

Sint Eustatius, January 27, 2022.

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Committee of the Lower House,
Honourable Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Committee of the Upper House,

This evening there was a townhall meeting in which the report of SHRC (Statia Heritage Research Committee) was presented. That presentation was made by means of a management summary, the report itself will be sent on request via email (for which you could sign up).

The presentation was clear and when I jump to the findings and recommendations they are completely in line with our initial protest letter sent to the Government Commissioner on July 13, 2021 ¹. An ongoing involvement of the people (or on their behalf: the Island Council) is a requirement that has not been met. The last letter on the website mentioned (see footnote 1) describes our disappointment up to that moment and that gives it a good feeling that the independent commission (which perhaps was more independent than I initially assumed) also speaks of a failing communication of the government with the population.

The point I want to make in the present letter is that this failure of communication does not only concern the excavations, but simply everything! Even the fact that this townhall meeting was taking place was announced one day in advance and the time of commencement was changed several times. Not surprisingly, the turnout (about 20-30 people) was relatively low.

Because virtually no topics are discussed with the population, a mentality has been cultivated - in all these years - that individual opinions do not matter at all: "the island government does what it wants anyway", is the general and resigned opinion. It would be so nice if the future of the island could be discussed in periodic townhall meetings, but nothing comes of it. Even the government radio broadcasts deal exclusively with the development of the statistics concerning COVID19 ; no other subject is discussed at all.

As long as the intervention continues - at least during the Knops regime - Hague opinion is decisive. The government commissioner is only a setter, an executor. And investments are leading. Even zoning plans or permits are irrelevant: if the investor thinks that a piece of land should be cleared here, it just happens. Without the required advice from the nature organization Stenapa and without a permit

¹ see <https://www.jhtm.nl/excav/nl/11.php>

from the government, building a path from a resort to the ocean coast? Dumping concrete blocks (with perhaps the intention of a small harbor)? If the investor says he wants it that way, then all the administrators bend like knives and there is obviously no question of enforcement. With such a board, the population does not really stand up for its legitimate interests. The feeling that they are not being listened to anyway is only confirmed.

Does this message sound frustrating? In a certain sense it does. Not personally, but it appears time and again that Sint Eustatius (or more broadly: the Caribbean Netherlands) is very much a *far cry from the (Dutch) bed show*. Of course I regularly write my letters but be honest: has any letter from my side ever made a dent? Well, no... In short, in the interest of the Statians, I hope that a new cabinet, a new élan, a new administration with perhaps an upcoming visit to the Caribbean (in which I hope you will not be guided exclusively by the "fixed" tours of the organizing government commissioner) may lead to real results.

I continue to wish you much wisdom.

Kind regards,

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Sint Eustatius, Caribbean Netherlands.

Note: The Cultural Heritage Agency (Rijksdienst voor Cultureel Erfgoed) has been informed of our letters on this website. We have experienced this Rijksdienst as a "bottomless pit". Everything you offered: not a single response followed. No rejecting, no correcting, no supporting, no response at all. One wonders whether this organization considers the Caribbean Netherlands (or Sint Eustatius) part of its work area, or wants to. It seems that the answer to this implicit question is in the negative.

Note: Because I understand that the Committee Kingdom Relations of the Senate will soon be visiting the islands (so also Sint Eustatius), I thought it would be a good idea to also send this letter to the members of this committee.

Cc: National Ombudsman