



Sociaal Economische Raad
Social Economic Council

SER symposium

Innovate or deteriorate

Corporate Social Responsibility as the Way Forward for Sint Maarten

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Opening address by the honorable Reynold A. Groeneveldt

Acting Governor of Sint Maarten

Social Economic Council (SER)

Symposium on: Corporate Social Responsibility

Chairman of the Social Economic Council, our Guest Professor dr. Ryan Peterson, a special welcome to you sir, Madame Prime Minister, Sarah Wescot-Williams, Members of the Council of Ministers, The Vice-President of Parliament, Members of Parliament, Dignitaries of French Saint Martin, Members of the High Councils of State, Corporate Leaders, Entrepreneurs, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen;

His Excellency Governor Holiday is away on official business. It is my distinct pleasure to attend this Symposium in my capacity as Acting Governor, and to be afforded the opportunity to present some introductory remarks.

First of all, I would like to make use of this opportunity to thank the Chairman of the Social Economic Council Mr. Rene Richardson and his entire staff for organizing this Symposium. I would also like to commend the SER for the manner in which it has taken on its responsibility since its inception and the professional way it is fulfilling tasks as a very important advisory body towards the Government. All of our Advisory Institutions and certainly the Social Economic Councils play a very important role in the development of our young but vibrant country and are essential for sustainable economic growth and social development. In this regard the SER places its emphasis on the Social and Economic aspects, in other words: the People is their main focus. I dare say that economic growth alone without the social and educational development of our people and the protection of the environment, can never lead to a sustainable development.

In order to guarantee a proper balance between economic development and the development of the people and environment a constant dialogue is needed between Government, Business and Unions. The SER is therefore the institution to create the forum for such consultations between the social partners in order to create the right climate and conditions for sustainable growth. I am extremely happy to see that this Symposium has been organized with the theme "Corporate Social Responsibility Innovate or Deteriorate". I am confident that our Keynote speaker will inspire us with his address and stimulate our thoughts on the best steps to take to move forward. I was elated to learn that dr. Peterson has Sint Maarten roots, this goes to show the greatness of our little country that we can produce human resources of this calibre. It is a pleasure to have you here today sir, to share your expertise and thoughts with us on how to move Sint Maarten forward in a manner that will guarantee a bright and prosperous future for all citizens, I include here, "corporate citizens" as well.

As a tourist destination it is very important that economic development goes hand in hand with the social growth and education of the people and the protection of our culture and the environment. The economic recession all around the world also has a negative impact on our little country as well as in the other parts of the Caribbean. I believe that this is the ideal time to innovate and develop new strategies and forms of co-operation. Our Government can do a lot but cannot do it alone. It is therefore required of all corporate enterprises to assist in the social and economic development of our country.

I recognize of course the good work of several good corporate citizens in our community but I believe that we should encourage and stimulate more structured corporate involvement in the overall social and economical development of our country and not leave it up to incidental contributions by some companies. Imagine what impact it would have on our development as a country if all enterprises on Sint Maarten join in a concerted effort together with Government to assist in improving our educational system, the continued professional development of our human resources, health care, social and charitable causes, the promotion of our arts and culture, the protection of our beaches, waterways, ponds, valleys and hills, and the promotion of Sint Maarten as the prime destination in the Caribbean. Not only by making financial contributions but by becoming true stakeholders in developing and executing policies, and by making all their resources available to this end. We need a new approach. I fully agree with the theme: "Innovate or Deteriorate", If we fail to come together as a Nation we will find ourselves failing and falling behind.

In preparing for this occasion I was referred to some background literature by the director of the Cabinet of the Governor. In particular a historic document that is referred to as the Akkoord of Wassenaar. This venture had a great effect on the economy and social development in the Netherlands. I recommend that as a follow up to this Symposium we consider developing our own Sint Maarten Accord. I believe that all corporations should assume their social responsibility and together with Government and Unions, enter into an agreement to jointly develop and implement a National Policy for sustainable economic growth and social development, taking into consideration among others: our tourism economy, the labour rights, the social/educational needs of the workers, the desire to eradicate un-employment and poverty, the overall improvement of our country as a tourism destination, the protection of our cultural heritage and the natural beauty of Sint Maarten. Such a Multi-Annual Policy and Action plan, if supported by all sectors and properly implemented will guarantee the desired sustainable and stable economic growth, labour harmony, and social development. I am sure that the SER under the capable leadership of its Chairman Mr. Richardson could play a significant role as one of the catalyst to achieve these goals.

I look forward to the Keynote address and the Panel Discussion on the way forward. In closing I would like to thank the SER for organizing this Symposium and dr. Peterson for your valuable contribution to this event. I expect many positive spin-off benefits from this exercise as we continue to build our Nation and develop its People. I declare this Symposium Opened.

I thank you,

Reynold A. Groeneveldt