island council is now being asked for its advice on issues relating to the excavations (for example whether or not DNA testing should be conducted on excavated human remains). Despite the report's recommendations, the descendant community has not been involved in this.

By strengthening the local heritage associations, we aim to ensure a greater voice for the local population. This must also include an ongoing focus on Afrikan-Caribbean heritage. In general, the public monuments on the island depict and represent the colonial history of the colonial power. This focus on existing monuments left by the colonial powers needs to be placed in the context of the history of slavery, ensuring that a more balanced picture develops that represents all residents.

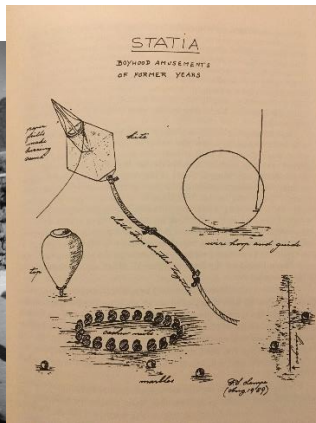


Photo left: The St. Eustatius Steel band in 1953

Photo middle: Boyhood amusement of former years (kite, wire hoop, top, cashew nuts/marbles)

Photo right: Traditional stone oven

² Commission report in the light of controversial excavations on a burial ground for enslaved Africans on the former Golden Rock plantation on St. Eustatius, see <https://www.statiagovernment.com/documents/media-articles/2022/01/28/report-of-the-statia-heritage-research-commission-shrc-for-the-government-of-st.-eustatius-netherlands-caribbean>

Real change calls for the exposure of colonial mechanisms

The United Nations (2001) and the European Parliament (2020) have designated slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade as a crime against humanity. The Dutch government has so far refused to do this. On 23 December 2013, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 68/237, calling for a decade to be devoted to people of Afrikan descent (*'International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024'*). That decade runs from 1 January 2015 until 23 December 2024. As announced by the General Assembly, the theme of the International Decade is: *'People of African descent: recognition, justice and development'*. Alongside the Faro Convention, this International Decade forms an important framework in terms of conserving the heritage of Afrikans in the diaspora. However, in describing the three pillars of recognition, justice and development, the term 'reparations' is also sometimes used (although it is defined differently by different groups). In essence, we believe this should not only involve taking action on the superficial consequences of colonialism, on 'healing', but also on the structures and systems that sustain inequality – and continue to do so to this day – or in other words action on 'recovery' and fundamental change.

One structural inheritance of the colonial past is a cultural perspective on the island that is too one-sided. St. Eustatius is not only part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, but is also part of the Caribbean Islands and the Afrikan diaspora. After the transition that happened in 2010, the Dutch government took little or no account of the geographical and cultural way of life within the Caribbean context. Instead, much of what it did was little more than copying and pasting Dutch, eurocentric models from Europe. This eurocentric approach means that people living in St. Eustatius can often feel that they have lost their own culture and way of life. When it comes to more regional methodologies and practices, it has become more difficult since the transition to enter into inter-Caribbean partnerships and alliances in the field of education, culture, history and healthcare. For example, teachers and doctors from surrounding islands now have to meet certain conditions (language test, BIG Register for Professions in Individual Healthcare), making it harder for them to work on the islands. European Dutch people are often 'flown in' for short periods, which means there is no time to become acquainted with the language and culture of the islands. As a result, the European narrative continues to predominate, leaving little space for a more multi-voiced perspective on Dutch trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism in such areas as regulation, official discourse, medical treatment methods, school curricula etc. This is having a psychological impact on the community of people of Afrikan descent on St. Eustatius.

