



Sociaal Economische Raad  
Social Economic Council

## WORKING VISIT OF THE SOCIAL ECONOMIC COUNCIL (SER) SINT MAARTEN TO ARUBA

SEPTEMBER 23-27, 2012

### REPORT

A delegation of the Sint Maarten social economic council (SER) paid a working visit to the SER Aruba 25<sup>th</sup> year anniversary and a number of stakeholders in Aruba from Sunday 23<sup>th</sup> to Thursday 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

The delegation consisted of:

- R. Richardson, chairman SER
- A. Bute, member Chamber of Commerce
- W. Reed, member WICSU/PSU
- G. Richardson, secretary-general SER
- A. Alberts, senior policy advisor SER
- B. Peters, policy worker

The program of the working visit comprised:

- 1) Monday September 24<sup>th</sup>
  - Visit to the SER Aruba 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary
- 2) Tuesday September 25<sup>th</sup>
  - Visit and meeting with the SER Aruba board members and staff
  - Visit to the Central Bank of Aruba
  - Visit to the Chamber of Commerce of Aruba
- 3) Wednesday September 26<sup>th</sup>
  - Visit to the Central bureau of Statistics
  - Visit to the University department of economics and department of law
  - Visit to the Parliament of Aruba
- 4) Thursday May 24<sup>th</sup>
  - Travel back to Sint Maarten



Sociaal Economische Raad  
Social Economic Council

## 1. Monday, September 24th, 2012

On Monday, May 21<sup>st</sup>, the entire delegation paid a visit to the SER Aruba, where the 25 year anniversary of the SER Aruba was celebrated.

Among the guests were the governor of Aruba, His Excellency mr. F.J. Refunjol, the prime minister of Aruba, His Excellency mr. M. Eman, the chairman and board members of the SER Aruba, the secretary-general of the SER Curaçao Mrs. Provençe, several members of Parliament of Aruba and other local dignitaries.

The celebration started with the entrance of the governor while the national anthem of Aruba was played. In his speech the Chairman of SER Aruba spoke about the need for cooperation between government, employers and employees in matters pertaining the social-economic realm in Aruba. The prime minister of Aruba Mr. Mike Eman also emphasized the need for a Social Economic Council in Aruba and remarked on the social and economic development of Aruba in the last 25 years. The Chairman of the SER Sint Maarten René Richardson gave a speech and referred to the impressive economic development Aruba realized since it attained its Status Aparte, and the pivotal role the SER played in ensuring social harmony and balanced economic growth. He touched upon the social and economic challenges the rapid development entailed, and on the parallels between Aruba's and Sint Maarten's social and economic conditions. The secretary-general of the SER Curaçao spoke about the need for cooperation between the different countries within the Kingdom of the Netherlands after the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles. The celebration ended with the presentation of the new logo and brochure of the SER Aruba. After the speeches all the guests were invited to mingle and participate in the cutting of the birthday cake of the SER Aruba.



From left to right: Chairman SER Aruba R. Geerman, Secretary-General SER Aruba F. Bijlhout, Secretary-General SER Curacao J. Provençe, Prime Minister of Aruba M. Eman and Chairman SER Sint Maarten R. Richardson.



Sociaal Economische Raad  
Social Economic Council

## 2. Tuesday September 25th

On Tuesday, September 25, 2012, a delegation of SER Sint Maarten visited the board members of SER Aruba.

The purpose of the meeting was to have discussions about the process, challenges and future prospects of both Councils.

Members and Secretary SER Aruba:

- R. Geerman, Federacion di Trahadonan di Aruba (FTA) Chairman SER
- H. Bareño, independent member SER
- M. Brito, Sindicato di Empleadonan publico (Seppa) member ESCs
- F. van der Woude, employers association Aruban Building Industry (WAB) member ESCs
- F. Bijlhout, Secretary SER

Members and Secretary SER Sint Maarten

- R.A. Richardson, Chairman SER independent member
- A. Bute, Chamber of Commerce member SER
- W. Reed, Windward Island Civil Servant Union / Public Sector Union (WISCU / PSU) member SER
- G. Richardson, Secretary SER

The Secretary of SER Aruba welcomed the delegation from St. Maarten. He said that the president of SER Aruba was delayed. Information is exchanged on the composition and functioning of SER Aruba. The President of SER Aruba explains that the Council always strives to achieve a majority opinion. The President of SER Sint Maarten indicates that so far two advices with majority opinions were submitted to government in Sint Maarten. He also indicated that the SER Sint Maarten strives for unanimity.

The Secretary of Aruba explained that in the past the secretariat existed of only a single person. The SER was not satisfied with the state of affairs. The public and government also expressed the need for a secretariat with specialists. Sint Maarten had a secretariat of only one person in the first six months. As of March 2012, five of the six job openings within the Secretariat in Sint Maarten were fulfilled.

