

Letter of 24 September 2019 from the State Secretary for the Interior and Kingdom Relations to the House of Representatives containing the six-monthly progress report on St Eustatius

Introduction

In my letter to the House of 14 November 2018 containing the second progress report on St Eustatius¹ I undertook to assess the situation in St Eustatius as of 1 September 2019, applying the criteria set out in that report. In the present letter, I inform the House about the outcome. The aim of the assessment was to gain insight into when local democracy can be restored to the island, either wholly or in part, and when elections for the island council can be held. Elections are essential to the local population; they are the means by which the people choose who will represent them. To this end the people must be able to exercise their right to vote and be given the opportunity to stand for election to a position in the island's democratic system.

To place the outcome of the assessment in its proper context, I will first describe the events leading up to the government's intervention. This will be followed by the assessment results and lastly by the government's opinion on where this outcome – in relation to the background described – should lead next. The leading consideration in this regard is the interests of the people of St Eustatius, such as the right to stand and vote in elections on the one hand, and the right to good governance and visible improvements in the neglected state of the island on the other.

Background to the intervention

Report of the Committee of Wise Persons

Given the ongoing concerns regarding the governance of the Dutch public body St Eustatius, on 24 May 2017 the then Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations asked a Committee of Wise Persons ('the Committee') to investigate the functioning of the public body and present a report including its conclusions and recommendations.

The Committee presented its report on 5 February 2018.² The Committee established that in both socioeconomic and physical terms, St Eustatius was in a state of gross neglect and that

¹ Parliamentary Paper, House of Representatives 2018-2019, 35000 IV, no. 29.

² Committee of Wise Persons, '*Nabijheid of distantie, een wereld van verschil*' (Proximity or Distance: A World of Difference'), 5 February 2018.

its enterprise and investment climate was unfavourable and characterised by certain arbitrary practices.

In the Committee's opinion, the island's public administration was characterised by lawlessness, financial mismanagement, disregard for other statutory authority, discrimination, intimidation and the pursuit of personal power. Relations between the coalition and the opposition and between the Dutch and Statian authorities were severely damaged or had broken down entirely. Under a motion submitted to the island council the Public Bodies (Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba) Act (WolBES) and Public Bodies (Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba) Finances Act (FinBES) were set aside. The Committee observed that the authorities of St Eustatius had abandoned the existing legal and constitutional order and were no longer prepared to relinquish the autonomy they had appropriated. Members of the public indicated that politicians and officials were acquiring support through promises, job offers and the disparagement of the Netherlands. What is more, according to members of the public and the business community, a culture of inequality, arbitrariness and exclusion had taken root among the island authorities, a culture maintained by a small group.

The Committee concluded that the scope for improving the situation through the regular instruments had been exhausted. Given the disorder that permeated virtually every area of public administration and the prevailing state of lawlessness, the Committee made a finding of gross neglect of duty on the island. In its opinion, allowing the situation to continue unchanged would be disastrous for the people of the island. There was, in the Committee's view, only one possible response: administrative intervention by the Netherlands, which would include the appointment of a Government Commissioner, pursuant to article 132, paragraph 5 in conjunction with article 132a, paragraph 2 of the Constitution.

Response by the government

In its response to the Committee's report, the government said that the picture the Committee had sketched of the administrative situation in St Eustatius exceeded its worst suspicions.³ The government shared the Committee's view that it is inconceivable for an administrative body in the Netherlands to turn its back on the existing legal and constitutional order. It joined the Committee in concluding that, in the interests of the people, the situation of disorder could not be allowed to continue any longer. The situation was having far-reaching consequences in people's daily lives; after all, delays in projects to improve roads,

³ Parliamentary Paper, House of Representatives 2017-2018, 31 568, no. 196.

the water supply, housing and waste management have a direct impact on the Stavian people.

