

The Hague, December 16, 2022.

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

When I now see that the legislation that led to the NL government's intervention on the administration of St. Eustatius in February 2018 was prepared and dealt with in days, perhaps a few weeks, how am I to understand the message about offering a bill that should lead to a better and a more affordable flight connection in the Caribbean Netherlands not until 2025...? It's all a matter of prioritizing and the Cabinet radiates that on many fronts and time and again: *The Caribbean Netherlands does not interest this Cabinet at all!*

Which then also does not help (at least, so I suspect) that all those who work at the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations on the living environment of the Caribbean Netherlands are sitting together in tunnel vision. This tunnel vision easily leads to a common idea of "*we are not doing so bad yet*" or "*we are really working very hard on the good things*". Very little dissent seems to exist or be organized at this ministry - at least in those departments dealing with the Caribbean Netherlands.

Nowhere are questioned (in their own BZK environment) about - for example - the above example about flight connections. But also the introduction of a BSN already takes far too long (and only for a limited target group, namely students). That work is being done (with only very limited progress...) on a social minimum specifically for the Caribbean Netherlands - of course by first creating a committee for that - is something that apparently nowhere leads to internal questioning, in the sense of "*do we do that elsewhere in the Netherlands as well?*". In what I assume to be tunnel vision in the relevant departments of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, these dissenting voices are not born of their own accord, and if they are heard, they are signals from outside that simply cannot be good.

At the time, it was U.S. President Abraham Lincoln who welcomed dissent precisely and saw it as a tool with which to tighten or improve policy. In the current administration, or at least in the relevant departments of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, I do not (yet) see this refreshing approach. It even has to lead to lawsuits to force a "normal" (humane, broad-based) understanding on the part of the government. On St. Eustatius, reports showing incorrect actions by the government are first shoved under the rug before being given due credit by a judge (I am now referring to the hotel that - despite warning words - remained unprotected while preserving the cliff). *Now, was this really necessary? Is it now really necessary for the Consumers' Association of Bonaire to start a lawsuit*

against the Dutch government to make the Caribbean Dutchman socially equal to the European Dutchman? Does the Dutch government itself not see this need? Apparently not...

In 2010, wasn't the inclusion of these three islands as part of the country of the Netherlands precisely aimed at an equal legal status (with exceptions for those circumstances that are substantially different from those in the European Netherlands)? The latter is emphatically not a license to label every difference as "substantially different"; at the same time, of course, English is the language of instruction on Saba and St. Eustatius (with consequences for the organization of education) and the climate is tropical with consequences for the possibility of hurricane-force storms. And the traffic on St. Eustatius generally does not use crosswalks and traffic circles (with the exception of the one traffic circle introduced at the hands of then State Secretary Knops). So the laws and rules regarding traffic on the roads might - rightfully so - be different from European Holland.

The fact that the departments of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations that should be concerned with the welfare of the Caribbean Dutchman do not, I can only explain because previously assumed tunnel vision makes these departments and their employees blind to what the average Dutchman with an interest in this part of the Netherlands can simply make up for himself. And the few employees who see what I also see, do not dare to bring it forward because tunnel vision is simply the prevailing vision. The saying *"only when the horse has bolted, do you fill the well"* seems to apply here. Incidentally, sometimes also in a more literal sense: the health care on St. Eustatius is still below standard while deaths have already occurred there (as a result of the failing policy regarding timely dispatch to a medical specialist).

A side note. Of course - in my estimation - I may think what I think of Cabinet policy. At the same time, my status is that of an individual citizen. It therefore seems easy to me - as a cabinet - to disregard this criticism. The royal way to deal with this criticism seems to me to play it through parliament (as controller of the cabinet). That, in my opinion, in the Lower or Upper House sometimes easy is chosen for a coalition interest instead of the interest of the community (in this case the Caribbean Dutch community) is a consideration you make. The way in which to date this balancing of interests is often done (with a possible positive or negative effect on voter behavior) is your responsibility, not mine. That you thereby widen rather than narrow the gap between politics and society is an effect that I do not need to explain to you.

I conclude with the thought you may have: what am I to do with this? In the words of the National Ombudsman, you should not let the government pull so many strings. You could insist that within a

reasonable period of time (after all, we have been messing around for 12 years...) some things will be put in order. Without wishing to be exhaustive nor suggesting an order of importance, there is the ridiculously expensive and not very customer-friendly attitude of Winair which needs to be addressed with affordable flights within the BES area without the seemingly unavoidable stopover in Sint Maarten (oh yes, Winair is an airline of Sint Maarten...). In this context, I note the Makana Ferry was "just suddenly" preempted and pushed through (by The Hague) with a subsidy scheme. From St. Eustatius, there is some added value in the connections to Saba and St. Kitts. The connection Sint Eustatius - Sint Maarten continues to be preferably done by air. Furthermore, there is the BSN that must become available to all Caribbean Dutch citizens (as far as I am concerned "as a matter of course", but in any case "upon request").

Last but not least, the ridiculous discussion about a social minimum in the Caribbean Netherlands must be taken off the table. In its place: simply the social minimum as it applies to all Dutch citizens (with all related benefits). Just the other day I read about the lagging banking services (of course: a task force is working...) that will soon have to gain a leg up to the level of (European) Netherlands. If it is smart to introduce the Euro instead of the US Dollar for that purpose: why not do it in the short term? Finally (in my non-exhaustive list of things): set up health care at the Dutch level and try to prevent even more deaths.

And before anything else: communicate with the islands of the Caribbean Netherlands. Less "about" and especially much more "with" the islands (the Island Council) in consultation to what extent we should follow the Dutch laws and regulations and what should be "own" island regulations. I wish you much wisdom and decisiveness.

With kind regards,

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cc: *National Ombudsman, National Coordinator against Discrimination and Racism*