Structural change also means Afrikan-Caribbean communities becoming involved in and having control over their own heritage. In the article *'A Future That Does Not Forget: Collaborative Archaeology in the Colonial Context of Sint Eustatius (Dutch Caribbean)'*, marjolijn kok highlights the importance of involving the 'descendant community' in any investigation of 'ancestral remains': *"The sharing of power is the base of this collaboration where the descendent community has the final say in what happens to their ancestors. If we want an archaeology that is meaningful in the future, we have to respect the rights and knowledges of the people affected by our work. These are long term commitments in which we strive for non-hierarchical relations."*



Photo left: Black Harry was a legendary Methodist preacher who worked in St. Eustatius in the 1880s

Photo middle: Soursop (fruit and leaves), is one of the many traditional herbal remedies still used in St. Eustatius

Photo right: Moku jumbie (stilt walkers) during the St. Eustatius Carnival in 2010. Moko means healer in Central Africa and jumbi is a Caribbean term for ghost or spirit

Planned activities for promoting the heritage of the Afrikan community and making this heritage accessible

An overview of ongoing and upcoming activities developed from within the community:

1. The *St. Eustatius Monuments Foundation* and the *St. Eustatius Historical Foundation* are in the process of establishing an umbrella organization that brings together all of the cultural institutions on St. Eustatius. Outreach activities will play a more important role.
2. Our '*Make the Connection*' project has been launched, linking the family names of inhabitants of St. Eustatius with the names in the registers in colonial archives. Unlike major projects on the history of slavery, such as the Slave Registers Project run by Dr Coen van Galen and colleagues at Radboud University and the University of Copenhagen's '*In the Same Sea*' initiative, we wish the inhabitants of St. Eustatius to be able to study the source materials themselves and be involved in indexing, because this itself is (or can be) part of overall efforts to process the history of slavery on the island.
3. In August 2022, we are joining forces with the *Bigi Bon* foundation in submitting a project proposal to the Cultural Participation Fund (*Fonds voor Cultuurparticipatie*). The aim is to establish a community project in which inhabitants write their own history. This process will involve setting off in search of ancestral heroes. The ultimate aim is to initiate and raise awareness of the importance of conserving the Afrikan cultural heritage of St. Eustatius. In addition, the forgotten heroes of slavery (many of whom lie buried at Golden Rock) must be commemorated.

4. On 11 June 2022, the documentary 'A Story of Bones' premiered at New York's Tribeca Film Festival. Lasting 95 minutes, this documentary tells the story of Annina van Neel: *"Annina van Neel arrives from Namibia to help with the construction of the airport of St. Helena and is present when the remains of thousands of 'freed slaves' are uncovered. Heeding her increasing discomfort with how the bones are handled, Nina campaigns tirelessly to honor their legacy and integrate them into the history of the island."* Over recent months, we have been in contact with the documentary's impact and consultant producers, Annina van Neel and Peggy King Jorde. A representative from the St. Eustatius Afrikan Burial Ground Alliance attended the premiere in New York and we continue to work together to raise awareness of the story of the 'forgotten' burial grounds.
5. We have drawn up a draft project proposal for a publication about the Afrikan/slavery history of St. Eustatius.
6. Intangible heritage <https://www.immaterieelerfgoed.nl/nl/kenniscentrum> (Network, Inventory and Register): we have registered on the website and created an account. We want to compile an *'Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventory'* for St. Eustatius and continuing to coordinate with the *St. Eustatius Historical Foundation* and the *St. Eustatius Monuments Foundation* in order to agree how to take further action and decide who should register which intangible heritage.
<https://www.immaterieelerfgoed.nl/nl/netwerkinventarisregister>
7. There has been contact with Ms Renee Ater from Brown University, Department of Africana Studies, concerning 'Slavery Remembrance Monuments' in the Americas with a view to expanding the database to include monuments on the Kingdom's Caribbean islands (<https://www.slaverymonuments.org/>).

An overview of upcoming activities that will need to be developed by government in collaboration with the community:

8. It is essential that the existing inventories and lists of monuments are supplemented to include Afrikan-Caribbean heritage. In this process, it is also important to highlight any gaps in knowledge. In the past, there has been almost no documentation of the heritage of enslaved people, which is why it is missing from the existing heritage maps and lists.
9. Protocols will need to be drawn up on how to deal with sites that have not yet been discovered in order to ensure that the local population is not excluded if Afrikan-Caribbean heritage is found during future developments. There also needs to be an additional focus on protecting sites that are of importance for cultural heritage.
10. A proposal is currently being prepared to apply for funding for the 'Slave Route Project/Routes of Enslaved People' for the Golden Rock and Godet burial grounds (<https://en.unesco.org/themes/fostering-rights-inclusion/slave-route>). We have also talked to representatives of the Dutch UNESCO committee, Ms Ferrier, chair of this committee, visited St. Eustatius at the end of May/early June and was given a guided

tour of various burial grounds by the *St. Eustatius Afrikan Burial Ground Alliance*. UNESCO Netherlands supports the application (which will need to be submitted to UNESCO Paris).

