

QUARTERLY



Cabinet of the Minister Plenipotentiary of Sint Maarten

This quarter brought major community moments and high-level engagement. We reflect on St. Martin Day celebrations, highlight NextGen initiatives, including Miss Dutch Caribbean 2026, and share key Kingdom and governance milestones, such as the VNG International partnership, InterExpo discussions, the Extraordinary Joint Session of the States General and the Kingdom Day programme in The Hague. We also look back on UNESCO engagements in Samarkand, diplomatic exchanges with ambassadors and partners, and Cabinet meetings that reinforce Sint Maarten's growing visibility and collaboration in The Netherlands.



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SINT MAARTEN COMMUNITY CELEBRATES ST. MARTIN DAY 2025

The Sint Maarten community in the Netherlands came together on Saturday, November 8, for a vibrant celebration of St. Martin Day at De Broodfabriek in Rijswijk. The event drew hundreds of Sint Maarteners and friends of the island filled with cultural performances, local vendors, music, and island spirit.

Hosted by the Cabinet of the Minister Plenipotentiary and Small Island Unity (SIU), the event featured a program including live steelpan performances, a brass band, cultural dances, and artists such as Ebony Empress, Big Mac and DJ Bean. Guests enjoyed island cuisine, art displays, and a lively atmosphere that show the essence of “one island, one people, two nations, one heart.”

In her speech Minister Arrindell reflected on the significance of the day and the importance of unity within the diaspora. “Today, we celebrate not only the beauty and resilience of our island, but the spirit of unity that binds us. Our diaspora is not a distant community, it is an untapped asset, full of talent, innovation, and belonging that Sint Maarten needs more than ever.”

As the rhythms of bouyon and soca filled the hall, visitor Candy Hazel said it was a success: “Over the past two years, I’ve seen the visibility of Sint Maarten in the Netherlands grow tremendously. This celebration was once again amazing!”



OFFICIAL ST. MARTIN DAY RECEPTION



The Cabinet of the Minister Plenipotentiary hosted a warm St. Martin Day reception on Tuesday, 11 November. The celebration brought together representatives from the Kingdom, the diplomatic corps, and friends of the island for an evening of culture, music and unity.

The program opened with the national song of Sint Maarten. Congratulatory remarks were delivered by Mr. Carlson Manuel, former Minister Plenipotentiary of Curaçao, Mr. François Alabrune, Ambassador of France, and Dr. René Bagchus, Director of Kingdom Relations - Caribbean Netherlands. The Cabinet of Aruba was represented by Ms. Shandra John, who conveyed greetings on behalf of Aruba.

In her St. Martin Day address, Minister Arrindell, reflected on the island’s progress, resilience, and the importance of regional cooperation. “Since achieving our new status as a country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, we are fully aware that we can chart our own course while passing the torch of democracy to the next generation of leaders.”

A cultural highlight of the evening was a dynamic performance by Frameless Collective, followed by a ceremonial toast, the cutting of the St. Martin Day cake, and the sharing of personal stories, capturing the spirit of One Island, One People, One Celebration.



NEXTGEN SINT MAARTEN

MINISTER PLENIPOTENTIARY ARRINDELL SERVES AS JUROR FOR MISS DUTCH CARIBBEAN 2026 PAGEANT



On Saturday, 15 November, Minister Arrindell served as a jury member for the Miss Dutch Caribbean 2026. The casting day took place at the Cabinet and featured a dynamic judging panel including former title holders and representatives from private- sector organizations. Together they evaluated their talent, confidence, and overall presentation.

The event was vibrant and inspiring celebrating themes of empowerment, cultural pride, diversity inspiration, and personal growth. Minister Arrindell said: "I deeply admire these young women who courageously stepped forward to present themselves, share their stories, and embrace the challenges of the pageant with poise and determination".

A heartfelt thank-you was extended to all participants, fellow jury members and to Alexandra Atalita for her leadership in organizing this successful Casting Day.

