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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

Letter dated 23 February 1983 from the Representative of the
Netherlands to the thirty-ninth session of the Commission on
Human Rights, addressed to the Chairman of the Commission
at its thirty-ninth session

As the representative of the Netherlands to the thirty-ninth session of the Commission on Human Rights I would like to draw the attention of the members of the Commission to the alarming situation of human rights in Suriname.

It is the view of the Government of the Netherlands that developments in Suriname over the last three years, particularly the events of the past two months, warrant the attention of the Commission.

On the night of 7-8 December 1982, a number of prominent people in Paramaribo were arrested by the military regime in Suriname. On 9 December it became known that 15 of those arrested were dead. The military regime claims they were shot while trying to escape. However, according to information available to the Government of the Netherlands at that time, it was evident they were tortured and then shot in cold blood.

In view of the request by the Secretary-General to the Netherlands, in accordance with resolution 1982/35 of the Economic and Social Council, for information on the question of summary or arbitrary executions, the Government of the Netherlands decided to submit on 23 February 1983 to the Secretary-General the report of the Dutch Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights on "the recent events in Paramaribo, Suriname, 8-13 December 1982: the violent death of 14 Surinamers and one Dutchman". The Netherlands Government considers the report to be an exact reflection of the events and fully subscribes to the conclusions contained in the report which are in conformity with its own assessments of these tragic events.

On behalf of the Government of the Netherlands I kindly request you to have this letter and the annexed report of the forementioned Committee circulated as an official document of the thirty-ninth session of the Commission on Human Rights under item 12 of the agenda.

Annex

THE EVENTS IN PARAMARIBO, SURINAME, 8-13 DECEMBER 1982:
the violent death of 14 Surinamers and one Dutchman

Report of the Dutch Lawyers Committee for Human Rights

Chris de Cocker, Chairman

Charles Moons, Executive Secretary

Leiden, 14 February 1983

Hugo de Grootstraat 27

INTRODUCTION

This report is an account of the events in Paramaribo, Suriname, from 8 December 1982 02.00 hours until 13 December 1982 17.00 hours. It describes the arrests, violent death and funeral of 14 Surinamers and one Dutchman. It shows that they were severely tortured and subsequently intentionally killed.

The report synthesizes statements of eye-witnesses, such as family members and persons who were professionally involved in the events, such as doctors and others. As the report shows, hundreds of people saw the corpses of the deceased. Sometimes use is made of information from reliable second-hand sources which corroborates eye-witness accounts or which is confirmed by eye-witness accounts.

For obvious reasons, the names of the witnesses may not be revealed. In addition, it has been deemed necessary to synthesize the statements, considering that some statements, even when kept anonymous, might lead to an identifiable person or persons. It must be added, that to further guarantee anonymity, not all available witnesses have been heard. Unless otherwise indicated, all facts given below are based on the statements of at least two mutually independent persons. All statements were taken independently from one another, and in different locations.

The signed statements have all been laid before Judge Hugo Pos, Vice President of the Court of Appeal, The Hague. Judge Pos and Mr. Jos Kapteyn, member of the Council of State of the Netherlands, declare below that the following synopsis is an accurate account of the facts as they have been set out in the statements.

These events are not isolated. In a second report which is to appear later further information will be given about the violations of human rights in Suriname.

The NJCM acknowledges its deep appreciation and respect for the manner in which the witnesses have been willing to co-operate under these difficult and painful circumstances. It also acknowledges the co-operation which it received from the Study and Information Centre for Human Rights (SIM), Utrecht.

The undersigned, Hugo Pos, Vice President of the Court of Appeal, The Hague, hereby declares that the following report is an accurate synopsis of more than 10 written statements by witnesses to the therein described events. The statements themselves and the conclusions derived from them in the synopsis are, in my judgement, reliable.

Amsterdam, 14 February 1983

Hugo Pos

The undersigned, Jos Kapteyn, member of the Council of State of the Netherlands, hereby declares that the following report is an accurate synopsis of more than 10 written statements by witnesses to the therein described events. The statements themselves and the conclusions derived from them in the synopsis are, in my judgement, reliable.

