

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committees KR and VWS,

Now that the Cabinet has fallen, no more dossiers that have been found controversial will lead to a decision. I assume that the developments in the Caribbean region in general, and certainly those on St. Eustatius, will not automatically appear on the list of files found to be controversial, so for the time being I will continue to write.

And especially as it pertains to the vaccination strategy on this island. After all, for matters concerning the COVID19 pandemic, the Cabinet is simply missionally available and approachable.

Without knowing exactly what the responsibilities are I describe to both committees below my concern.

What I see is the following:

- the information about the vaccination from the side of the local government is late and inadequate; on Saba, a call for a townhall meeting (on January 20 and on January 21) appears on Friday, aimed at informing the Saba people <sup>1</sup>. I hope that on St. Eustatius a broad public information will also be organized. Last week a Central Committee meeting did take place. That meeting - at least the public part of it - could be followed on the radio but from the population's point of view that is a bit "at a distance" (incidentally, that same evening there was also an information session on the radio). After all, one does not know whether the questions as raised by the population are actually and sufficiently addressed; at best, this may be assumed, but it is by no means certain. I therefore consider this method of providing information to be somewhat weak.
- I don't know which organization is precisely responsible for what, but I see a government commissioner who - when it comes down to it - conveniently says that the responsibility for vaccination (and information about it?) is a matter for the Public Health Department (GGD), which, according to this Department, prepares all this in close cooperation with the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and the RIVM. Perhaps the hospital also plays a role: I just don't know. What I do believe is that, given the lack of information, only a minority of the population still spontaneously and willingly register for the vaccination. I sincerely hope I am wrong here, but further dates on this I do not know as yet (as of last Friday you can sign up with a form that must be submitted to the Public Health Department).
- then it seems to be yet uncertain which vaccine will be made available here in mid-February: Pfizer or Moderna. As far as effect and effectiveness are concerned, both vaccines are similar (if I understood the disclosed information correctly); the big difference between the two has to do with the storage and preservation conditions. These are considerably more difficult for Pfizer than for Moderna (especially since we are, of course, in the tropics). Minus 70 to 80 degrees Celsius (for

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://bes-reporter.com/index.php/2021/01/15/invitation-for-saba-town-hall-meeting-for-covid-19-vaccine/>

Pfizer) is quite a task, while minus 20 degrees Celsius is a fairly simple challenge for the implementing organization <sup>2</sup>.

- during the information (given in the previously mentioned consultation of the Central Committee as well as the subsequent information on the radio) I sensed as a listener a certain preference (of the local GGD) for Moderna (above Pfizer) given this easier 'manageability', and also because the packaging concerns fewer units. Once out of the environment of minus 70 to 80 degrees Celsius, Pfizer is only usable for about five days, and with a moderately enthusiastic (and by no means broadly informed) population, the chance of deterioration is thus great <sup>3</sup>. This seems to me fairly easy to explain and also fairly logical. Here you do not need to have completed a study in medicine or logistics first.

My concern here is that the decision might be too quick and ill-considered. I would like to see reason playing a leading role in the choice of vaccine and the organization responsible for implementation being able to bring its considerations to bear without restraint on the decision-makers.

In conclusion, I wish you much wisdom in the decision-making process.

Kind regards,

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*Cc: Government Commissioner on St. Eustatius*

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<sup>2</sup> That policy and implementation sometimes have a somewhat abrasive relationship with each other, we have seen in the Toeslagendossier about which the government has now also stumbled.

<sup>3</sup> Then, by the way, I assume that the transport of the vaccination material with the accompanying refrigeration will be without problems. In the case of regular flights - i.e. with a stopover on Sint Maarten - the special circumstances under which this transport must take place seem to me to be an easily identifiable potential vulnerability (say: risk).