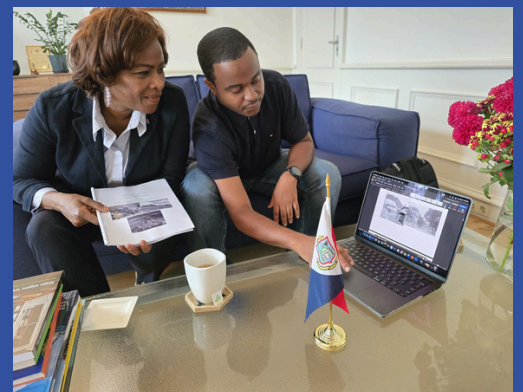
YOUNG SINT MAARTEN HISTORIAN JEAN-MARC AUGUSTY MEETS WITH MINISTER ARRINDELL

Minister Arrindell met with young Sint Maarten historian Mr. Jean-Marc Augusty, who travelled to the Netherlands for a research visit. Mr. Augusty conducted research at Leiden University, supported by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW), with additional sponsorship from the Plantz family.

During his visit, Augusty consulted historical materials at the Nationaal Archief and the University of Amsterdam, including rare maps of Sint Maarten. The discussion also highlighted challenges in securing funding and timely access to information for academic research, including delays in requests to certain entities.

The meeting addressed broader heritage matters, including the state and location of Sint Maarten's historical archives and the need to review and update the monument ordinance, which Augusty described as outdated and insufficiently enforced. He presented Minister Arrindell with his ongoing research and noted that he is exploring funding opportunities through UNESCO.

Another concern raised was the erosion of Fort Amsterdam, one of Sint Maarten's most significant historic sites. Augusty emphasized the importance of safeguarding the site and noted that it is not government-owned, raising the question of whether funding, locally or through Kingdom channels, could support reacquisition. Minister Arrindell expressed her appreciation for Mr. Augusty's dedication and contributions to researching and preserving Sint Maarten's history.



REPRESENTATION AT HIGH LEVEL MEETINGS

SINT MAARTEN FORMALIZES EXTRAORDINARY MEMBERSHIP WITH VNG INTERNATIONAL

The Government of Sint Maarten has taken another significant step in strengthening the civil service and unlocking funding opportunities with the formal signing of the Certificate of Extraordinary Membership with the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG International). The signing took place following a high-level working meeting between the Government of Sint Maarten and VNG International representatives.

Prime Minister Dr. Luc F.E. Mercelina was accompanied by a delegation including Drs. Gracita R. Arrindell, Minister Plenipotentiary, and Mr. Stuart Johnson, Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister. Their presence affirmed the government's commitment to strengthening governance frameworks, ensuring compliance, and maximizing future cooperation opportunities.

The certificate, co-signed by Prime Minister Mercelina and VNG Chair, Mayor of Utrecht, Mrs. Sharon Dijksma, officially recognizes Sint Maarten's extraordinary membership. Reflecting on the occasion, the Prime Minister stated: "The signing of this certificate is far more than a formality. It is a statement of confidence in Sint Maarten's future. Through this strengthened partnership with VNG International, we are unlocking new avenues of support, knowledge exchange, and technical expertise that will directly improve the lives of our people."

During the meeting, the Government of Sint Maarten and VNG International discussed priority areas for a proposed 10-year programme, including strengthening mental health services, supporting the training of medical professionals, and transitioning toward greener and more sustainable energy sources. The discussions also addressed outstanding technical assistance under the TWO Country Packages, including the status of available support and the potential reallocation of remaining resources.

Human resource development featured prominently, with a focus on recruitment needs within key ministries, training opportunities for medical specialists, and pathways for other medical personnel in anticipation of the opening of the new hospital. Prime Minister Mercelina emphasized: "Our people are our greatest resource. By investing in training and development, we are investing in a stronger Sint Maarten."

Concluding the meeting, the Prime Minister remarked: "Sint Maarten stands ready to work side-by-side with VNG International to build the professional, service-oriented public sector our citizens deserve. Today's signing marks a new chapter, one where cooperation leads to real, tangible progress for our island nation."



REPRESENTATION AT HIGH LEVEL MEETINGS

DIPLOMAT MAGAZINE HIGHLIGHTS MINISTER ARRINDELL

The Minister Plenipotentiary, Drs. Gracita R. Arrindell, was recently featured in the latest edition of Diplomat Magazine. In this issue, Minister Arrindell is highlighted in the magazine's Diplomat VIP section, a distinction that recognizes influential voices within the diplomatic community in The Hague and beyond.

The feature, titled "Sint Maarten: A Bridge between the Kingdom and the Caribbean," highlights Sint Maarten's unique position as a connector between the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the wider Caribbean and Latin American region. It reflects on the island's forward-looking vision, centered on education, culture, and sustainability, and touches on themes such as purposeful tourism, innovation, regional cooperation, and diplomacy in action.