The Hague, 14 February 1983

Jos Kapteyn

THE EVENTS

On 8 December 1982 at around 02.00 hours a number of people in Paramaribo were taken from their beds and arrested. These people were composed of four journalists, four lawyers, amongst whom the dean of the bar association, two professors, two businessmen, two army officers and one trade union leader. Their names are set out in full below on page 6.

Witnesses have declared that at the arrest of Baboeram and Kamperveen by the militia there was indiscriminate shooting and grenades were used. They were given no opportunity to dress themselves and were hauled into military vehicles and taken away. Considerable damage was thereby inflicted on, in particular, Kamperveen's house. There were bullet-holes in the walls. In the bedroom on the first floor, the outside wall showed a large hole.

At each house where someone was arrested at least three military appeared. In some cases the telephone connections were wrenched out. The remaining family members were forbidden to make contact with the outside world. Military guards remained on watch at each address. They left their post between 6.00 and 6.30 hours.

No search was conducted in any of the houses.

In some cases the arresting squads had to return empty-handed as the sought persons were not to be found.

All the arrested persons were brought to the military headquarters in Fort Zeelandia. Rambocus, who had recently been sentenced by court martial on account of his participation in the coup attempt in March 1982, was picked up at the Memre Boekoe Barracks by Boereveen and Rietveld. Sheoubar, who had also recently been sentenced, was taken from the Santo Bona prison, twenty kilometres further away, by Stelli, the head of the prison administration and member of the court martial, and two members of the military police. Both were also brought to Fort Zeelandia.

At ± 3.45 hours in the morning shooting was heard, including most probably bazooka fire. Shortly afterwards a number of buildings were on fire: the ABC radio station (Crecle), the Lionarons press office, where "De Vrije Stem" ("The Free Voice") was printed, and the building of the Bloederbond, the largest trade union in Suriname. Somewhat later the Rodika radio station (Hindustani) was also on fire.

From the existing recordings of the mobile phone conversation between the fire department, the fire engines and the police, and from the statements of eyewitnesses, it appears that the fires were started by the military. Fire engines soon announced that they were allowed to extinguish the fires "only on the orders of the Commander". In addition, fighting the fire was factually made impossible by the military who were armed with uzis who were led by sergeant-majors Esajas and Roozendaal.

Only later did lieutenant Verhaag (or: Terhaag) announce that the supreme command had not said that the fires were not to be put out. The fire brigade was left to quench the embers.

At 7.00 hours the radio announced that Commander Bouterse and the army had intervened that night "to prevent even worse damage". At the same time it was officially announced that an unspecified number of prominent persons had been arrested.

For a long period relatives were left in doubt as to the location and the fate of those arrested. The relatives who made enquiries were referred from Fort Zeelandia to Memre Boekoe Barracks and then back again.

Little is known about what happened to the arrested persons that day and that evening. From all accounts, they were forced to stand (almost) naked for the entire day in the courtyard. They were tortured, as is shown below.

From around 17.00 hours rumours circulated that Kamperveen and Slagveer were to make a statement on television that evening. The Suriname State television announced that evening that two of the arrested persons would make a statement at around 20.00 hours. This time was repeatedly postponed.

At around 21.00 hours Lieutenant Colonel Desi Bouterse declared on television that the military power had intervened in the preceding night and had foiled a coup attempt. He announced that a number of arrests had been made and he proclaimed the following measures: (1) a curfew; (2) closing of the borders and air space; (3) restriction of gatherings; (4) the closure of a number of (private) radio stations and a publication ban for a number of newspapers; and (5) the closure of the university. Shortly afterwards one of the arrested, Slagveer, appeared on television accompanied by Major Roy Horb. The left side of Slagveer's face in particular was swollen. He admitted that preparations had been made for a coup. He also gave names of his fellow conspirators. The transmission was suddenly broken off. The same admission was also repeated on the State radio, which in that case was followed by a similar declaration by Kamperveen, who sounded like a broken man.

In the early hours of 2 December shooting was heard in different parts of Paramaribo from amongst others machine guns and heavier arms. It is not unthinkable that this served as a camouflage for the executions in Fort Zeelandia. The "Ware Tijd" ("True Times"), the only newspaper not under a publication ban spoke of a successful military preparedness exercise.

