

Kathleen Ferrier

Summary:

Kathleen Ferrier is actively involved in issues relating to international relations, with a focus on human rights, migration, culture and sustainability. Born in Suriname, she worked on grassroots education, human rights, culture and development projects in Chile and Brazil, before serving as a member of parliament in the Netherlands for ten years (2002-2012). After that she lived in Hong Kong, for five years (2013-2018). Currently, she lives in the Netherlands where she is appointed Chair of the Dutch Unesco Commission.

Short Bio

Kathleen G. Ferrier was born in Suriname and grew up in both Suriname and the Netherlands. She graduated from Leiden University with master degrees in Spanish, (Brazilian) Portuguese, Modern Spanish-American Literature, and Development Cooperation. She lived and worked in Latin America for ten years. During this time, she was involved in grassroots projects focussing on education, human rights and health, in the 'poblaciones' of Chile and the 'favelas' of Brazil, while she also worked as a policymaker and advisor, at the national and international level, including to Jan Pronk, then the Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation.

After returning to the Netherlands, Kathleen Ferrier became General Secretary of Samen Kerk in Nederland (SKIN), the association of migrant churches in the Netherlands. During her eight years at SKIN, she put the new organisation on the map, using public debate to raise awareness of the presence of migrants and specifically migrant Christians in the country and the value of diversity. She campaigned in favour of full recognition, legal status, and equal opportunities for migrants. To this end, she organised various activities in which broad and multicultural representatives of Dutch society participated and debated sensitive issues.

Through her work for SKIN, she became involved with the Christian Democratic Party (CDA) and was invited to act as Vice-Chair of the team charged with writing the party's political programme for 2002–2006. In 2002, Kathleen Ferrier was elected to Parliament, where she served for ten years.

In Parliament, she was spokesperson for international cooperation, human rights, migration, and education. She founded the Multi-Party Initiative on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and HIV/AIDS. She represented the Dutch parliament in various international assemblies, such as the Inter-Parliamentarian Union (IPU) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly, where she was elected Special Representative on Migration. Within her own party, she developed a new vision for international cooperation that emphasises self-reliance through financial independence; policies that combine development sectors, such as health, human rights, education, and finances; and the vital role of sustainability in development.

In 2011, the Mexican government honoured her with the Order of the Aztec Eagle (*Águila Azteca*), the highest decoration in the country, awarded to foreigners, and in 2012, she was bestowed with the Dutch Order of Knighthood (*Ridder in de Orde van Oranje Nassau*).

From 2013- 2018 Kathleen has lived in Hongkong where she worked as a teacher of “Gender and Politics” and Spanish and Spanish American Language and Culture at the Hong Kong Baptist University. She is co-founder of Bright Hong Kong (www.brighthk.org), and ambassador to The Mekong Club (www.themekongclub.org) and involved in different initiatives related to human rights, migration and sustainability.

Since her return to the Netherlands in 2018, she took responsibilities in different Human Rights related organisations, was the chair of an expert committee that had to decide on proposals for a Dutch National Slavery Heritage Museum and was appointed as Chair of the National UNESCO Commission.

She is chair of the Johan Ferrier Fund and the board of the prestigious Geuzenpennig and a member of the Advisory Board of the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague. She is a public speaker and writer on international relations, female leadership, and the principle of diversity as a source of strength.

Publications:

Apart from many articles and columns, as a regular columnist in Dutch newspapers and magazines Kathleen has published a book on migration and migrant churches in The Netherlands: "Migrantenkerken. Om vertrouwen en aanvaarding" ("Migrantchurches. On trust and acceptance") 2002, and on international cooperation: "Armoede, de angel in onze rijkdom" ("Poverty, the sting in our wealth") 2006.

As the chair of the jury for the yearly Dutch National Poetry Prize 2012, she edited a book with her 100 favorite poems "De honderd beste gedichten van Kathleen Ferrier" (2012).