



Parliament of Sint Maarten

Staten van Sint Maarten

St. Martin Day Message of the Chairman of Parliament

Great Bay, November 11, 2019.

Fellow St. Martiners,
Residents of our beloved island,

Sixty years ago, the founding fathers of St. Martin Day – Dr. Hubert Petit, Claude Wathey and Clem LaBega – conceived of this day as a celebration of the people, by the people and for the people. Alas, that whole idea has been hijacked. This is what Dr. Hubert Petit had to say about what happened:

“...gradually, they (the colonial authorities) took over the celebration of St. Martin Day and they changed everything. We St. Martin people believed we had a day belonging to us, but in reality, they took it back from us... the spirit that existed at that time does not exist anymore. At that time, it just had a small population and we all were St. Martin people; we knew each other and we celebrated happily.”

Dr. Petit was speaking on a televised interview with Elton Richardson of the St. Martin In Retrospect program many, many rains ago. But his words apply just as much today, or probably even more so.

It is very clear that originally, St. Martin Day was a people's fete. Unity is what we are supposed to be celebrating, not the division of the island.

The true spirit of St. Martin Day should therefore not die after we have delivered all the sweet-sounding speeches on Nov. 11. This ritual needs to be rooted in the very dreams and aspirations of our people for a St. Martin that belongs to all of us.

If we were able to see ourselves in this manner, no decision would be taken in Great Bay without consultation with Marigot and vice versa. Let me give a concrete example. The controversial PPRN affects not only our brothers and sisters in Sandy Ground, Grand Case and Lamijo, but also several St. Martin people in Great Bay, Dutch Quarter and Simpson Bay who have family ties that stretch across the artificial borders.

The reverse is also true; whatever the fate of the Princess Juliana International Airport may be, it would affect all of us equally because it is the international gateway for the entire island, employing people from both sides of the island.

This island is ours because we built it with our blood, sweat and tears; it is ours because our forefathers and foremothers worked it from salt pond to salt pond; from valley to hill top; from sun up to sun down; a chant of freedom on their lips; salty sweat on their brows, dripping down their bodies with the sun as the promise of a better day for us their offspring.

We should therefore not allow anybody, no matter where they come from, to divide us and take over what is ours. St. Martin is ours by history and heritage; it is ours by dint of hard work and by divine destiny. We stand on this Rock we call home and shall not be moved from it, so help us God!

Happy St. Martin Day!