At around 7.00 hours the rumour started that two fleeing military men had been shot. The same morning, at around 11.00 hours, a blue army pick-up truck arrived at the mortuary of the Academisch Ziekenhuis (University Hospital) to deliver 10 large sacks containing corpses. An army guard was put on duty. Within a very short period of time personnel from the first aid centre, and doctors and nurses from the Academisch Ziekenhuis pushed the guard aside and entered the mortuary. These people saw the corpses.

The rumour that the dead bodies of the arrested persons were in the mortuary quickly circulated and at around 10.30 hours hundreds of people had gathered outside. Admission to the mortuary was forbidden by the military guard. The military guard tried to disperse the crowd by firing in the air.

Persons who are and/or have been in personal contact with Desi Bouterse declared to one source that Bouterse, when asked for information about the corpses in the mortuary had said: "I killed them", and in another instance: "that was not the intention, but things got out of hand".

At around 11.00 hours that morning Bouterse had assembled his military leadership and gave an explanation of the events. Some of the military who did not agree with what had happened were later dismissed or themselves resigned. The Neighborst Government rendered its resignation on 9 December. The acting president, Ramdat Misier, did likewise on 10 December. Not until the evening did the authorities appear on television with an official announcement of the violent death of a number of those who had been arrested. That evening, 9 December, Bouterse appeared on television and announced that "a number" of the arrested had been killed while escaping during their transportation from Fort Zeelandia to Hare Boekoe Barracks.

In an official announcement, issued by the government information service, it was regretted that several persons - described as conspirators - had died, in particular since among those who had died were "prominent movers in the planned coup", the interrogation of whom had not been concluded. According to the "Ware Tijd" of 10 December, "it is probable that because of this important details of the foiled coup have not come to light".

On Friday, 10 December, from the beginning of the afternoon until 17.00 hours, the relatives identified the corpses and were permitted to see them.

A number of the families learned this through other sources. All contact between the relatives and Fort Zeelandia was through Major Ruimveldt.

The military guard at the entry to the hospital premises permitted entry to families at intervals, family by family. With the families that were allowed in sometimes dozens of onlookers crowded through. At the entrance of the mortuary the same scene repeated itself, with the difference that first two members of a given family were admitted to identify the corpse, thereafter followed by other family members and onlookers. After identification of the victim the name was written on a plaster which was stuck on the forehead of the deceased.

The corpses of the 15 lay on tables in two connecting rooms. The corpses were covered up to the face by sheets. Some of the witnesses were able to lift the sheets.

A restricted number of people was in the mortuary on Saturday and Sunday. Several families learned from Ruimveldt that they were to prepare for funeral on Sunday 12 December. Only then was it made known that the family was allowed to arrange the funeral. Until then it had been maintained that the funeral would be organized by the State.

On Monday morning all the families were informed that the funerals would be on that day at around 14.00 hours and that, in so far as had not been yet done, burial clothes and coffins should be quickly brought to the mortuary. From around 13.00 hours the relatives were permitted to bid farewell. They were also present for the closing and sealing of the coffins. The time of the funerals was repeatedly postponed. Between 16.00 and 17.00 hours the coffins arrived at the different cemeteries. Baboeram, Gonsrawsingh, Rambocus, Sheombar, and Sohansingh were buried at Sarwa Odai. Behr, Daal, Kamperveen and Wijngaarde were buried at Annetteshof. Goncalves, Leckie and Slagveer were buried at the Roman Catholic cemetery, and Hoost, Rahman, and Riedewald at Mariusrust. Thousands of people were present at the funerals. On account of the curfew the ceremonies had to be very short.

The corpses were buried unburied. No autopsy was performed. As far as is known the death certificates issued by the local authorities gave the date of death as 9 December. Thereafter, until Friday 17 December, the graves were guarded, in the daytime by police, and at night by the military.

THE VICTIMS AND THEIR INJURIES

The following 15 persons were killed:

John Baboeram; practising lawyer.

Bran Behr, journalist, editor of the weekly "Mokro".

Cyrill Darl, chairman of the Incederbond, the largest trade union in Suriname.

Kenneth Concalves; Dean of the Surinamese Bar Association.

Eddy Hoost; practising lawyer, former Minister of Justice.

André Kemperveen; businessman, former Minister of Culture and Sport, owner of the ABC radio station.

Gerard Leckie; Dean of the social economic faculty of the University of Suriname, aged 38.

Suchrin Oemrawsingh; professor at the University of Suriname, director of the Computer Centre.