Minister Arrindell expressed her appreciation for the feature, noting that it contributes to strengthening the visibility of Sint Maarten within European and international diplomatic circles. More information can be found on [our](#) website.



MINISTER PLENIPOTENTIARY ATTENDS EXTRAORDINARY JOINT SESSION OF THE STATES GENERAL



On Thursday, 20 November, Minister Arrindell attended an Extraordinary Joint Session of the States General at the Grote Kerk in The Hague. The gathering marked eighty years since the Dutch Senate and House of Representatives met jointly for the first time after the Second World War.

The session commemorated 20 November 1945, a pivotal moment when the Dutch parliamentary system began to recover after years of war and occupation, underscoring the importance of democratic governance alongside post-war reconstruction.



Extraordinary Joint Sessions are held only on exceptional occasions; the previous one took place in 2015, marking the 200th anniversary of the States General. The date was chosen to reflect on freedom and the need to protect democratic institutions in a time marked by conflict, polarization, and societal pressures.

The ceremony, attended by His Majesty King Willem-Alexander and Princess Amalia, featured remarks by the Presidents of both Chambers, outgoing Prime Minister Schoof, and General (ret.) Peter van Uhm. By attending, Minister Arrindell reaffirmed Sint Maarten's engagement within the Kingdom's constitutional traditions and the democratic values for future generations.

REPRESENTATION AT HIGH LEVEL MEETINGS

MINISTER ARRINDELL HIGHLIGHTS INNOVATION, EDUCATION AND CULTURAL PROTECTION AT UNESCO GENERAL CONFERENCE

Drs. Gracita R. Arrindell, Minister Plenipotentiary, addressed the 43rd session of the UNESCO General Conference, which took place in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. It is the first time since 1985 that the biennial conference is being held outside of Paris.

Representing the Honourable Melissa D. Gumbs, Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Minister Arrindell highlighted ongoing efforts in education reform, digital innovation, and cultural protection. She emphasized that technological progress must go hand in hand with integrity and creativity, stating that “AI must amplify Caribbean creativity, not appropriate it.”

Minister Arrindell also underscored advances in higher education, including the new Higher Education and Research Ordinance, which sets national standards for quality assurance and international accreditation. “Education remains a public trust,” she said. “It is the foundation of national resilience.”

She further highlighted new initiatives in Artificial Intelligence and STEAM education, developed through partnerships with the St. Maarten Science Fair Foundation, the St. Kitts & Nevis Robotics Association, and the OECS Robotics Association. She reaffirmed the cultural vision: “Culturize before you digitize. We do not reject technology; we seek to humanize it.”

The Minister also referenced growing leadership in heritage protection, including the establishment of the region’s first Caribbean Cultural Emergency Response (CER) Sub-Hub, and ongoing efforts toward a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

In closing, Minister Arrindell expressed gratitude for UNESCO’s continued support and solidarity with small island nations, and extended heartfelt thoughts to Jamaica, Haiti, Cuba, and other countries affected by Hurricane Melissa. She concluded: “Together, may we build a world where knowledge inspires peace, and culture lights the path forward.”



MINISTER PLENIPOTENTIARY ATTENDS JAPANESE TABLES EVENING IN LEIDEN

On 26 November, Minister Plenipotentiary, Drs. Gracita R. Arrindell, participated in the annual Japanese Tables Evening, hosted by SIB-Leiden at Leiden's City Hall. Now in its 23rd edition, the event brought together 48 ambassadors and over 150 students.

Following a welcome by the Deputy Mayor of Leiden, students engaged directly with diplomats and high-ranking officials. At Minister Arrindell's table, a diverse group of international students discussed different topics, including Kingdom relations, the role of the Cabinet, and the impact of climate change on Sint Maarten's coastlines. Arrindell also shared Sint Maarten's strategic direction to sustainable development, strong institutions, and enhanced regional and global cooperation.

This edition marked the second occasion on which Ministers Plenipotentiary were invited to participate, adding meaningful perspective to discussions on shared Kingdom challenges. Reflecting on the evening, Minister Arrindell stated: "Taking part in this yearly forum with the students at the Japanese tables has been a deeply enriching experience, one that allowed us not only to share our own journeys, but also listen closely to their voices and aspirations as the next generation of leaders."