Given the situation of gross neglect of duty, the government decided to intervene by introducing the Temporary Act on Neglect of Duty in St Eustatius, which contained provisions aimed at turning the situation around. On the basis of this Act, a Government Commissioner was appointed to head the administration of St Eustatius until such time as the authorities are considered capable of adequately fulfilling its tasks themselves. The island council was thereby dissolved and the island commissioners and acting governor were relieved of their duties. The Government Commissioner carries out all the tasks and exercises all the powers of the island council.

The intervention was intended to enable the island's administration to be put in order and to create the conditions for lasting improvement. It is important to prevent a recurrence of the previous situation once normal administrative relations are restored. On 6 February 2018 the House of Representatives and the Senate unanimously passed the Temporary Act on Neglect of Duty in St Eustatius.⁴ The Act is intended to expire on 17 March 2021, although even at the time the Act was drafted the government took account of the possibility that more time would be needed.

Since it considers the wellbeing of the people of St Eustatius the primary concern of the intervention, the government has adopted the Committee's recommendations to address shortcomings in the socioeconomic and physical domains. In addition to the reconstruction budgets made available by the ministries (following hurricanes Irma and Maria), the government will further ensure that regional funding ('the regional envelope') referred to in the Coalition Agreement is also made available. The targeted, combined deployment of these resources must lead to results that are visible to the people of St Eustatius.

Current situation and assessment

Before assessing the situation on the basis of the progress achieved on the criteria referred to in the second progress report of 14 November 2018, I will provide an overview of the measures taken and results achieved to date in the socioeconomic and physical domains and in the island's reconstruction after the hurricanes of September 2017. This should give the House an insight into the current state of affairs on St Eustatius. The results achieved are directly visible (in the case of the physical domain) and noticeable (in the socioeconomic

⁴ Bulletin of Acts and Decrees no. 2019/26.

domain) to the people of St Eustatius. They show that good local governance in combination with Dutch central government can bring about genuine improvements to the living environment and living conditions.

I will then move on to assessing the progress achieved against the criteria referred to previously, which concern financial management, administrative structure and the civil-service organisation. The following measures are being taken on the basis of the Temporary Act to help ensure that the island authorities can function adequately in the future:

- cleaning up the population register;
- ensuring high-quality management of administrative processes such as tax administration and land registry;
- amending inaccurate or outdated island ordinances;
- reorganising the civil-service organisation and providing the correct procedures and work instructions;
- describing the policy frameworks of the public body;
- putting supervisory and enforcement instruments in order;
- equipping the public body to perform its supervisory and enforcement activities;
- introducing a multiannual training programme for civil servants and politicians;
- digitising and centralising financial processes;
- setting up a planning and control cycle in accordance with the FinBES;
- implementing activities set out in the plan of action for the improvement of financial management; and
- establishing a court of audit function.

Socioeconomic and physical domains and reconstruction

Socioeconomic domain

Within the socioeconomic domain important first steps have been taken at the level of social welfare provisions in the Caribbean part of the Netherlands. Recently, the reference points required for socioeconomic security (also known as the 'social minimum')⁵ were established. The aim is to raise certain benefits and allowances, reduce social insurance payments and take measures to reduce the cost of living.

In the social housing sphere, the Dutch housing association Woonlinie has expressed its willingness to work with the Statia Housing Foundation (SHF) and the local authorities,

⁵ Parliamentary Paper, House of Representatives 2018-2019, 35 000 IV, no. 61.

initially on the basis of a pilot project. Before the end of 2019 the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Affairs will make structural funding available for social housing, so that rent can be lowered by means of a landlord's contribution. Together with the public body of St Eustatius we are working to set up a points system for the rental market, a rent-control ceiling and a rent tribunal. To that end, a new Rental Housing Market Measures (Caribbean Netherlands) Act (*Wet maatregelen huurwoningmarkt Caribisch Nederland*) has been drawn up (Bulletin of Acts and Decrees, 2017, no. 189), which is expected to enter into force on 1 January 2020.

