

St. Eustatius, May 4, 2022.

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Committees of the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament <sup>1</sup>,

In the run up to the IPKO consultations on St. Maarten there will first be a visit of the parliamentary delegation of the Netherlands to Saba and to St. Eustatius. I read <sup>2</sup> that on Saba there was an opportunity for the Sabans to get acquainted with their representatives in the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament. On St. Eustatius no publicity was given to their arrival. I can only guess at the reason for this seclusion, but I do not exclude that the Government Commissioner wants to avoid any risk that negative reports about St. Eustatius come to the attention of our parliamentarians.

For example, I wonder further if one or more of the delegation members has asked the Government Commissioner, in response to the information held, whether all of this has also been shared with the Island Council and with the Statian population in the broad sense...

At the same time you want to radiate a certain hospitality so you receive the guests with a lunch. And so it is that after lunch at Ocean View the group takes a stroll through the historic and pleasant center followed by a visit to the museum. Just before their departure for St. Maarten I see the delegation at the excavations near the airport about which there has been some commotion because of the particularly disrespectful actions of the local government (read: the government commissioner) and SECAR (St. Eustatius Center for Archaeological Research). It is true that these excavations have now been stopped - under pressure from an international group of scientists - but what happened to the excavated human remains is still a carefully guarded secret. In any case, nothing has been publicized about it. And no memorial or monument of any kind seems to have gotten off the ground either. Not talking about it and covering it up is a tried and tested Statian method of not talking about it at all anymore (and possibly, in the long run, continuing with the contested activities).

It is on this occasion (lunch at Ocean View and subsequent visit to the museum) that I run into the delegation. For me it is not so difficult to recognize them: via the websites of the Senate and the House of Representatives you can easily find out who is who. Although I regularly write letters to the Lower (and also Upper) House, which means that my name is probably somewhat familiar to this (these) Committee(s) on Kingdom Relations, we have of course not often met in person. The people I have had the pleasure to shake hands with reacted with surprise and warmth. And because Mr. Ester had been to the island before and passed up the walk through the village, we had a short, pleasant conversation (at Ocean View) in which serious points of interest were also discussed.

For example, we talked about the BES Civil Law Notary Act, a law that may not be so bad on paper, but in practice is not observed or enforced. The prevailing practice (nota bene partly propagated by the former government commissioner Van Rij) is based on the notarial services provided by offices on St. Maarten: another country in the Kingdom with its own legal rules. As a result of this, the viewpoint

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<sup>1</sup> It is my intention to write to both the House of Representatives and the Senate in the future

<sup>2</sup> See <https://dossierkoninkrijksrelaties.nl/2022/05/02/kamerdelegatie-ontmoet-sabanen/>

emerged that - in general - perhaps not initially "an act for the benefit of the BES" should be considered, but declaring the NL legislation applicable in the Caribbean Netherlands (which, by the way, sounds to my ears just as nonsensical or self-evident as "as of <...date...> the Civil Code also applies in South Limburg", after all, South Limburg is an integral part of the Netherlands. It is no different with the Dutch Caribbean).

Coincidentally, just today (May 4, 2022) I read on Bonaire.nu <sup>3</sup> of a peaceful demonstration on Bonaire, organized by an umbrella organization of labor unions, against the continuing inequality between the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands, whereby the latter part of the Netherlands is put and kept behind on all fronts. I write regularly about this inequality, also felt by me. Equalizing one part of the Netherlands with another should not be a big expense in absolute terms, considering the size of the entire Dutch Caribbean (i.e. the three public entities of Saba, St. Eustatius and Bonaire). In total it concerns about 25,000 people, by European Dutch standards a 'village'. To determine the thoughts: the municipality of Veendam in Groningen has about the same number of inhabitants; all the Wadden Islands together have about three times as many inhabitants.

Mindful of the adage "comply or explain", Dutch laws and regulations in the broadest sense should be applicable in the entire (i.e. both European and Caribbean) Netherlands, unless.... The status of "public body" gives the three Caribbean islands the position to have "their own" laws and regulations if there is an explainable reason for this. To date, double standards are easily applied. The discussion about the social minimum in the Dutch Caribbean is a despicable example of this. The demonstration on Bonaire is fighting for these identical goals!

At the same time I would like to add a 'cultural aspect' to this. When I look at the Dutch Caribbean, and in particular at the island on which I myself live and work (St. Eustatius), then I easily see that flying in European Dutchmen with the best of intentions want to realize their views as quickly as possible. All this without any consultation. And if there is something that bothers the people of St. Eustatius (without them complaining too much, because that does not make much sense, as years, decades or maybe even centuries of experience have taught them) it is that without any consultation about their daily affairs, their own business operations, their own <...fill in the blank>, decisions are made by well-intentioned European Dutch force which in some cases nobody was waiting for. A good conversation based on equality and mutual respect is more effective than - by way of example - a newly constructed traffic circle. We all know the story that teaching someone to fish is more effective than just supplying fish, but putting that same idea into practice: ho!

And then it is even worse. Even the own island government hardly consults. In the first paragraph I already mentioned that nothing of your visit has been brought into the public domain. In any case, the population is not involved. In every (progress) report of the State Secretary about St. Eustatius that comes under my eyes I read things that are partly experienced very differently than they are presented to you and moreover I read things that I have not heard at all on the island. For example, I am genuinely curious to know whether the new WOO Act (as successor to the WOB) - with more

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<sup>3</sup> See <https://bonaire.nu/2022/05/04/usibo-organiseert-vreedzame-demonstratie-tegen-ongelijkheid-tussen-nederland-en-caribisch-nederland/>

publication obligations on the part of the government - is equally applicable to the Caribbean Netherlands, or whether a BES variant of this also exists or is in the making (and on the basis of which circumstances, different from the European Netherlands, is there a BES variant, I wonder).

In good Stavian custom, progress in improving the care organization is absolutely invisible (or perhaps truly non-existent) despite two recent cases of death. I do not rule out the possibility that the government commissioner is doing all he can to sell something nice without actually doing anything. The fairy tale of the emperor's new clothes seems to apply here too. I really hope that someone in The Hague will initiate a real improvement action in the entire healthcare system.

Well, so much for a brief but critical sound from the Caribbean region. I realize that you currently have other Caribbean concerns on your mind (i.e. the Inter-Parliamentary Kingdom Consultation [IPKO] on St. Maarten) but at the same time I hope that the "small issues" regarding the Caribbean Netherlands (which includes St. Eustatius) do not get out of your sight.

As always I conclude by wishing you much wisdom.

With kind regards,

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*I would like to attach an advice to this letter. Next time, come without the program being determined by others. Travel to a hotel in the village of St. Eustatius and look around. Talk to residents. And leave the government commissioner for what she is. Set your own agenda on the island and talk to people you choose. If you would like any advice from my side in this, I am of course willing to do so at any time.*

cc: *National Ombudsman*