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VOL 31 NO. 103

Friday/Saturday, October 8 - 9, 2021

U.S. 0.75 CENTS / Naf. 1.50 / EC\$ 2.00

Dumfries gives informative presentation on COHO

AMERSFOORT--The process to establish the Caribbean Body for Reform and Development COHO and the workings of this entity, imposed by the Dutch government, was the central theme of a presentation facilitated by Aruba-born Evelin-Pierre Dumfries at a gathering of the Union of Dutch Caribbean Pensioners BGNAA in Amersfoort, the Netherlands, last weekend.

The COHO has been a subject of mutual discontent on which the countries in the kingdom only reluctantly reached an agreement with much political scepticism. The COHO is part of the package of conditions in order for Aruba, Curaçao and St. Maarten to receive Dutch liquidity support during the pandemic.

The objective of the COHO, to

Continued on page 8

Continuous efforts essential to develop island agriculture

THE HAGUE--Continuity in policy and the execution and monitoring of plans to develop agriculture in Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba is a key factor for success in getting the islands to become more self-reliant in growing produce.

Dr. Bert Lotz of the Wageningen University & Research (WUR) suggested this during a technical briefing to the Permanent Committee for Kingdom Relations of the Second Chamber of the

Dutch Parliament on Thursday about the development possibilities for the agricultural sector in Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba.

On behalf of the WUR team, Lotz gave a virtual presentation to the Committee gathered in one of the meeting rooms of the Second Chamber. WUR carried out a desk study and spoke with experts about the development possibilities for the agricultural sector in the Caribbean Netherlands.

The sustainability of local food production and fisheries has been

Continued on page 7



More than 50 different civil society organisations attended the three in-person "call for proposals information sessions" held by the Resources 4 Community Resilience (R4CR) programme to mark the launch of the third funding round. In photo: A scene during one of the sessions. Story on page 8.

Winair looking to raise capital to weather pandemic shock

PHILIPSBURG--Windward Islands Airways International NV Winair is expected to become viable as the season picks up, said Prime Minister and Minister of General Affairs Silveria Jacobs on Thursday, representing majority shareholder St. Maarten Government in a Parliamentary meet-

ing on Winair's financial status.

The airline is currently making progress. Winair had performed around 6,000 flights this year up until October, a quarter of the number of flights performed in 2019, but recently flights have started to pick up.

"The fourth quarter is showing improvements and our forecasts for the high tourist season remain optimistic," said Winair Supervisory Board Chairman George Greaux Jr., who stressed that the

2021 financials demonstrate the resilience of Winair's team and continue to show promise. "The ambition is still very much there," he said.

Although encouraging, the message was not received as such by a number of Members of Parliament (MPs). MPs Sidharth Bijlani (United People's Party), Christopher Emmanuel (independent) and Claudius Buncamper (United St. Maarten Party) spoke

Continued on page 9

IN BRIEF

Philipsburg BANK REQUIREMENTS

Central Bank of Curaçao and St. Maarten (CBCS) President Richard Doornbosch says the only requirements that are important for the CBCS for the opening of bank accounts are proper identification and a source of funds. Page 3.

Philipsburg SUSPECTS MAY BE ACQUITTED

Two young men who went on trial for involvement in the shooting of a man may be acquitted. Page 3.

Anguilla NON-STOP TO ANGUILLA

An excited group gathered at Anguilla's Clayton J. Lloyd International Airport on Wednesday afternoon to witness the inaugural arrival of an Aurora Airlines Embraer 170 direct from Florida. Page 11.

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R4CR grant scheme attracts big following

PHILIPSBURG -- The Resources 4 Community Resilience (R4CR) programme held a series of "call for proposals information sessions," which marked the launch of the third funding round.

More than 50 different civil society organisations (CSOs) attended the three in-person sessions which were held at the R4CR headquarters at A.Th. Illidge Road 60, the former WIB office, on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evening and the online (Zoom) session on Thursday evening.

The R4CR programme includes a grant scheme as funding mechanism for community and social rehabilitation initiatives in

St. Maarten and focuses on improving the capacity of local CSOs in reconstruction and resilience activities post-Hurricane Irma.

The R4CR programme is financed by the government of the Netherlands via the St. Maarten Trust Fund. The latter is administered by the World Bank and implemented by the National Recovery Program Bureau (NRPB). The R4CR programme is locally managed by the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities VNGI in close cooperation with Foresee Foundation and other local partners.

The official call for proposals opens on Friday, October 8, and closes on

Tuesday, November 5.

