

Dutch Ombudsman looks into St. Eustatius pension debacle

THE HAGUE--The Dutch National Ombudsman Reinier van Zutphen announced on Thursday that he has started an investigation into the pension premiums of a number of (former) St. Eustatius civil servants and teaching employees.

The investigation focuses on the non-supplying of information of the St. Eustatius Government to the Caribbean Netherlands Pension Fund (PCN). The investigation is the result of a complaint filed by a female teacher with regard to the problems with her pension.

According to a press release of the National Ombudsman, the PCN is unable to calculate her pension over the years 1998 to 2010 because the Public Entity St. Eustatius has not supplied the information, despite repeated requests.

The National Ombudsman has already submitted a number of questions to the St. Eustatius Government in order to obtain a good view of the situation. Van Zutphen is expected to conclude his investigation in October this year.

Several teachers and former teaching personnel stationed in St. Eustatius

had approached Dutch authorities, including Member of the First Chamber of the Dutch Parliament Jan Nagel of the senior citizens party 50PLUS, about the situation that they have been confronted with regarding their pension. In St. Eustatius it reportedly concerned 15 pension cases at the Gwendoline van Putten School with two to fifteen years of "missing" pension premiums.

The pension premiums of these persons, possibly up to 300 civil servants and teaching personnel in Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba, have either not been paid by their employers prior to 2010, or the information was not properly registered by the then Netherlands Antilles General Pension Fund APNA.

In the years prior to the dismantling of the Netherlands Antilles, the Antillean Government omitted to transfer the pension premiums of an unknown number of civil servants to the APNA. These pension premiums were in fact deducted from the employees in question. PCN has had a hard time tracing the information due to inconsistencies in APNA's administration.

Senator Nagel brought up the issue of the non-payment and the possible adverse consequences for the pensions of the involved persons. During a debate with Dutch Minister of Home Affairs and Kingdom Relations Ronald Plasterk on June 21, Nagel requested establishing an independent committee to investigate the matter.

Plasterk then explained that talks were ongoing between the PCN and the Dutch Government, in this case the Caribbean Netherlands National Government Office RCN, which is the legal successor of the personnel that formerly worked in the service of the now dismantled Country the Netherlands Antilles.

The Minister clarified that the dossier investigation was taking place, which should be concluded this summer or shortly thereafter. Based on the results of this investigation, it might prove necessary for the Dutch Government to pay a supplement to the PCN to restore the individual pension rights of the duped group of persons. Plasterk said it would be wise to await the investigation and the talks between PCN and RCN.

Govt. asks CFT to approve loan to improve Tax Dept.

PHILIPSBURG--Government will be requesting the Committee for Financial Supervision CFT to approve a loan to increase the efficiency of the Tax Department, Finance Minister Richard Gibson told reporters at the Council of Ministers press briefing on Wednesday.

Gibson said the discussions between the Council of Ministers and the CFT earlier in the week focused on, amongst other things, the tax department and the investments needed to make the department more efficient.

"I am pleased to report that the CFT has an open mind and is positive in assisting to see how these investments can be obtained and we are preparing the necessary information in terms of what we want to do on the short-term, and based on this we will direct a request to the CFT to approve a loan so that we can start making serious investments into the Tax Department."

The Council of Ministers

discussed the issues regarding the 2016 budget, the expectations for the remainder of the year and the current status of things with CFT earlier this week. Gibson said the first quarter had been "alarming" in terms of the revenues generated, but he noted that the numbers for the months of April and May have shown "considerable improvement" in revenues, which were more than the revenues compared to

the same period last year.

He said the global slowdown will affect St. Maarten, but the effects will not be as disastrous as St. Maarten may think. With the revenues for March, April and May, surpassing the figures compared to the corresponding period last year, Gibson said it's now a matter of seeing how the numbers play out for the remainder of the year. "But I am convinced that we will be able to hold our own."

Meeting on financial situation postponed

PHILIPSBURG--The public plenary session of Parliament scheduled for Thursday to discuss the financial situation of St. Maarten has been postponed until further notice.