Leslie Rahman; journalist for the CTS press agency.

Soerindre Ramboos; army officer, sentenced to 12 years imprisonment for his part in the coup attempt in March 1982, born on 5 June 1953.

Harold Riedeveld; practising lawyer.

Jivansingh Sheorbar; army officer, sentenced for his part in the coup attempt in March 1982.

Jozef Slagveer; journalist, owner of the Informa press agency.

Somradj (Robby) Cohansing; businessman.

Frank Wijngaarde; journalist for ABC radio station, of Dutch nationality, born 14 August 1936.

As is described above, hundreds of people including doctors, saw the corpse in the mortuary. The following is composed from eyewitness accounts of those who were in the mortuary between 9 and 15 December 1982.

Nearly every corpse showed signs of severe mistreatment in the face from, in particular, punches and blows with heavy objects. Experts and those who professionally are involved with victims of violence have declared that many of the cuts in the faces were wounds that were slashed open by blows from a solid, not too sharp, but not too blunt object, such as a rifle butt.

In addition the corpses without exception showed signs of bullet wounds in the chest, abdomen, the face or the limbs. Witnesses with experience of weapons and injuries inflicted by weapons have declared that the bullet wounds in the chest and abdomen were clearly caused by the entrance of bullets, that is to say that the victims were shot from the front.

In the course of the relevant days efforts were made to conceal the wounds. This appears, from amongst other things, the carrying out of sutures and the application of plasters on the face wounds, in particular on bullet wounds.

Apart from the above mentioned general injuries, the corpses of the respective victims showed the following injuries.

John Baboeram was heavily and brutally mistreated in the face. He for instance had a broken upper jaw. Almost all his teeth, except for one, on the upper right hand side, were beaten inwards and his lips were pulped. He had a horizontal gash on his forehead. In addition he had a bullet wound on the left side of his nose, which was later covered by a plaster. Further he had wounds, cuts, on the cheeks and internal haemorrhages. One source reports a cut in the tongue.

Bram Behr had wounds in the face and bullet wounds in the chest and feet. Cyrill Daal had bullet wounds in the abdomen and several wounds in the face. Two sources report eye injury in general; one source mentions Daal in this respect. Two sources report that the scrotum of one person was shot off; one other source reports to have seen that Daal had been castrated. One source reports fractured arms and legs.

Kenneth Goncalves had wounds in the face. In particular he had a fractured nose. One source reports to have seen a dozen bullet wounds in the chest.

André Kamperveen had a swollen face and injuries on the jaw, most likely a dislocation. He had some 18 bullet wounds in the chest. Furthermore he had a fractured femur. One source reports a fractured arm. One source reports a shot wound in the right temple.

Gerard Lockie had internal haemorrhages in the face. One source reports bullet holes in the chest.

Suchrin Oarravasingh had under the circumstances a reasonably uninjured face. He had a small wound in the right cheek. On the left temple covered with some hair he had a bigger wound. This was later covered by a plaster.

Leslie Pohean had slashes and cuts in the face. He had lumps on his forehead. One source reports that parts of the skin from the upper thigh were torn off.

Surindre Rambocus had open slashes in the face and small cuts on the lips and above the left eye. From the left foot up to the neck and across the upper abdomen he was riddled with bullets. He had a swollen face.

Harold Riedewald had a bullet wound through the right temple and blood marked severe injuries on the left side of the neck. One source reports dozens of bullet wounds in the chest.

Jiwansingh Sheombar had a swollen face which was very dark in colour because of massive internal bleeding. He had a severe injury on his right jaw. Furthermore he had a bullet wound from the neck upwards and another bullet wound in the skull. The pattern of a cross had been made with bullets in the chest and abdominal area.

Jozef Slagveer had a swollen face with many internal haemorrhages, in particular on the left side. He also had a jaw injury.

Somradj (Robby) Sohansing had wounds in the face. In particular his teeth were beaten inwards and one of his cheekbones was fractured. In addition he had six bullet wounds in the chest and abdominal area.

Frank Wijngaarde had a fractured jaw. His teeth were beaten inwards. He had bullet wounds in the chest and face.

CONCLUSION

The injuries as reported and described above lead to the conclusion that the 14 Surinamers and 1 Dutchman were severely tortured and intentionally killed.