B.U.C. CONFERENCE: STRENGTHENING KINGDOM COOPERATION



On Friday, 3 October, Minister Arrindell took part in a conference, organised by the BeNeLux University Centre (B.U.C.), at The Hague City Hall. Under the theme "Perspectives on Sustainable Coexistence within the Kingdom," the conference brought together experts, policymakers, and cultural leaders to explore how cooperation within the Kingdom can be strengthened.

From a Sint Maarten perspective, Minister Arrindell emphasized the importance of intergenerational mobility and long-term structural collaboration within the Kingdom, highlighting the Cabinet's new diaspora database. The database aims to connect and empower students and young professionals across borders. "Intergenerational mobility is essential. With this initiative, we aim to bridge the gap and create a structural basis for sustainable cooperation," she noted.



The conference also featured contributions from Minister of State Prof. Jan Peter Balkenende and Council of State member Mr. Paul Comenencia. In the coming months, the Forum will present a joint declaration outlining key action points for the future, reinforcing the ambition to build a Kingdom rooted in mutual respect, opportunity, and sustainable progress.

DIPLOMATIC DIARY

Some meetings, moments & milestones from the past quarter

The Diplomatic Diary covers some of the diplomatic exchanges over the past quarter. The Minister Plenipotentiary met during this period with numerous ambassadors among which from: the United States of America, Belgium, Hungary and the United Kingdom. Here are a few highlights:



Hungarian Ambassador Szilágyi-Landeck

On Friday, 14 November, Minister Arrindell welcomed H.E. Dániel Horogszegi Szilágyi-Landeck, Ambassador of Hungary, for an official courtesy meeting at the Cabinet of the Minister Plenipotentiary of Sint Maarten.

The meeting touched on mutual interests and opportunities for cooperation and several areas where Hungary and Sint Maarten can further deepen their partnership.



USA Ambassador Popolo

On Thursday, December 4, Minister Arrindell welcomed the newly appointed United States Ambassador, H.E. Joseph Popolo Jr., for an introductory courtesy visit at the Cabinet of the Minister Plenipotentiary of Sint Maarten.

Ambassador Popolo Jr. began his tenure on 8 October 2025. The meeting took place in a warm atmosphere and provided an opportunity for mutual introductions as the Ambassador continues his tour with key partners throughout the Kingdom.



British Ambassador Rampling

Minister Arrindell welcomed H. E. Chris Rampling, British Ambassador, for an introductory courtesy visit on Wednesday, November 19.

During the meeting, they engaged in a constructive discussion centered on disaster preparedness, infrastructure resilience, and health-sector capacity building, including opportunities for strengthening nursing education and training.



VISIT MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, HEERA DIJK

On Friday December 5, Minister Plenipotentiary Drs. Gracita R. Arrindell received a courtesy visit from Ms. Heera Dijk, who recently joined the Dutch House of Representatives, as a member of the Kingdom Relations committee on behalf of D66. The meeting served as an opportunity to exchange views and formally welcome her in her new role.

Dijk is responsible for the parliamentary portfolios of Kingdom Relations, including Sint Maarten, Curaçao, Aruba and the BES islands, as well as Culture. During the conversation, the Minister and Ms. Dijk briefly discussed shared priorities within the Kingdom and the importance of continued constructive cooperation.

The Cabinet looks forward to further engagement as Ms. Dijk begins her tenure in the House of Representatives.



MINISTER ARRINDELL ATTENDS U.S. MISSION HOLIDAY RECEPTION IN THE HAGUE

On Wednesday, 10 December, Minister Plenipotentiary Dr. Gracita R. Arrindell, attended the holiday reception hosted by H.E. U.S. Ambassador Joe Popolo and Mrs. Popolo at the U.S. Mission to the Netherlands.

The reception brought together representatives, partners, and community leaders from across the Kingdom and the Netherlands, offering an opportunity to connect and exchange holiday greetings in a warm and welcoming setting. Reflecting on the occasion, Ambassador Popolo stated: "I, along with our entire Mission team, wish you a joyous holiday filled with all that each of us holds dear."

The Minister Plenipotentiary and the Cabinet value the continued engagement and cooperation with the United States and look forward to further strengthening these ties. "On behalf of the Cabinet of the Minister Plenipotentiary, I extend sincere thanks to His Excellency Ambassador Joseph Popolo Jr, and his spouse for the warm hospitality extended to us. We look forward to a new year marked by peace, prosperity and enduring friendship".

