Dear Chai members;

On March 18, 2016 the monument commemorating the 105 Surinamese born Jews who were murdered during the Shoah (the Hebrew word for Holocaust), was unveiled at the grounds of the Neve Shalom synagogue in Paramaribo, Suriname.

71 years after the end of World War 2, these forgotten individuals now have a face.

The Monument contains the names of 105 members of the Suriname Jewish Community who had moved to Europe and were murdered there by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1939 and 1945.

On the monument, each victim’s name is followed by date of birth and date and place of death. The list is based on archival documents at the Yad Vashem in Israel, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Amsterdam and our community’s resources. Prior to this, a complete list of those known to have perished during the Holocaust did not exist.

The monument was designed by Philip Dikland (KDV Architects). The aim was to locate the memorial in an environment that invites reflection. The location of the monument, on the synagogue grounds, near the large trees and right under the eucalyptus is ideal for this purpose.
The rectangular shape and height (2.5 meters high and 1.2 meters wide) of the memorial reflects the shape of the simple post that was used in Suriname as a matseva (gravestone) for those of little or no financial means.

The abstract image displayed in the inlay at the top is realized through a combination of granite in three different colours. It symbolizes the felling of a tree (by the Angel of Death or the Hand of G-d), a customary Portuguese Jewish reference to a life that was ended before its time (untimely death). The irregular border and formatting of the dates 1939 – 1945 hint at the uncertainties of that time.

The texts on the monument have been made in gold lettering in English, Hebrew and Dutch.

**Historical Perspective**

Suriname was a Dutch colony (aka Dutch Guyana until 1975). Even though Suriname is in South America, there was always movement of people between Suriname and the Netherlands. For example, students who wanted to attend University, professionals such as doctors and traders spent time in the Netherlands.

When World War 2 started, the entire Surinamese Jewish community at that time consisted of about 700 members, of them 105 were in the wrong place and at the wrong time. 15% of the community were murdered in the Holocaust. The impact on the community was profound.

**The Ceremony**

Mr. Ron Reeder, the Master of the Ceremony welcomed the distinguished guests, who included in addition to the community members, the Ambassadors and diplomatic representatives from The Netherlands, Argentina, Brazil, France, Germany, USA, Guyana and Israel as well as the religious leaders of the Hindu, Catholic, Protestant and Muslim communities.

The acting President of the community, Jacques Reeder with his thoughtful speech set the stage for the event to begin.
The first guest speaker was Mordehai Amihai-Bivas, the Israeli Ambassador to Suriname. Ambassador Amihai-Bivas reminded the audience that even though 105 individuals are a small number compared to the 6 million Jews who died in the Holocaust, each of them was an individual with his own dreams and life story. He was surprised to find among the names a family person that had similar family name to his, maybe an unknown distant relative.

The String Section of the Eddy Snijders Orchestra performed “Bereft” (sad because a family member or friend has died). The work was composed by a Canadian composer, Ms. Evelyn Stroobach, to commemorate her Surinamese born great-uncle Abraham (Bram) Fernandes, a resistance fighter and a member of the Geuzen resistance group, who was arrested by the Germans and tortured to death at the Oranjehotel, a German prison in Scheveningen in March 1941.

Mr. Stanley Sidoel, the Director of Culture of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture reminded us that the Surinamese Jewish community, the oldest existing Jewish community in the Americas, has made a significant contribution to the Surinamese culture, economy, government and society over its 375 year long history as a community.

The next speaker was Dr. Alexander Avram, the Director of the Hall of Names and the database of the Holocaust victims’ names at the Yad Vashem – the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre in Jerusalem, who flew in specially for the occasion. Dr. Avram emphasised in his speech that this monument should remind us not only the names of the victims but also that we must stand up against hatred and injustice wherever it happens.

Dr. Avram’s message was echoed by the touching speech of the famous Surinamese author and historian Cynthia McLeod-Ferrier.
Ms McLeod-Ferrier reminded us that Suriname was one of the few countries who accepted Jewish refugees during World War 2. More than 400 Jews were initially saved, among them 150 members of the Hamburg Germany Sephardic Jewish community and over 200 Dutch Jews who had left Holland for France. Later that year 150 Jewish refugees, mainly children, from Belgium and the Netherlands arrived in Paramaribo with the Portuguese ship “Nyassa”.