The request for postponement of the meeting came from Finance Minister Richard Gibson, Parliament said in a notice issued on Thursday, just after the meeting was scheduled to be held.

The meeting was requested by United People's (UP) party Member of Parliament Franklin Meyers, Theo Heyliger, Tamara Leonard, Dr. Lloyd Richardson, Johan "Janchi" Leonard and Independent MPs Cornelius de Weever and Leona Marlin-Romeo.



Ombudsmen of Curaçao, St. Maarten and the Netherlands, and Quartermaster of the Ombudsman in Aruba.

Ombudsmen close sessions on high note

PHILIPSBURG--The first formalised working visit of the Ombudsmen of St. Maarten, Curaçao and the Netherlands can be considered an historic event. The Quartermaster for the Ombudsman of Aruba was also present to observe how the Ombudsman functions and observed the three-day sessions that started on Monday.

St. Maarten Ombudsman Dr. Nilda Lynch-Arduin said in a press conference on Wednesday that the sessions had been successful and civil servants had been represented in full force since the session started.

Netherlands Ombudsman Reinier van Zutphen conducted the first session and focused on Politics and Public Administration. This was to educate civil servants on the limitations and restrictions between political office holders and the civil administration.

The second day presentation by Curaçao Ombudsman Keursly Concincion focused on internal complaints. During this session Concincion said there were no clear policies in place for internal complaints between civil servants.

Close to 120 civil servants took part in the sessions, including 90 per cent of the police management. Arduin said the police had been eager and open to learn about the many procedures of the ombudsman.

The third session was presented by the St. Maarten Ombudsman on the role of the civil service. Workers had to role-play, acting out real complaints by persons and acting like the complainant to experience firsthand how the complainant might feel.

The core task of the Om-

budsman, a High Council of State of St. Maarten, is the handling of complaints filed by the public against a Government body, including Government entities charged with public authority.

The Ombudsman is limited to the authority outlined in the National Ordinance Ombudsman (AB 2013 no.20). The Ombudsman cannot handle civil complaints between persons or against non-Government entities.

Aruba is the only Dutch territory without an Ombudsman and is in the process of setting one up. The Quartermaster said the experience had been worthwhile and that Aruba was on its way to establishing its own Ombudsman by January next year.

After hearing the different concerns from civil servants for the past three days, Arduin said one main issue was that civil servants wanted more distance between political appointees and the civil service. This would allow them to do their jobs more efficiently. Workers also believe that the policy regulating internal complaints needs to be implemented as soon as possible.

Arduin plans to present her findings to Parliament and the Council of Ministers for their consideration to regulate a policy.

Curaçao is having similar problems, according to its Ombudsman, and does not have an internal complaint policy.

Second Acting Secretary General of Parliament has been appointed

PHILIPSBURG--Members of Parliament (MPs), on Thursday, unanimously appointed G. James Richardson as the Second Acting Secretary General of Parliament. Richardson's appointment will become effective as of September 1.

National Alliance (NA) MP George Pantophlet, who chaired Thursday's meeting, said the position became vacant following the appointment of Ann Groen-Gumbs to position of First Acting Secretary General of Parliament as of March 15.

Seeing the current needs of Parliament and its desire to intensify its legislative work, it was decided to offer the successful candidate for the post, an opportunity to attend a two-year training programme at the Academy for Legislation in The Hague, Netherlands to become a leg-

islative lawyer, before taking up their post in the Parliament of St. Maarten.

For the first two years, Richardson will be employed at the Ministry of Safety and Justice in the Netherlands, before taking his position in St. Maarten. During his employment in the Netherlands he will follow various courses at the Academy.

Pantophlet said after having gone through the application process, Richardson was selected by Parliament's presidium as the choice. His name was proposed during the parliament meeting and it was unanimously accepted by the MPs present.

MP Rodolphe Samuel (NA) congratulated Parliament for "going ahead and doing what needs to be done to have a well-qualified staff on board that will help all MPs going forward."