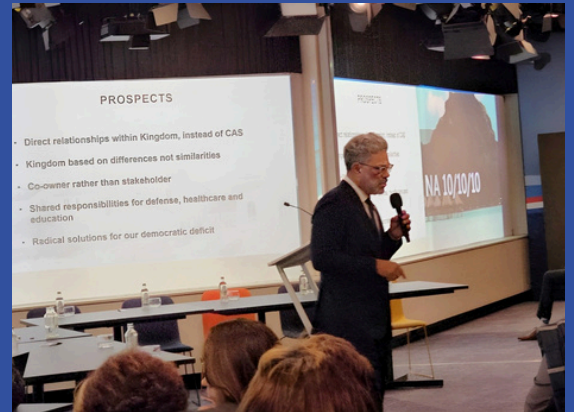


PRIME MINISTER MERCELINA CALLS FOR MODERN KINGDOM DIALOGUE

During the 36th InterExpo Kingdom Relations Congress, held under the theme “Fifteen Years After 10/10/10,” Prime Minister Dr. Luc F.E. Mercelina reflected on 15 years of constitutional autonomy and urged participants to view this period within a longer constitutional history. He was accompanied by Drs. Gracita R. Arrindell, Minister Plenipotentiary.

The Prime Minister highlighted lessons from recent crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and global economic disruptions, stressing the need for strong institutions and investment in key pillars like healthcare and education. “Nation-building is expensive,” he noted.

Looking ahead, Prime Minister Mercelina called for a more modern and equitable Kingdom model based on equality, trust, and mutual respect, and proposed establishing a Kingdom Political Dialogue Platform. He also expressed his intention to seek support for a formal invitation to the Netherlands, Aruba, and Curaçao for a Kingdom summit to advance a new, positive agenda.



KINGDOM DAY 2025 – FROM PAST TO CONNECTION

On Monday, 15 December, the Minister Plenipotentiary attended the Kingdom Day 2025 celebration at The Hague University of Applied Sciences, alongside representatives from Curaçao and Aruba.

Kingdom Day marks the signing of the Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands on 15 December 1954, the foundation of the Kingdom as it exists today, built on equality, cooperation, and shared responsibility.

Under the theme, “From Past to Connection: Building the Future Together,” the programme featured plenary sessions and discussions on topics including self-determination, island governance, climate justice, small-scale economies, and cultural development. Keynote contributions were delivered by Mr. Thom de Graaf, Vice President of the Council of State, and Professor Dr. Wouter Veenendaal (Leiden University).

The event brought together students, researchers, policymakers, and representatives from across the Kingdom, underscoring the importance of dialogue, knowledge exchange, and cooperation in working towards a shared future. Reflecting on her participation, Minister Arrindell stated: “My active participation in this forum on Kingdom Day December 15 is a testament to our commitment to fostering mutual understanding and furthering the common values we share within the Kingdom of the Netherlands.



NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN THE NETHERLANDS

On October 29th, Minister Plenipotentiary Drs. Gracita R. Arrindell exercised her right to vote during the national elections in the Netherlands.

"Voting is not something I take for granted. Many citizens around the world do not have this opportunity for various reasons. As a woman, this right carries even deeper meaning, generations of women fought tirelessly for the right to have our voices heard at the ballot box. Each time I vote, I honor their struggles. Every vote counts. Every voice matters."



NEW YEARS MESSAGE

The Cabinet of the Minister Plenipotentiary extends sincere New Year's greetings to the people of Sint Maarten, Sint Maarteners in the Netherlands, and our partners and friends across the Kingdom and beyond.

"As we enter 2026, we reaffirm our commitment to constrictive dialogue, meaningful cooperation, and effective representation of Sint Maarten's interest. Together, we look ahead with hope continuing to build resilience, and shape a future in which all our communities can thrive. May the New Year bring you and your loved ones health, unity, prosperity and peace."



IN OUR NEXT EDITION...

In the upcoming edition, the Cabinet will look ahead to a renewed and dynamic period of engagement. We will highlight the relaunch of the Cabinet After 5 sessions, creating fresh spaces for dialogue, connection, and exchange with the community.

The next issue will also focus on the strengthening of diplomatic relations and continued outreach to international partners, alongside political engagements with the newly formed Dutch Cabinet.

In addition, we will share updates on the continuation and expansion of our student and diaspora programmes, including outreach initiatives, the diaspora database, educational support, housing-related information, and cultural events aimed at keeping Sint Maarten's community closely connected and informed.

