

FACT SHEET PRINCE CLAUS FUND

PROTECTING AND SAVING SURINAME'S DIVERSE HERITAGE



Fort Zeelandia-Office Suriname Built Heritage Foundation

A heritage site that's vulnerable to fire: the wooden home of a colonial officer forms part of the Suriname Museum in Fort Zeelandia. Image courtesy of the Prince Claus Fund.

Suriname has a diverse and dynamic culture, a multi-ethnic mix of indigenous groups with African, Asian and European influences, but many elements of its cultural heritage are largely unprotected. The centre of its capital, Paramaribo, was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2002. Paramaribo is located at the mouth of the Paramaribo River just a few feet above sea level. Now, with climate change, the country's capital suffers from frequent flooding. Most buildings are constructed of wood, so fire is a constant concern, and there are many cultural heritage sites and artefacts both in and outside of the capital that are at risk in various ways.

The first step in the protection of this heritage is to bring stakeholders of 20 institutions together with representatives of the government, Civil Protection Service and the Red Cross to identify their needs and priorities for training. A 5-day training programme will be organised for 40-45 participants that will include risk assessment, salvage and recovery techniques, and will culminate with the development of disaster management and mitigation plans for each institution.

The institutions involved include some of the most important archives, libraries, museums and sites in the country, such as Surinaams Museum, the NAKS “EU-FRIE Documentation Centre for Afro-Surinamese Culture”, the Roman Catholic Bishopric Archive, and the Tembe Art Museum of Maroon Art, to name a selection. Together, they represent the national memory, history and heritage of Suriname and yet there are virtually no plans for how to anticipate or respond to natural disasters, until now.

This project will be a significant step in safeguarding Suriname’s cultural heritage for generations to come. Linking the cultural institutions with government, emergency and humanitarian representatives ensures better coordination when disaster strikes. TEFAF will donate €10,000 to the project, which will support a large portion of the work to be done.