From 1 January, a number of social support provisions will be structurally funded by the hospital. The care contract between the hospital and the BES Health Insurance Office has been expanded to include a meals service, individual transportation, home help and modifications to the home. In the coming period, five sheltered accommodation homes in the Lodi district will be built.

The Sport and Performance Agreement concluded in May 2019 has made it possible to retain the system of neighbourhood coaches and to permanently increase the physical exercise activities on offer. The Cruijff Court has now been renovated, and a number of other projects are lined up, including the construction of a clubhouse, expansion of the fitness centre and improvements to the car park at the sports ground.

Public information campaigns on domestic violence and child abuse are making it easier to talk about these issues, while also enhancing the effectiveness of support services. In addition, a voluntary joint agreement on multidisciplinary consultation (MDO) (a network partnership between the care sector and criminal justice system) will contribute to prevention, support services and efforts to combat crime.

The programme BES(t) 4 kids,⁶ launched by the three public bodies and four government ministries in February 2019, has made it possible to greatly improve the level of childcare and before- and after-school care, in terms of both educational opportunities and physical space. St Eustatius has embraced the programme with vigour. Working closely with the Buzzy Bees Inn Daycare Centre, the Gwendolyn van Putten School has launched a training course on 'Early Childhood Development', with a view to meeting new demand and quality requirements. New students and existing childcare staff take the course together, an arrangement that both groups have responded to positively.

⁶ Parliamentary Paper, House of Representatives 2018-2019, 31 322, no. 397.

In March 2019 the local tourism board and the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) jointly developed a vision for tourism⁷ on St Eustatius which will be fleshed out into an implementation plan.

The agriculture and livestock sector also offers good prospects for greater sustainability, but in order to achieve them, a permanent supply of water is needed and livestock farmers must be willing to embrace a cultural shift and keep their livestock within fenced-off areas.

The physical domain

The repairs to the eroded cascade, the drainage system of the cliff, were completed in late 2018. In January 2019, further work to stabilise the cliff began, a project that will be completed in March 2020. The Government Commissioner has now begun work aimed at sufficient rainwater collection on the island, with a view to not only preventing erosion but also providing water for agriculture and livestock farming. This approach is embedded in all plans for road building and repairs, as well as repairs to the cliff and coastal areas. At present Rijkswaterstaat is developing the measures that will be used to tackle erosion on the coastline.

The road development programme comprises four projects, including road paving in the Cherry Tree neighbourhood, as well as repairs to the road to Jeems, the road between the hospital and two schools, and repairs to the connecting road between the seaport and the airport. The last two projects will require additional funding. The completion of the Cherry Tree project has been delayed, primarily because of a difference of opinion about the materials to be used in order to achieve a durable, maintenance-free road surface, given the composition of the Statian soil. Following the eventual rejection of the type of cement proposed by the contractor, a new kind of cement has now been ordered. The public body and the contractor have concluded new agreements on the conditions under which the contractor will complete the project, with a delayed completion date of no later than March 2020.

At the start of next year a new protective structure at the seaport will reach completion (with funding from the 10th European Development Fund (EDF) project). Work will then begin on reinforcing the seabed of the container port, which will increase storage capacity. Measures

⁷ RVO, Tourism Vision Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development on St Eustatius, March 2019.

for further improvements at the port are being planned in the framework of the measures in development for the coastline in Lower Town.

A new airport terminal and air traffic control tower are expected in 2020; the plans have been shared and discussed with the public. A contractor has been appointed and construction will begin this autumn.

The waste management sector, which was overhauled in 2018, is tackling the island's waste-processing needs systematically and professionally, supported by funding for a new waste incinerator. Following the first phase devoted to the collection and removal of car wrecks (which brought in around 300 wrecks by the end of 2018), these activities have now been integrated into the duties of the new waste management organisation.

