

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committee on Kingdom Relations,

With a view to the debate on the 'benchmark of livelihood security' first a general remark. Why a benchmark exclusively for the Caribbean Netherlands at all? Is it not the case that article 132a of the Constitution defines the country of the Netherlands as consisting of a European part and a Caribbean part? Paragraph 4 of this article states "*For these public entities, rules can be established and other specific measures can be taken in view of special circumstances that make these public entities substantially different from the European part of the Netherlands*". The benchmark of subsistence security is meant to be an aspiration, a 'soll' situation. When it comes to social security and a minimum subsistence level, it seems to me that in the 'soll' situation no difference can and may exist between the two Netherlands (otherwise this is called discrimination). That the 'ist'-situation is different is evident and about the measures to get from 'ist' to 'soll' (one then speaks of a 'strategy') should certainly be discussed.

Referring to the report of the written consultation, adopted on February 17, 2021 (under agenda item 1) the following:

- In question 2, there is some mention of the ferry connection. In my opinion, this is not based on any needs assessment. Mobility must of course be increased, but with a regular flight connection between Saba, St. Eustatius, St. Kitts and Nevis, Bonaire and St. Maarten. As long as that connection must be provided by Winair on St. Maarten it will remain (too) expensive and (too) unreliable. Why not broaden the market and also open it up to, for example, EZ Air (based on Bonaire)? For the record: very briefly Winair had started a direct connection between St. Eustatius and Bonaire but that has - entirely in line with expectations and with the wishes of Winair - silently disappeared from the stage. All flights via Sint Maarten, is Winair's strategy. My advice: relinquish the ownership of Winair and allow EZ Air (of Bonaire) to enter the market.
- When answering question 43, it is not mentioned that, at least for St. Eustatius, the patient transport to Bonaire is not provided by Winair (St. Maarten) but by EZ Air (Bonaire). EZ Air is the name of a Bonairean airline of which the government seems to want to deny any involvement because then competition with Winair would be promoted, which is poorly related to partial ownership. Again: stop with the ownership issue and promote precisely that air traffic with EZ Air.
- If in the answer to question 4 it is noted that income data is lacking in the Dutch Caribbean because many incomes are below the tax free allowance, is that not in any case an indication of a (too) low income? Could a pilot for a condition free basic income for all inhabitants of the Dutch Caribbean perhaps be considered here?
- Question and answer 6 focuses on 'drinking water'. I would like to bring *Elemental Water Makers* to your attention. No, I have no personal interest in this, but I am impressed with their presentation via <http://elementalwatermakers.com/>. It seems to me that with their help Stuco (on St. Eustatius) can produce better and more efficiently. Related to this point, I bring to your attention that permission seems to be easily given for the drilling of wells where volcanically heated groundwater can be sourced for personal gain. This fresh water is in a certain equilibrium with the salty sea water and by drilling wells the equilibrium is shifted, causing salinization of the soil. It seems to me that this is a point to which perhaps too little attention is currently being paid.

- In answering question 18, three points are mentioned at St. Eustatius that would have been raised by the youth. On the first point, I note that - certainly compared to European Netherlands - the schools have remained open relatively normally. The call for an upgrade of the medical center I can only endorse, whereby I would also like to understand the (regional) dialysis facility desired by the Island Council for this center. I have already mentioned better travel connections as a first point of attention. As a side note I would like to remark that the dependence on St. Maarten should be reduced as much as possible in favor of a more direct contact with Bonaire.
- In question 21 the benchmark itself is discussed where it is argued that through cost reduction the benchmark could be adjusted downwards (compared to what Regioplan advised). At the same time I hear Ombudsman argue that poverty has by no means been reduced in the Dutch Caribbean. A more generous policy seems to me to be in order. Above I have already argued for a pilot with a condition-free basic income for everyone. This is apart from my 'beginning' view: "why do something special at all for the Dutch Caribbean, when poverty or actually combating poverty is not an *essential distinguishing* aspect in the sense of the Constitution, Article 132a, paragraph 4.

In agenda item 2 I see a letter with the title "Impact corona crisis on implementation in SZW tasks in the Dutch Caribbean" but I believe that this - despite the somewhat broader sounding title - only addresses Bonaire. Also the annex to the document "Handvatten inzet middelen eilandelijk beleid" (Guidelines for using island policy resources) is only addressed to the Executive Council of Bonaire.

Agenda item 3 deals with the progress of the establishment of the "benchmark for livelihood security 2021". I do not want to go into too much detail but will suffice with the remark with which I started this letter: why use an artificially "different" framework for the Caribbean Netherlands than for the European Netherlands. Also the set of benefits is different and in the Dutch Caribbean we do not even know the unemployment benefit.

Finally, when I see tables in the progress report (annex to the document mentioned under agenda item 3) in which for 2018 and 2019 respectively (tables 3 and 4) the vast majority of the population of the Dutch Caribbean (approx. 70%) is categorized in the groups up to 70%, 95% and 100% of the benchmark, so the vast majority is below the established subsistence level, well, I am left with a feeling of shame for so much pettiness of our government.

I wish you much wisdom and strength during the committee debate (and I hope that my contribution will be delivered to you in time for your perusal).

Kind regards,

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