The SER Aruba will focus on a public campaign in the future. The SER Aruba seeks attention among the population by printing leaflets and launching a website. Sint Maarten is already on that track. In August of 2012 the SER website was launched. Next year SER Sint Maarten will organize a symposium for all SER's within the kingdom.



Sociaal Economische Raad  
Social Economic Council

- Visit Social Economic Council (SER) St Maarten to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Chamber)

The delegation of the SER Sint Maarten had a discussion with

- M.J. Can Mahawat, President Chamber
- L. Maduro, policy Chamber

The Board of the Chamber is composed of nine members. Five members represent the major companies, and four members represent small businesses. The members are elected for a period of three years, after which they may be re-elected if they choose to remain available within the Board of the Chamber.

The Chamber of Aruba knows the following departments: the Secretariat, ICT policy and the Financial Administration and Business Information and Support. In total there are 19 full-time employees, including the executive director.

The industry in Sint Maarten is 90% focused on tourism. In Aruba the Chamber supports the entrepreneurs involved in innovation. Developing new business ideas plays an important role in the Chamber of Aruba. The Aruba Chamber regularly organizes various events, such as trade missions, exhibitions, conferences and lectures to support their businesses. The Chamber of Sint Maarten organizes frequently lectures on financial and economic issues in cooperation with the government and / or the University of Sint Maarten. The Chamber of Sint Maarten gives advice to Government in the field of financial, economic and social spheres.

Member SER Sint Maarten member Mr. Bute (and Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce Sint Maarten) explains how the economy of Sint Maarten functions. Important sectors in the Sint Maarten economy besides tourism are ports and distribution function to Sint Eustatius, Saba and Anguilla. Mr. Bute also stated that especially in the tourism sector there are similarities and differences between both countries. In Aruba one has to deal with foremost 'stayover tourism while Sint Maarten has more cruise tourism.

The visit concluded with a tour of the building. The building is fully financed by the membership fees from the registered companies at the Chamber of Aruba.

- Visit to the Central Bank of Aruba

on Tuesday the SER Secretariat visited the Central Bank of Aruba and was received by department heads of Statistics and Research, and several staff members. The development and tasks of the Central Bank of Aruba was discussed in relation to the social economic development of Aruba. More specifically the need for reliable statistics, research and personnel with sufficient qualifications and skills was discussed. Other topics of discussion were direct foreign investments and the decisive policy decisions in the last 25 years by the Central Bank and the government of Aruba to stimulate the economic growth of the island.



Sociaal Economische Raad  
Social Economic Council

### 3. Wednesday October 26<sup>th</sup>

- The SER Secretariat visited on Wednesday the University of Aruba; Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management Studies and the Law Faculty, and the central Bureau of Statistics.

The SER secretariat discussed with the director of the bureau of Statistics mr. M. Balkestein the most important matters regarding statistics of Aruba. Most importantly the director mentioned the need to monitor closely the buildup of the population due to immigration and fertility rates. The population statistics have a major influence on pension, health, education, housing and labor policies. Mr. Balkestein has created a number of new ways to collect statistics, including data-entry modules for stakeholders, public-private partnerships and exchanging the skills within the bureau of statistics for data with other stakeholders.

- The University of Aruba met with the SER secretariat

The faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management Studies, represented by Prof. dr. Ryan Peterson mentioned several new initiatives to help develop economic innovation on Aruba. Another topic was the sequence of development of major institutions on Aruba and sustainable island economies in general. Most importantly island should identify institutional capabilities for sustainability.

In discussion with the SER the faculty of Law, represented by Dean mr. dr. Carlos Bollen and lecturer Dr. Viola van Bogaert named the most important developments in public law and private law on Aruba. The discussion focused on labor law and the current political situation on Curaçao in light of the constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Also some of the difficulties to implement international treaties were discussed.

- The entire delegation of the SER Sint Maarten visited the Parliament of Aruba

The SER delegation met with members of parliament involved in legislation connected to social and economic developments the last years on Aruba, more specifically laws related to the general compulsory pension scheme and health care laws.

The following Aruba members of Parliament were present:

Mr. Rene Herdé

Mrs. Desiree C. Kroes

Mr. Juan David Yrausquin

Both delegations emphasized the need to work together and acknowledged that they are already working together. The members of parliament told the SER Sint Maarten delegation the political track of the health care law was bumpy in Aruba. This was connected to a political discussion each time the premiums needed to be changed. This discussion inevitably is connected to the content of the insurance package. The Aruba delegation advised that the changing of premiums should be connected automatically to the yearly financial outcome of the health care system and this connection should be made at the introduction of health care legislation.



Sociaal Economische Raad  
Social Economic Council

The topic of the recently introduced obligatory general pension arrangement was also discussed at length. The Aruba parliament is in the process of changing the pension system and will share the new law as soon as it has become public.

Chairman of the SER Sint Maarten René Richardson expresses his gratitude for this warm welcome and wishes Aruba well for the future.