Reconstruction

More than 100 hurricane-damaged homes have been repaired, as has the damage sustained by the six cemeteries, a church tower, a wall ruin and the fence outside the former administrative offices. The current repairs to the last 30 homes are being financed by 'integrated funds' from central government.

The St Eustatius National Parks Foundation, Stenapa, is responsible for projects including reforestation, the protection of iguanas and breeding turtles and the placement of coral ladders. Some projects have been completed; the cultivation of saplings required for reforestation will take around two years. The anti-erosion projects, waste management system (incinerator) and part of the road-development plan (transport and storage of rainwater) are being funded from the remaining resources earmarked for reconstruction activities.

A new Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) has been set up with funding from previously unused budgets. Launched at the beginning of 2019, the EOC is now capable of playing its part in the island's crisis- and disaster-management operations.

The hurricanes of September 2017 had a major impact on the island's capacity, including the civil-service organisation. Local staff on the island have consistently put all of their energies into carrying out the measures described above.

In the fourth progress report, expected in November 2019, I will, as is customary, discuss in more detail the progress made on supporting measures and the results achieved, as well as the associated budgets.

Assessment against individual criteria: financial management, administrative structure and civil-service organisation

At the start of the intervention, the situation on St Eustatius appeared more serious than previously thought, and over time new issues have arisen, which I have informed the House about.⁸ The annexe contains a detailed assessment overview that sets out not only the current situation but also – wherever possible – the expected completion dates. In this letter I will confine my remarks to the following summary of the assessment's outcome.

Financial management

Good financial management is the foundation of good governance. The disordered financial management on St Eustatius did not develop solely during the tenure of the last island authorities (March 2015 to January 2017), but had been an issue since 10 October 2010 (when the Kingdom's new constitutional relations entered into force) and probably even before then. The first binding instruction dated from 2011, and successive administrators have been unable to turn the situation around. For this reason, the Government Commissioner's October 2018 plan of action for the improvement of financial management contained a large number of projects aimed at virtually complete professionalisation of the island's financial management.

Around half the planned measures have been launched, around one-third have begun in part, and the remaining 20% have yet to be started. Given the number of measures concerned, this is an encouraging start. Ultimately the parties are working towards an unqualified audit opinion on the 2021 accounts.

Nevertheless, progress towards this goal is proving slower than expected. This is partly due to an external factor: the IT company providing the 18 software modules is still not adequately meeting its commitments. The Government Commissioner has drawn the company's attention to this issue. After all, digitalisation is one of the key building blocks of this programme. But there are also internal factors in the delay. At first, for example, the finance unit and the staff of the other units were not communicating well. This meant it was

⁸ Parliamentary Paper, House of Representatives 2018-2019, 34 775 IV, no. 41.

not immediately clear to staff what was expected of them, and this did not help foster support for the planned measures.

A second internal cause of the delay is resistance to what staff perceive as excessive bureaucracy: all activities must be (promptly) recorded. Overcoming this resistance will require perseverance and ongoing supervision and guidance. A third reason is the simultaneous implementation of so many projects and activities at a time when the island is facing a lack of qualified financial staff.

I conclude that a great deal of work has been done by many people, but there is still a great deal more work to be done. The measures will take longer to complete than expected. They can only be considered fully implemented once the island's future administrators have adopted and internalised the new working methods.

Administrative structure

A government can only perform its administrative tasks properly if local legislation, administrative records and official processes are in order. The support of a qualified civil-service organisation also helps to lighten the administrative burden. As with its financial management, the island's administrative structure has been in a state of neglect for some time.

Administrative records, for matters like taxes, population records and the issuance of permits and grants, must be reliable and up to date. The population register, which is also relevant to the electoral register and other types of records and users (in the care, education and social services sectors), can be seen as 'the mother of all administrative records'. Its quality was substandard, which is why the Netherlands actively provides technical assistance, with a view to improving the quality of personal data on file and sharing knowledge. Recently, preparations have been made for a clean-up of the records, with the implementation of the street name and house numbering project. This is a visible result for the local population. This clean-up is a time-consuming and labour-intensive project, since people leaving or departing the island frequently fail to register or deregister with the local authorities. The lack of adequately trained personnel has magnified the difficulty of the task. The review of personal records will continue until the spring of 2020. The electoral register is now largely in order.