Ms McLeod described how the whole Surinamese community was mobilized to help the refugees - people donated whatever they could, from furniture to clothing and even the poorest people donated pots and pans. The Government built small houses where the refugees were housed (The houses were demolished in the 1980's, they stood near where today stands the Venezuelan Embassy).

In January 1942, when the news of what was happening to the Jews in Europe reached Suriname, a general strike was organised in the country in protest against the persecution of the Jews.

**Carrying of the Wreath and Unveiling the Monument**

Two youngsters of the community, Jack Donk and Sara Aalstein carried the Wreath towards the monument as the orchestra was performing the theme from Schindler’s List.
Nine spiritual leaders of the main religious groups in Suriname (Jewish, Hindu, Catholic, Protestant and Muslim) read the names of the 105 victims. For example:

**Marcus Abraham Samson,**
*Marcus was a doctor, who died with his wife Daisy and their two young children Emmen and Hanna in Auschwitz*

**Mr. Armand van Alen,** a prominent member of the Surinamese Society and a loyal member and Patron of the Suriname Jewish community unveiled the monument.

Mr. Jules Donk, the President of the Suriname Jewish community and Mr. Stanley Sidoel, the representative of the Government of Suriname laid the Wreath in front of the Memorial Monument.

**The Flower Ceremony**

In remembrance of the six million Jews who were murdered in the Second World War, six red roses were laid on the remaining three sides of the monument by six prominent members of the Surinamese or Jewish community and six children:

**Mr. Fredrik van Russel** - Second World War Veteran, and Chairman of the Surinamese Federation of Veterans and Ex-Servicemen and **Jair Donk**;
Mr. Jules Fernandes – Member and Patron of the Suriname Jewish community and Honory Consul of Israel and Alexander Aalstein;

Mr. Jerry Klinger – the President of the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation and the representative of the donors and Shane Bilkerdijk;

Ms Lilly Duijm – the Vice President of the Suriname Jewish community and the driving force of the Memorial Monument project and Zoe Reeder;

Ms Irene Spangenthal – Member and donor to the Suriname Jewish community and Shirah Franker;

Ms Marina Da Costa – Member of the Suriname Jewish community and Isabel Hoever.

After the flower ceremony, Mr. Jacob Steinberg recited El Male Rachamim and the Mourners Kaddish, in memory of those murdered in the Holocaust.

A poem “Mijn Held” (my hero) was read by Mr. Don Visbeen, a member of the Board of Directors of the Suriname Jewish community. The poem was written by Ms Lea Visbeen – Da Silva.

After closing remarks by Mr. Ronny Reeder, the ceremony concluded and the guests were invited to view the Memorial Monument and to attend a reception.

Special Thank you

For over twenty years the leadership of the Suriname Jewish community expressed their desire to build a Memorial Monument to the Surinamese Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust. Lacking the financial resources and being a small and isolated Jewish community were some of the key factors that prevented the community from achieving this dream. However, with the help of some wonderful people, some whom had never heard about Suriname before, we managed to complete this project in just over a year.
On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Neve Shalom Synagogue and the Jewish community in Suriname, I’d like to thank all those who helped us making this memorable event happen:

The donors - over 45 individuals from the USA, Canada, Holland and Australia who opened their hearts and wallets and donated the funds to make this a reality;

To our major supporters from the community who covered a significant portion of the ceremony and hospitality costs: Irene Spangenthal, Jules Fernandes and Jacques and Roger Reeder;

The architect - Mr. Philip Dikland who designed this beautiful Monument and provided a turn-key solution and Mr. Armand van Alen for his on-going support;

To our amazing volunteers Ank Kuipers and Ronny Reeder who worked tirelessly to ensure that every detail in all the many components would be on time and with no mistakes;

To our International consultants Jerry Klinger from the USA, Dr. Alex Avram from Yad Vashem in Israel and Cantor Eli Bard from Canada who advised us with so many great ideas. And Cantor Bard who also taught me how to recite the prayers;

To Scott Forler who came earlier from the USA to help in editing the English texts, and to the ladies who helped sew the Monument cover;

To Heather Steinberg from Canada, for the graphic design of our Memorial booklet;

Last but not least, to the community Vice President, Lilly Duijm, the engine, heart and soul of this project. Weeks of sleepless nights and endless days of hard work to coordinate all the tasks, people and professionals such as sound, video, catering, printed materials, musicians, decoration, letters of invitations etc. etc.

Your help and support is highly appreciated. Thank you!

We wish you and your families a Happy and Kosher Passover!

April 2016