The grant scheme will be active for four years and will provide grants to local CSOs to execute projects focused on reconstruction, resilience and improved service provision. Project activities by registered CSOs can cover subject categories such as neighbourhood initiatives, sports, nature/environment, culture, poverty relief, day-care centres/after-school programmes, youth employment, skills development, psycho-social support or preventing gender-based violence.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions R4CR limited the in-person sessions to a maximum of 12 persons. Consequently, all sessions

were fully booked and many CSOs opted to join the online Zoom session on Thursday evening instead.

"We saw a great need from CSOs for personal interaction and many had specific questions about their project proposals, so we decided to organise a final in-person session on Tuesday,

October 12, at our office, from 6:30pm to 8:00pm," stated local R4CR Team Leader Rolf Hunink.

"This extra session is specifically geared towards CSOs who are submitting a grant request for the first time to R4CR and need some extra guidance" Hunink said.

Registration for the final in-person session can be done by sending an email to: info@r4cr.org

For more information about the R4CR programme or an overview of all current projects, please visit www.r4cr.org or the Facebook page R4CRSXM.

Presentation on COHO

Continued from page 1.

be secured in a Kingdom Consensus Law shortly, is to make the countries more resilient by 2027, economically, financially and socially, with solid, effective governments in place. The COHO, which will be an independent administrative organ, will guard and monitor the execution of the individual country packages and plans of approach.

Dumfries, a consultant with a past 10-year political career in Amsterdam, gave a short explanation of the Temporary Work Organisation (TWO) which precedes and prepares the way for the COHO, and will transfer to the COHO.

As part of the process to establish the COHO Kingdom Consensus Law, the Council of State of the Kingdom gave advice. The Council pointed out the importance of the Kingdom Charter and the responsibilities of the countries in relation to the COHO, the advice to have representation of the Dutch Caribbean countries in the COHO, and to make sure that the plans of approach are clear in their goals.

The Council of State of the Kingdom issued a second advice in September which has not been published as yet. In this advice, the Council again emphasised the importance of having Dutch Caribbean representation in the COHO, to make sure that the members of the COHO and the chairman have affinity with the islands.

In her 45-minute detailed and informative presentation, Dumfries provided worrisome facts about the growing national debts of Aruba, Curaçao and St. Maarten. The debt quota for St. Maarten, for example, grew from 51 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019 to 91 per



Evelin-Pierre Dumfries

cent in 2021 during the pandemic.

For Curaçao, the debt quota was 54 per cent in 2019 and 89 per cent in 2020. Aruba has the highest national debt: 84 per cent of GDP in 2019 and 117 to 130 per cent in 2020. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the critical line for the debt quota of small-economy Caribbean countries is 55 per cent.

An overview in Dumfries' presentation of the zero-per cent Dutch government loans for the Dutch Caribbean countries showed that St. Maarten from April 2020 up to now received NAF. 235.6 million in seven tranches. Curaçao and Aruba received substantially higher amounts.

In addition, St. Maarten received 15 million euros for the implementation of the country package, 30 million euros for the detention facilities, 2.7 million euros to strengthen law enforcement and 30 million in budget support after the implementation of measures.

Dumfries said she felt honoured to have given a presentation to a group of retired experts who worked on the islands in the past. "I was glad to be given the opportunity to explain the process and the workings of the COHO, the liquid-

ity support and the country packages. The audience was eager, inquisitive and they asked many well-informed questions."

One question, for example, was: When will the measuring of the effects of the country packages and the reform measures take place and based on which criteria, also in connection with the purchasing power of the people? Dumfries explained that this part still had to be worked out, also in relation to the result goals of the actions stemming from the Plans of Approach.

One member of the audience asked when the evaluation of the COHO would take place. This will be after three years, with the possibility to extend the COHO by two years each time, noted Dumfries. She predicted that it would be an "enormous challenge" for the COHO to assist the countries in reaching a sustainable economic level by 2027.

Another member of the audience asked whether it was realistic for the countries to repay the liquidity support loans and what would happen if the countries were unable to pay back. "Theoretically the countries can go bankrupt. Will the Netherlands allow this to happen?"

Dumfries replied that everything will depend on the evaluations and how the countries develop. "Fact is, however, that the countries need to implement reforms to become more resilient economically and socially. It remains to be seen whether the Netherlands, in light of the existence of the Dutch Kingdom, will allow the countries to go bankrupt."

The audience said it didn't expect this to happen, but that they were worried.



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The deadline for submission of applications will be October 15th, 2021.