The Dutch Cadastre, Land Registry and Mapping Agency is expected to take over the land registry function. There is currently a bill under consideration, which will provide for the

transfer of this responsibility for the Caribbean Netherlands to this agency. The purpose of the law is to ensure the continuity and quality of land registry practices on the islands and to enhance legal certainty.

Work is also being done on the records for permits and grants and for personnel and payroll, but additional measures will need to be taken. The administration of social housing at the SHF is not in order, but the involvement of Woonlinie will result in quality improvements. In principle the Tax and Customs Administration of the Caribbean Netherlands is prepared to take over the collection and recovery tasks. We are currently examining whether the systems of the public body and the tax and customs administration are well enough aligned to ensure a smooth transfer, and a voluntary agreement is being drawn up containing arrangements to this effect. A measure like this will not only boost efficiency, but can also serve as an example of how cooperation between the public body and central government agencies can work in practice, while simultaneously facilitating the transfer of knowledge.

The public body has over 100 ordinances and associated decrees, a significant number of which were not up to date. A number of ordinances which were no longer relevant have now been revoked, and a number of others have been amended for various reasons, including *contra legem* provisions. The work that has already been done constitutes a big step forward, and this project is expected to be completed around mid-2020. Priority is currently being given to ordinances with a financial impact. With regard to the supervision and enforcement function, 15 staff members of the public body and a number of other organisations have been trained as Special Police Officers.

The civil-service organisation

After the conclusion of a year-long process, a new organisational structure was introduced on 1 September 2019, based on the principles of the separation of duties and the pooling of knowledge. Working in a different context of public service professionalism requires setting aside habits and customs that have been in place for years. For this to happen, adequate training and educational programmes are essential, especially given the absence of such programmes (including in-service training) in recent years. To improve effectiveness and quality over the long term, the training programme that has been devised will run for a number of years. A training programme is also planned for future politicians.

A new way of working, centred on greater cooperation and documentation of activities, requires a new set of processes. The description of processes and procedures is being updated. For example, a new template has been developed for a decision-making

memorandum and the list of decisions of the executive council. This will help ensure clear decision-making procedures, and in the future it will be possible for decisions to be published straightaway. The next step is to familiarise all local government employees with this new way of working.

To improve both working conditions and the level of service provided to members of the public, a new government office building has been provided. The staff of the public body are currently spread out over more than 10 locations, which means that the quality of service and internal cooperation are less than ideal. A new office will help the internal services to work together more closely, while also bringing together the public body and the National Office for the Caribbean Netherlands (RCN) in the same premises. More up-to-date IT infrastructure and IT equipment are also needed. The first phase of this project is now under way; it involves connecting the six most crucial units via a network structure. Other units will be added to the network in time, but additional funds are still being sought for this purpose.

Administrative judgment on the outcomes of the assessment

The decision to authorise an administrative intervention was an exceptional one, and it was not taken lightly. A decision to terminate the intervention demands the same well-considered approach. As stated in the government's response to the Committee's report, the intervention should not last any longer than necessary. Nevertheless, when the time comes to return to the normal administrative situation, we must take care to avoid a relapse to the status quo prior to the intervention. I would further note that since 10-10-10 and probably even before then, the quality of governance was substandard, due in part to an inefficient and ineffective administrative structure, a neglected civil-service organisation and inadequate financial management.

Successive island authorities often felt powerless to act, believing that little or nothing could be done about the neglected state of the island with the available budgetary resources. But the last administration was marked by an *unwillingness* to act, which ultimately resulted in a situation in which the local government ceased to respect the rule of law or those who expressed dissenting views.

