

Statia, Quo Vadis?

By Koos Sneek

I have the feeling that this is not the first time that the title ‘Statia Quo Vadis?’ has been used for an article or opinion on our little island. The developments of the last few weeks, the public outcry and fierce discussions that followed the recent statements made by councilman van Putten however warrant once again to ask the question “Statia, where are you going?”

It is not my intention to elaborate more on the contents of van Putten’s message or on the emotions and often hefty debate on Statia and far beyond that has followed. I believe more than enough has been said about it. And honestly speaking I believe that the incident does not deserve any more attention. What I am wondering about is, how did it get so far? When speaking with the older generations and with people, just like me, who came to live on the island some decades ago, one can hear that Statia wasn’t like that. Statia was a quiet and peaceful island. People were friendly and respected each other. They invited you into their homes, where you were offered their food and something to drink and everybody had a good time. This does not mean that there were no differences. In politics there was a clear line between the Democratic Party and the WIPM party. This played however mainly during election time but as soon as this was over the smoke came down and life went on as peaceful as before.

It is true, the DP was in power most of the time in those days. It is also true that the party did not always do it right or made the right decisions. They did what they thought was right and they used for this the very limited means at their disposal. In this they were basically on their own, because contrary to now, the support from the then national government from the former Netherlands Antilles, was almost non-existent. But somehow the way they did then did not cause the divide and the often strong animosity the way we experience nowadays. The people accepted and respected each other regardless their different political affiliations. Of course, they may have had it a lot easier in those days because there were no social media where everybody is able to ventilate their opinion.

I am not sure if in the present political constellation, it will be possible to return to this state of acceptance and respect. I say this, because it need to begin by our leaders and political representatives. When you analyze for instance an island council meeting, you can see that the debate is not based upon difference of opinion on a topic or on political differences. You see council members who are unable to separate their personal differences from their political ones. Their rhetoric is often based on a personal dislike and even hate for the opposing members. By their deeds and words, they are advocating and encouraging animosity, dislike and hate for those they disagree with, being it the opposition, the governor or the minister and the national government. With their constant aggressive and confrontational language, they are creating also a state of unrest and animosity among the people.

I too must admit that it is hard for me to function in an environment where personal dislike and hate apparently prevails in the debate. It makes it sometimes very difficult for me to ignore and to focus on the things at hand. I guess the same counts for the people. When the people are constantly bombarded by their government with derogatory statements, when insulting of others becomes the norm, when enticing violence, real or not, appears the new way to go, unrest, flares of emotions and instability are the result.

Statia right now is in need of a government that displays an air of stability and inclusion. We need a government that builds bridges and does not attempt to tear down our present constitutional status. We need a government that does not judge on where you come from or the color of your skin. We need a government that builds up our society together with everyone and prepares it for more autonomy by making use of the status we are in. But most of all we need a government that does not divide and stirs up emotions. We need a government that brings people together and that leads the way to the peaceful society we once were. That is my answer to the question "Statia Quo Vadis?"

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Koos Sneek