

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Commission,

Normally, when I decide to send an email to you again, I pick up the previous email ("where have I come to"), I consult my notes that I have made since then and I draw up the new email to be sent.

Meanwhile, I have to conclude, in my (Dutch and Statian) environment nothing is what it used to be. And "nothing" may sound very absolute but at least "almost nothing". The last sixty to seventy years at least the final exams continued every year. And this year it turns out that experiences in the past do not automatically lead to guarantees in the future.

The whole world is experiencing the consequences of the coronavirus and people everywhere are wondering "what is sensible to do now". Some countries seem to be more ready for it than others, and what is ultimately sensible now will become apparent in a number of years' time when one looks back on this period in evaluation.

For two years now, the common thread in my story has been that there is little or no European Dutch respect for the local population (and from the point of view of the Statian this is no different than in the past decades or even centuries). From The Hague, policy is 'declining' and the population is being confronted with this. So there is no discussion "with" but "about" the Stadians. And then The Hague seems surprised that "the Statian" is not overflowing with gratitude that - by way of example - street signs appear just like that. Something he never asked for in any case. And that it might be necessary after all, might just be so, but in any case it has never been explained properly and understandably. The previous government commissioner and his deputy almost never (or at least not more than strictly necessary) spoke to (a representation of) the local population.

And then two things entered the island: the new team of government commissioners and the threat of corona. Admittedly, it is not the most ideal scenario to accept a new position. When I try to look at the past few weeks with a helicopter view, I see essentially two things:

1. Everything that seemed even remotely important in the period up to mid-March lies still, has been forgotten or no longer matters. And if that is not already the case, it is in any case well hidden from the public.
2. Everything that is going on right now is "corona"-driven. Where the previous team of Commissioners hardly communicated with the local population, there is now an update on the radio on all working days at seven o'clock in the evening about the island, regional, Dutch and worldly corona developments.

The good news, therefore, is that there is communication. You can complain a bit about its quality (I too) but I would like to highlight the positive side of this development at the moment. But at the same time - as I already stated - the question applies how things are going with all the other developments

that should lead to "St. Eustatius 2.0". In that respect, the combination of two government commissioners seems to me to be ideally suited to appoint a *leader-over-all* and, as far as this crisis persists (and that could well take some time), a *chief-corona*. And where I (as an interested and involved inhabitant of the island standing outside the administrative organization) now seem to see that the corona developments are mainly "followed" and "observed" (by both commissioners at the same time), I miss the pro-active component in which, based on things you know and things you don't know, in scenarios and in multidisciplinary teams, an analysis is made of what is now smart policy for the short and (medium) long term.

There are now two positively tested people on the island. And where keeping the virus out of the door for as long as possible has been kept as the holy grail, this finding is now interpreted as a "loss". This view is of course reprehensible and probably not meant to be so, but the fact is that an invisible racial battle is now raging on Facebook saying that the virus-causer (China) and the virus-bearer (two Dutch Europeans) are seen as "enemies of the Statian people" (which, incidentally, was condemned in sharp terms in the radio broadcast of the local government, especially by Mrs Alida Francis). In terms of scenario thinking, it seems as if nobody wants to face up to what should happen when more positive cases occur in which the serious phenomena with a life-threatening attack on the respiratory system also manifest themselves.

In one of the recent radio broadcasts it has been stated that help has been requested from the Ministry of Defence (i.e. a naval vessel with adequate hospital facilities in material and personnel sense) but I do not notice much pressure on that request and so far not much seems to have been set in motion. Of course I'm not a virologist or an expert otherwise but my common sense tells me that once an outbreak has started on a small island it won't be easy to stay small. And even "small" in absolute numbers is easily "big" in relative terms. And no matter how you turn it around: our medical facilities are limited. In practice, the hospital is little more than a general practitioner's post and if the care to be provided becomes somewhat complicated, there is the way to a hospital elsewhere (usually: Sint Maarten, Curacao or Colombia). If I then consider that a naval vessel will soon take a week to bridge the distance from the European Netherlands to the Caribbean Netherlands then, well I can hardly say otherwise, I am worried about the lack of urgency and decisiveness of our local and national managers. I follow the website <https://www.defensie.nl/> and it says what the Ministry of Defence is doing in the context of the fight against the coronavirus. However, I do not (yet) find anything about the deployment of a naval vessel with hospital capacity for the Caribbean Netherlands (and in particular the two small windward islands; after all, Bonaire is geographically still relatively close to the countries of Curacao and Aruba).

Note: There are already signs that the surrounding islands/countries are closing their borders to patients from elsewhere, now that the need is getting higher. The Statian sees his experience confirmed that help from outside is not self-evident.

And if this situation persists for a very long time, will the hurricane season also be included in the scenario thinking? I may hope so, but for now our most important "weapon" seems to be the insistence on keeping social interaction small by closing everything down. In an operational sense, there may not be much you can do at the moment, but I can only hope that there is still a lot going on that the residents may not see. In that respect, the transparency suddenly isn't as great as I would like it to be.

I conclude with another small personal finding. In my immediate work environment I also have to deal with the development of "teaching at a distance". A development that in the European Netherlands is suddenly going through great strides. With us the steps are a bit smaller but also here similar steps are being made. The (only) secondary school on the island now "sees" its students almost exclusively through the internet (which fortunately is fairly stable at the moment). The availability of internet and computers in all families is still a point of attention.

We hope to see you next time.

With kind regards,

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