About the St. Eustatius Afrikan Burial Ground Alliance

The *St. Eustatius Afrikan Burial Ground Alliance* came about as a result of the protests against the excavations on an 18th-century burial ground of enslaved Afrikans that were started by a team of international archaeologists in June 2021. The protests were initiated by the Ubuntu Connected Front (UCF), a political party that took part in the House of Representatives elections in 2021 led by human rights lawyer Regillio Vaarnold. Although it did not secure enough votes for a seat in parliament, the UCF became the biggest party on St. Eustatius, attracting 50.8% of the vote. 'Equality is a human right and not a privilege' is the UCF's motto, focusing specifically on the interests of Dutch people with Afrikan roots:

“UCF takes the view that political and administrative action based on Ubuntuism can ensure a society in which the humanity of all citizens is upheld and respected. As a result, all citizens, without any exception, will be able to enjoy all fundamental human rights, including cultural rights.”

UCF also bases itself on the three pillars of recognition, justice and development (as outlined in the 'Black Agenda').

When it became clear that the activities relating to the controversial excavations would last for longer than a few weeks or months, the group began to establish itself outside the political spectrum, culminating in the establishment in November 2021 of the *St. Eustatius Afrikan Burial Ground Alliance*. The Alliance has since developed into a movement with contacts with other groups fighting to conserve Afrikan historic burial grounds, including Annina van Neel from the St. Helena African Burial Ground and Peggy King Jorde who was closely involved in the Afrikan Burial Ground in New York. Their expertise is invaluable to us.

Locally, on St. Eustatius, the Alliance has sought to work closely with the *St. Eustatius Historical Foundation* and the *St. Eustatius Monuments Foundation*. In the Netherlands, the 'black' organizations *Stichting Nederland Wordt Beter* and *Zwart Manifest* are supportive of the Alliance and, internationally, we are working with the Department of Archaeology at the University of the West Indies, Mona in Jamaica and also have contact with Prof. Verene Shepherd from the *Center for Reparation Research*, at the University of the West Indies. An application for membership of the *Caribbean Heritage Network* (based in Barbados) has also been submitted (<https://www.caribheritage.org/>; the application is being processed).

The core group of the *St. Eustatius Afrikan Burial Ground Alliance* includes people born and raised in St. Eustatius, as well as Dutch white people who support the Alliance's objectives. The Alliance also includes an anthropologist and archaeologist among its members. In response to the protests, in January 2022 we published an academic article entitled '*A Future That Does Not Forget: Collaborative Archaeology in the Colonial Context of Sint Eustatius (Dutch Caribbean)*', DOI: <https://zenodo.org/record/6077186>. A new article has been submitted to a peer-reviewed journal.

NB: in common with many Afrikan-centered organizations and movements, the *St. Eustatius Afrikan Burial Ground Alliance* has deliberately opted to spell 'Afrika(n)' with a 'k' in English based on the following insides:

1. It is a pan-Afrikan spelling that relates both to the Afrikan continent and the Afrikan diaspora;
2. It reflects the spelling of 'Afrika' in all Afrikan languages;
3. It includes the concept of 'ka', the vital energy that both sustains and creates.

Ka the Soul

There are three elements in the Egyptian concept of the soul: Ka, Ba and Akh. Ka is the life force or spiritual double of the person. The royal Ka symbolized a pharaoh's right to rule, a universal force that passed from one pharaoh to the next.

Contact

Kenneth Cuvalay

Phone/Whatsapp: +3162901 4308

Website: <https://afrikanhistoryandconsciousness.blogspot.com/2021/12/st-eustatius-afrikan-burial-ground.html> (coming soon <http://www.steustatiusafrikanburialground.org>):

Email: steustatiusafrikanburialground@gmail.com

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