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His Excellency Mark Rutte

Prime Minister

The Kingdom of the Netherland

Dear Prime Minister Rutte:

In 2009, I was invited by a young student named Sergio Belfor of the Youth Organization "Eenheid is Kracht" to participate in a masterclass. This was part of a capacity building program in the Netherlands on human and civil rights. I remember the many conversations with several people of all backgrounds and ethnicities. I was also warmly welcomed at the official residence of Hon. Job Cohen, former Mayor of Amsterdam. During one of the events in a packed theater in The Hague, many came to hear and learn from my experiences with my mentor, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.. It is when I met Dr. Barryl Biekman, head of a mass movement in the Netherlands against Black Pete ("Zwarte Piet"). Dr. Biekman and I met again in April 2014, during the gala presentation of the "African Union Bridge Builder Forum". One of the issues discussed during our conversation was about Black Pete.

She asked for my opinion on what blacks/Africans could do more of in the Netherlands that could lead to greater awareness that the Black Pete tradition is racist, immoral and hurtful to their community. I believed she followed my advice to continue engaging the government and the people. Recently, it was brought to my attention that your attitude regarding Black Pete has changed. We are expecting that you, as the leader of the country, will join Dr. Biekman and others to put a stop to Black Pete very soon.

Your Excellency, as the whole world mourns the brutal murder of George Floyd, followed by the worldwide mass protest demonstrations calling for actions to combat racism, I do not think that it was appropriate for you to explain that you understand better the sufferings of black people regarding Black Pete and at the same time, saying that you do not consider Black Pete as racist.

I am aware of the controversy in your country over Black Pete and of your major change in attitude regarding this Dutch tradition. I am writing to urge you to heed your moral conscience and do what you believe and know to be right. Since you yourself have played Black Pete, you have an additional responsibility to end this offensive tradition.

The Black Pete tradition cannot be separated from the attitude of the Dutch Reformed Church's history of apartheid in South Africa. Black Pete cannot be separated from the very offensive tradition of black face in the United States. The December 5 tradition of Black Pete is seen as an offensive relic of colonial times. Black Pete is not seen as equal with and as fully human as the white people of the Netherland. Black Pete is not merely a harmless part of

Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, Sr., *Founder & President*

Martin L. King, *Chairman*

www.rainbowpush.org



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Christmas celebrations enjoyed by children. He has a negative impact on the innocent minds of children. Black Pete is someone to "have fun with" not to be treated as fully human and as an equal person.

My mentor, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. recognized that we all like to be popular, and there are times when it's appropriate to be political, but sometimes it's more important to be prophetic - to just do what's right. I suggest that this is one of those times and I urge you to respond positively to your inner voice and to the current public pressure that is being demonstrated in the public square by your citizens of conscience and sensitivity.

Again, in his most famous "I Have A Dream" speech, Dr. King stressed the "urgency of now" and not waiting for things to magically or automatically change for the better over time. The current situation in the United States gives witness to the fact that merely waiting for matters of race to voluntarily go away over time is naive and does not work. Matters of race must be deliberately confronted and if done on a high moral plane, people of good will can and will resolve it. I believe with your moral leadership the good people of the Netherland will respond positively to ban the offensive and racist Black Pete, for good. The world is watching. Keep Hope Alive!

Sincerely,

Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, Sr.
President & Founder
Rainbow PUSH Coalition

Cc:

Ambassador Andre Haspels

Mrs. Dr. Barryl Biekman

The Pan African Community in the Netherlands

Human & Civil Rights movements in the Netherlands

All responsible Dutch Departments of Anti-Racism, Education, Justice & Safety
Affairs