

Zaandam says discontent of people finally put on paper

THE HAGUE--St. Eustatius Commissioner Reginald Zaandam said there were no surprises in the findings of the report of the Caribbean Netherlands Evaluation Committee 2015. He was glad that the discontent of the people in the Caribbean Netherlands regarding the new constitutional structure has been finally put on paper.

"The committee was able to weed out all influences of third parties, and was strong in their bipartisan approach of their assignment. They amplified the discontent of the people of the Caribbean part of the Kingdom. Not the expectation of luxury, but simply hoping for a better life with acceptable perspectives," Zaandam told *The Daily Herald* on Wednesday.

The report of the Evaluation Committee, which was presented in The Hague on Monday in Zaandam's presence, was also an "assessment of the tremendous failure" of The Hague these past five years in dealing with the islands.

"This failed responsibility can simply be assessed as a mockery by the Netherlands that constantly profiling itself as frontrunner in the fight for humanitarian rights in the world, while grossly dismissing that charity starts at home," he said.

Zaandam does have some issues with the Evaluation Committee's report. For starters, he had expected more attention in the report for the unequal position that Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba have in the Dutch Constellation. The Dutch Constitution and the



St. Eustatius Commissioner Reginald Zaandam (left) receives the four reports of the 2015 Caribbean Netherlands evaluation from Member of the Evaluation Committee Fred Soons during the official presentation in The Hague on Monday. (Suzanne Koelega photo)

Kingdom Charter speak of equality, yet the Netherlands doesn't treat the islands equally. "This is not portrayed towards the Caribbean Netherlands and I had hoped that the committee would have put more emphasis on this aspect," Zaandam told *The Daily Herald* on Wednesday.

Secondly, the Commissioner had hoped to finally read a proper explanation and understanding about the level of services and provisions ("voorzieningenniveau"), a source of continuous discontent of the three islands, which feel that the Netherlands is not living up to its side of the deal that the services and provisions would be lifted to an acceptable level.

According to Zaandam, it was this promise that "fooled" the islands. "When we became a Dutch public entity in 2010, we were under the impression

that things would be much better than under the Netherlands Antilles. But the opposite was the case: the spending power of the people decreased and poverty went up."

Thirdly, Zaandam had expected that the aspect of the democratic deficit in the relations of the three islands with the Netherlands would have been dealt with. "I had hoped that they at least would have commented regarding the dealings of The Hague with the islands, and the lack of input that we have. We have the feeling that the Netherlands decides things for us, while we have no influence or input," he said.

The fourth point concerned the tax regime, a system which had been promised would become simpler and better for the people under the new constitutional relations. "The tax regime has proven not to be beneficial for the people and their spending power," said a dissatisfied Zaandam. He thinks that the islands should demand that the fiscal system get its own, separate evaluation.

Overall, Zaandam said he had anticipated more in-depth conclusions by the Evaluation Committee. "I expected a more detailed approach." Also presented were three supporting reports by independent research organisations on more specific topics: the consequences for the population, the workings of the (new) legislation, and the functioning of the new administrative structure.

The fact that the four reports together counted more than 700 pages didn't

by the Netherlands, especially against the backdrop of the high expectations at the start of the new constitutional relations."

The Evaluation Committee, which presented its report to the parties that had requested the evaluation, the Ministry of Home Affairs and Kingdom Relations BZK and the public entities Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba, in The Hague on Monday, drew the general conclusion that disappointment on the new constitutional status predominated on the islands.

Some of the main conclusions that the committee drew, included the concerns about the decreased standard of living since 2010, the disappointing results of the new constitutional status for the residents and governments on the islands, the fragmented execution of policies by the ministries in The Hague, and the insufficient consideration for the special circumstances of the islands.

Positive developments were noted in the area of health care and education, both of which have seen drastic improvements on the islands. Large investments were made in edu-

cation, while residents are now able to make better use of health care provisions abroad. Investments were also made in the local medical facilities.

St. Eustatius was specifically mentioned in the reports where it pertained to the relations with The Hague. Those relations have come under serious strain, especially after Minister of Home Affairs and Kingdom Relations Ronald Plasterk issued an instruction ordering St. Eustatius to get its finances in order and to drastically improve its administration.

Zaandam said that indeed the relations with the Netherlands had become harsher. "This is not due to ignorance, but because St. Eustatius made clear that no one is above the law. We are more than open to have talks to find a solution, but we have to be shown respect at all times," he said.

Together with Johnson of Saba and Commissioner Clark Abraham, Zaandam was able to share his concerns and remarks about the evaluation reports with the First Chamber of the Dutch Parliament on Tuesday. Zaandam said the Senate was "very receptive."

Toastmasters commend members on distinctions

PHILIPSBURG--The Disciples Toastmasters Club is commending its members who earned distinctions at the Territory Humorous Speech and Evaluation Competition recently held at St. Maarten Academy, as well at other forums.

Receiving distinctions were President Amanda Vital-Bedminister, who captured the judges' hearts and won the evaluation contest segment; Toastmasters Kimasha Williams who obtained her Advance Leader Bronze (ALB); Toastmaster Sharanne Gibbs who obtained her Competent Leader (CL), and Vice President/Public Relations Officer Shirma France who was officially pinned in acknowledgement of her post.

Additionally, Vice President Education Sharon Layne presented from the Leadership Excellence series project on Resolving Conflict at American University of the Caribbean (AUC), School of Medicine

in Cupecoy's Toastmasters Club and earned the title of Advance Leader Bronze (ALB). This is Layne's third accomplishment for the year enabling her to earn a Triple Crown.

Toastmaster Patricia Peter also earned her Advance

Communicator Bronze (ACB), on Thursday, September 24.

The Disciples Toastmasters Club meets every second and fourth Sunday of the month at St. Maarten Academy.



Spanish state oil and gas provider Repsol together with its partners Total and Shell will take a decision on test drilling for oil and gas in Aruban waters early 2016. Economic Affairs Minister Mike de Meza was informed of such during a meeting with representatives of the group and government-owned "Compania Arubiano di Petroleo" (CAP), which granted Repsol its exploration concession. An amount of between 30 and 45 million US dollars has been invested so far in two- and then three-dimensional measurements and analysing ground samples. The Dutch Government and Energy Company of the Netherlands EBN are advising local authorities.

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