

Chairpersons of Parliament praise resilience of Windward Islanders

THE HAGUE--Chairpersons of the First and Second Chambers of the Dutch Parliament Ankie Broekers-Knol and Khadija Arib said that during their visit to St. Maarten earlier this month they were struck by the resilience and the hands-on, positive attitude of the people.

The *Daily Herald* spoke with both chairpersons and asked them about their impressions of their visit to the three Windward Islands January 6-9. For Arib, who was elected Chairperson of the Second Chamber in January 2016, it was her first visit to the islands. Broekers-Knol had already been on the islands in October 2014 with the previous Chairperson of the Second Chamber Anouchka van Miltenburg.

Arib described the visit to St. Maarten on January 6, 7 and 8 as "impressive." "The island is truly beautiful, but you can clearly see the damage that was caused by the hurricane. I found it very special to see people in St. Maarten repairing their houses with limited means, improvising as they go along, and to see them trying to restore their lives to normalcy," she said.

Broekers-Knol praised St. Maarten and its people for the tremendous amount of work that has been done since Hurricane Irma.

"There are many private initiatives, recovery is visible everywhere and organisations such as the White

and Yellow Cross are developing valuable projects that benefit the island's reconstruction and the care for the vulnerable ones in society," she said.

"With the horrible images on TV after the hurricane in mind, I had prepared for the worst. But I was pleasantly surprised by how much work has been done. That is because the people have worked really hard. You can see how hard the island has been hit and it hurts me. But you can also see how hard the people work, how much resilience they show, and have deep respect for that."

Arib referred to the immense damage the hurricane has caused, not only physically, but also emotionally and in terms of unemployment, and the big blow to the local economy. "People told us that they still hear the horrendous loud noise that the hurricane made in their ears. But people are also out of a job. We spoke with many people. Their stories moved me," she said.

Arib said that what she heard and saw gave her great confidence in the people and their resilience, despite the fact that many are still awaiting payments from their home insurance and the effects of the Recovery Fund for which the Dutch Government has reserved 550 million euros.

Broekers-Knol said she found it important that the Dutch Government con-

tributed to St. Maarten's recovery. Getting tourists back to the island is vital as this will generate revenue and employment, she stated, adding that a speedy reconstruction of the St. Maarten airport will further contribute to increasing the tourism figures. "The economy is down. The island direly needs to get its economy back up and running."

Both Broekers-Knol and Arib expressed much appreciation for the way Saba has recovered.

"It is good to see that solidarity," said Arib.

"In Saba the people braced this disaster together. Right after the storm, they started cleaning, not only their own yard, but also the roads. I just love that spirit," said Broekers-Knol.

The Chairpersons mentioned Saba's disaster plan which they said was obviously well put together.

The Chairpersons visited Saba on January 8. Broekers-Knol said she had much appreciation for the "very professional approach" of Island Governor Jonathan Johnson, the members of the Executive Council and Island Council and their support staff, headed by Island Secretary Tim Muller. She also mentioned the input of social organisations. "The great unity and the goal-oriented mentality to tackle issues command respect," she said.

The Chairpersons of Parliament visited St. Eustatius on January 7, where they met with Acting Island Governor Julian Woodley and members of the Executive and Island Councils. Several locations where reconstruction is taking place after the hurricanes were visited. Here too, the Chairpersons could witness



Chairperson of the Second Chamber of the Dutch Parliament Khadija Arib (second from left), Chairperson of the First Chamber, the Senate, Ankie Broekers-Knol (second from right) with Chairperson of the St. Maarten Parliament Sarah Wescot-Williams (left) and Dutch Government Representative in Philipsburg Chris Johnson in St. Maarten earlier this month.

how people had worked hard to restore their homes and to clean their island.

During their stay in St. Maarten, Broekers-Knol and Arib were able to see the destruction caused by the hurricane during a tour of the Dutch side on January 6 and the French side on January 7. They were accompanied by Chairperson of the St. Maarten Parliament Sarah Wescot-Williams.

In the morning of January 8, the Chairpersons met with St. Maarten Governor Eugene Holiday and visited the White and Yellow Cross Care Foundation. They also met with Head of the Civil Recovery Mission Nico Schoof.

Broekers-Knol and Arib visited Curaçao on January 10, were in Bonaire the following day, and closed off their visit to the Dutch Caribbean in Aruba on January 12.

Arib said the visit to the



Chairpersons of the Dutch Parliament Khadija Arib (right) and Ankie Broekers-Knol (left) in Saba with Island Governor Chris Johnson on January 8.

Dutch Caribbean had given a good impression of the islands and their people, which she said would help her in carrying out her tasks as Chairperson of the Second Chamber. "It was my first time on the islands,

but our visit to the Windward Islands also served to show the people that we are with them and that we didn't forget them. I got the impression that our visit was well-appreciated," she said.

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Leona voices sympathy for govt., people of Netherlands

POND ISLAND--Prime Minister Leona Romeo-Marlin has expressed sympathy to the government and people of the Netherlands on the death of three people in the severe winter storm on Thursday.

"Our unwavering support and solidarity goes out to the Netherlands, its residents and Sint Maarteners living in the Netherlands," said Romeo-Marlin.

She sympathises with the families who have lost their loved ones and wishes them much strength in their time of grief.

News reports from the Netherlands have also indicated dozens of people were injured by falling trees and flying debris when the storm blew through the European part of the kingdom.