The Dutch government has a duty to the people of St Eustatius to facilitate a new local government that is capable of adequately performing its tasks. This means that not only must the administrative structure, including the civil service and financial management, be in good order; it must also be reorganised with a view to the long term. At that point it will be up

to future island authorities to maintain the system and regain the trust of the local population in democracy and the legal order.

Against that background I would note that a great deal of work has been done in the past year; we have a clear sense of the issues at hand, and it is plain what improvements need to be made. At the same time I would note that many problems still remain, more than initially anticipated, and the workload of the current island authorities, and the civil service in particular, is heavy. The remaining administrative tasks are extensive and labour-intensive, and this leads to the inevitable conclusion that a return to full democracy and normal administrative relations would not yet be a responsible course of action. Moreover, the island authorities and officials also have the task of working with the European Dutch government on projects that have arisen from the supporting measures aimed at tackling physical and socioeconomic neglect, in order to bring about visible and noticeable improvements.

On the other hand I am confident that the commitment and ambition level of the authorities and officials will, in the course of the next year, foster sufficient institutional stability to hold elections for the island council as a first step towards ending the administrative intervention entirely. It is therefore my intention to hold island council elections on 21 October 2020.

What comes next

The Temporary Act is premised on the principle that circumstances in St Eustatius must be improved to the extent that the island authorities are capable of adequately fulfilling their tasks. The Act provides for a deadline (17 March 2021) for island council elections, and for the cessation of the Temporary Act once the new island council has taken office. The return of the island council would signify the end of the administrative intervention. In its advisory opinion on the Temporary Act,⁹ the Council of State pointed out the desirability of transitional arrangements for the conclusion of the administrative intervention. The Dutch government subsequently indicated that it would consider what form such transitional arrangements should take.¹⁰

As noted above, despite all the steps that have already been taken, I do not anticipate that in the short term the situation will improve to such an extent that a new administration will have

⁹ Council of State, NO. W04.18.0012/I.

¹⁰ Parliamentary Paper, House of Representatives 2017/18, no. 43, para. 3.2.

an adequate basis for effectively fulfilling its tasks. More time will also be needed to put the island's financial management and civil-service organisation in order.

It is therefore necessary to specify what an extension of the administrative intervention will entail, and with that in mind I intend to submit a bill that will provide for the continuation of the administrative measures on St Eustatius and a gradual return to a normal situation, so that the administrative intervention can be gradually phased out. I have sketched out the contours of this process below.

A gradual return to normality

The plan I envision entails a return to normal administrative relations in four phases, along the lines of the WolBES and FinBES. The transition from one phase to the next will be determined on the basis of the results achieved and the achievement of standards yet to be determined.

The first phase involves holding elections for a new island council. The island council will be granted a monitoring task with regard to the right to ask question orally and in writing, the right to seek an emergency debate on a policy issue, and the ability to submit motions. It is also conceivable that it could be granted the power to adopt ordinances, including the right to introduce and amend legislation.

In this phase there is not yet an executive council or governor. The Government Commissioner will continue to exercise the tasks associated with these institutions and will retain the other powers not granted to the island council.

One possible condition for the transition from the first to the second phase could be that the civil-service organisation must be given adequate work instructions and be sufficiently organised to assist the future executive council in fulfilling its tasks. Another possible condition is that supervision and enforcement must be in order.

In the second phase the island council will once again have the power to appoint and discharge deputies. As part of the executive council, the island commissioners have the power to carry out autonomous and delegated competences, including those related to supervision and enforcement. Decision-making authority regarding financial matters and the civil-service organisation will continue to rest with the Government Commissioner. In this phase, too, no governor will be appointed. The governor's tasks and the non-assigned

powers of the island council and commissioners will also remain with the Government Commissioner. This phase might also be the time to have the Island Secretary appointed by Royal Decree, which could serve to give that individual a stronger and more neutral position.

