

The Hague, October 15, 2022.

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committee on Kingdom Relations of TK and EK,

More and more I feel like that little boy by the side of the road - I refer to the 1837 fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen "The Emperor's New Clothes" - who exclaims at the passing of the emperor in his new robe "...but the emperor is naked, he has nothing on at all". By this I mean "everyone can see it, but no one wants to see it". So what is it about?

About the Cabinet's unwillingness to see and treat the residents of the Caribbean Netherlands as ordinary, full-fledged Dutch citizens in the context of Dutch laws and regulations. By law, all Dutch citizens are equal and will be treated equally in equal circumstances; this is stated in so many words in Article 1 of the Dutch Constitution.

And for quite some time now, a kind of camouflage language has suddenly appeared with words like "equal," "benchmark," "social minimum for the Dutch Caribbean," etc. You all see - as I do - that the Caribbean Dutchman is being fooled, not to say outright and deliberately fooled, by this play on the social minimum! This is all a big charade that - to the best of my belief - is neither legally valid nor meaningful.

All this fuss only leads to the maintenance of inequality between the Caribbean and European Netherlands (or as I also read once in De Correspondent "policy is of the cabinet"). And then, at an awfully late hour, comes a letter from the Minister of Poverty Policy explaining in 15 pages (excluding appendices) how "well" things are going. That we have forgotten to organize breakfast in schools in the Dutch Caribbean while it is getting off the ground in the whole of the European Netherlands, I will forget here (but of course that remains embarrassing as well). If I examine the contents of the letter (from Minister Schouten) against the light and I look between the hairs of my eye at what I see as the central message, then I notice one big reluctance of the Cabinet to lift a finger to the Caribbean Netherlands at all. That central message is "*we are not doing anything at all*". In my opinion, the entire social infrastructure in the Caribbean Netherlands must be scrapped in favor of what is current in the Netherlands (I am now referring to Europe, and in fact to the whole of the Netherlands). Then there will at least be a decent minimum wage and benefits in case of - for example - unemployment.

I come back to my opening paragraph. Everybody sees it and nobody questions the way it works! We don't do a discussion about the social minimum for the municipality of Oldenzaal, the gas extraction areas in Groningen, the fishing village of Katwijk or the Wadden Islands, do we? That little boy on the side of the road (that's me) would like to see these kinds of fundamental questions being asked instead of a percent this or a percent that. The Caribbean Netherlands is simply "the Netherlands," nothing more or less than the European Netherlands is. And if anyone wants to go into depth: the cost of living is higher in the Caribbean Netherlands than in the European Netherlands, so equal treatment of all Dutch citizens is the least that should be done. And each time there are interested visitors (ministers) who are shocked by what they find. Well, where the Caribbean Dutchman would benefit from a critical parliament, this group of Dutchmen only sees not really involved or interested plush pluckers (in both parliament and government). And no, don't think now in terms of yet another delaying investigation into something that has been known for a long time. Those kinds of arguments no longer resonate with the Caribbean Dutchman who still has a shred of trust in The Hague. That the respect in the Caribbean Netherlands for the Dutch government is waning seems to me to be a euphemism and you may guess why.

Shall I leave it at that in this letter?

Yours sincerely,

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cc: *National Ombudsman, Chairman Committee on Social Minimum*