I believe that the transition to the third phase will depend on the implementation of all supporting measures related to financial management, administrative structure and the civil-service organisation.

The third phase is the point at which full recovery has been achieved. The island council and executive council will be granted the right to draw up and approve a budget and to exercise the other powers laid down in the WoIBES and the FinBES, as well as responsibility for the civil-service organisation. A governor will be appointed who will perform all the tasks and exercise all the powers associated with that office. We are considering including a provision in the Act whereby the Government Commissioner stays on for a short time in a supervisory capacity. I can also imagine that the governor may be given the authority to approve personnel-related decisions, a power that currently rests with the Kingdom Representative. It is also conceivable that the governor could be given a monitoring role, aimed at fostering good governance and proper financial management. Strengthening the position of the governor will do much to help prevent irregularities.

In the fourth phase the administrative intervention will come to an end, and the Government Commissioner will be relieved of his duties. A key advantage of using a phased approach is that the island council can be swiftly reinstated as a representative body. It also gives island commissioners the opportunity to gradually re-establish a position for themselves within the new constellation.

The gradual transition to a full restoration of the normal situation will not only facilitate a smooth transfer of power, including greater scope for hands-on administrative experience, but will also allow the necessary activities to be carried out so as to enable the future island authorities to discharge their duties in accordance with the standards of good governance, without any loss of momentum and under the leadership of the Government Commissioner.

To ensure a smooth transition between the various phases, it is necessary to be explicit about what results must be achieved, as discussed above in the section devoted to the assessment. By granting the island council the right to draw up and approve budgets and executive authority over financial matters and the civil-service organisation at a later stage in the process, the Government Commissioner will have the chance to ensure that his work

has a long-term impact and to further flesh out the intended results of the supporting measures.

The proper restoration and functioning of democracy and governance is vital for the people of St Eustatius. My intention to extend the duration of the administrative intervention means that the measures will last longer than thought when the Temporary Act was passed. That said, even at that time there was a recognition that the process might take longer than first envisioned. Given the current situation on St Eustatius, I regard this as unavoidable. At the same time I think it is advisable to include a gradual restoration of regular administrative relations in the bill. These transitional arrangements offer the prospect of a return to a normal state of affairs.

Conclusion

Over the past 18 months the Government Commissioner and his officials have acquired a good grasp of the issues that have arisen due to the neglect of duty. Much work has been done, and in some areas a great deal has been accomplished. As the assessment revealed, the administrative challenge is extensive and labour-intensive.

The results of the assessment also show that it is not yet possible to specify a time for a full return to democracy. It would be irresponsible to be satisfied with the existing and still-anticipated results of the administrative intervention and supporting measures. This would be a disservice to the island's people and to future members of the island authorities and civil service.

When I took the exceptional and carefully considered step of intervening, I treated the severity and scale of the gross neglect of duty with the seriousness it deserved. We are therefore obliged to take the necessary time to allow the results of our work to take root, even if this means that the process ends up taking longer than I might have hoped. It is my firm belief that the island's people and future politicians must be offered prospects for the future, by setting a date for the election and developing transitional arrangements for a gradual return to democratic institutions.

From my perspective I am confident that the work of the Government Commissioner and his officials will lead to satisfactory results, allowing a new administration to fulfil its tasks properly and build on a solid administrative and financial foundation.

I derive that confidence from my regular visits to St Eustatius and those of other members of the government, including the Prime Minister and the Ministers of Justice & Security; Agriculture, Nature & Food Quality; Infrastructure & Water Management, and the State Secretaries for Health, Infrastructure & Water Management and for Social Affairs, all of whom felt it was important to engage in dialogue with the local population, government institutions, the Government Commissioner and his officials. I did just that when I visited the island on 23 September and laid out my aims for the future of St Eustatius to the island's people at a public meeting. The goal of the intervention and the subsequent execution of the associated projects has always been to improve the situation of the people of St Eustatius. This has been the focus of our efforts from day one.