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Violence against women on islands needs higher priority

UTRECHT--Violence against women in Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba deserves higher priority and more concrete action by the Dutch Government, the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights (College voor de Rechten van de Mens) stated in its 2014 annual report.

The 200-plus-page report, published on Tuesday, dedicated a section to the three public entities Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba

that are part of the Netherlands. The size and severity of domestic violence and violence against women and girls is substantial in the Caribbean Netherlands and it is a problem that is largely caused by poverty.

Therefore, the Dutch Government needs to concretely tackle both the issue of domestic violence and poverty on the islands. The Netherlands Institute for Human

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Social, cultural history study of Windward Islands starts

LEIDEN--The history of St. Maarten, St. Eustatius and Saba will get a much-needed revisit in a new project which focuses on the social and cultural history of these islands in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with a particular emphasis on the dynamics of migration, governance and regional entities.

Dr. Jessica Vance Roitman of the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies KITLV will be responsible for the research. Roitman's research is part of the overall project, "Confronting the Caribbean Challenges: Hybrid Identities and Governance in Small-scale Island Jurisdictions."

The project, which includes not only Roitman's research, but

also three other projects which will analyse the intersection of political reforms, often intensive migrations and current practices of governance from the perspective of political science, media studies, and cultural and environmental heritage on all six Dutch Caribbean islands. The emphasis, though, will be on the least studied of the six former Netherlands Antilles, the Caribbean Netherlands and St. Maarten.

The "Confronting Caribbean Challenges" project, for which the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science OCW has made around 750,000 euros avail-

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Airport Managing Director Regina Labega symbolically breaks ground for the renovation of the airport cargo building along with Members of Parliament Cornelius de Weever and Sarah Wescot-Williams, Airport Special Projects Coordinator Robert "Cliffy" Brown, Airport Board Secretary Melinda Hoeve, Airport Holding Company Chairman Michel Hodge and Airport Supervisory Board Vice-President Ludwig Ouenniche. See story on page 7. (Alita Singh photo)

Rita supports decriminalisation of marijuana for medicinal use

PHILIPSBURG--Acting Minister of Public Health, Social Development and Labour Rita Bourne-Gumbs said on Tuesday that she "is completely for the decriminalisation of marijuana and cannabis-related products for medicinal use."

She was responding at the time to several questions posed by *The*

Daily Herald on the subject via the Press Secretariat. In her brief response, she also said she "is completely against the decriminalisation of marijuana for personal abuse."

However, she said the actual decriminalisation or changing of the law must happen in Parliament.

When asked to weigh in on the

issue, Minister of Justice Dennis Richardson said he was unable to comment at this time as this topic needed careful consideration and consultation with all persons and organisations involved.

The decriminalisation of marijuana in the correct way was supported during a discussion at a forum at the Belair Community Centre on April 18.

United St. Maarten (US) party leader Member of Parliament (MP) Frans Richardson said recently that it was time to talk

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IN BRIEF

Philipsburg AUTOPSY IN HOLLAND

The body of the unknown person found in the Dawn Beach area on April 29 has been flown to the Netherlands for an autopsy. Page 3.

The Hague ST. MAARTEN PAY OWN DEBTS

The Dutch Government is not obliged to help out St. Maarten financially if the latter country fails to reach an agreement to pay off the debt to APS and SZV. Page 3.

Marigot PAY TAX

Territorial Council President Aline Hanson reminds citizens that the 2014 Income Tax Return forms will be delivered to every household shortly. Page 11.

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Social, cultural history study

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able was part of a larger drive to focus research on the former Netherlands Antilles, especially the Caribbean Netherlands. Eight other projects were also awarded for funding.

The project integrates an interest in past (historical development), the present (governance, migration and citizenship issues) and future (sustainable tourism capitalising on natural and historical heritage). The project director is KITLV Director Prof. Dr. Gert Oostindie.

The central question of the overall project is how political reforms and intensive migrations affect historically grounded identities and political practices on the islands. The sub-project on the social and cultural history of the three Windward Islands carried out by United States-born Roitman fits perfectly within this theme.

Roitman's study will look at the implications and legacies of colonialism and the long-standing migratory patterns for identity, heritage and politics, and will cover the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One



Dr. Jessica Vance Roitman (left) and PhD student Stacey Mac Donald of the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies KITLV in Leiden. In the background a historic photo of Saba's Fort Landing before the harbour was built. (Suzanne Koelega photo)

of her first activities was a visit to St. Maarten, St. Eustatius and Saba in January and February of this year, to search for documents and talk with local history experts and others.

"I wanted to find out what local people thought about their own histories, what they thought was missing from the history books, generally what their take was. I also wanted to see whether there were documents that I could use," she said an interview with The

Daily Herald.

"Looking at government documents, which are mostly what is in the archives, will only give you one side of the story, so I am adding the information that I am getting from expert locals. I wanted to see what oral histories had already been recorded, if there were other people out there who might want to share their stories with me, and, of course, if there were any old letters in forgotten boxes stored away somewhere," she said.

"Retrieving local oral history is important because most documents from the past about the islands were written from a Dutch Government perspective, and written for governmental purposes. As such there was little room for the human aspects, for example the daily life of slaves whose voices were not heard," she said.

Much of the (historic) documentation that was written about the Windward Islands is not to be found locally, so Roitman has paid visits to the Dutch National Archives in The Hague and the National Archive in Curaçao. "There is a lot of historic material in Curaçao and The Hague which will hopefully get digitalised, including the slave registers of St. Eustatius.

Roitman said that many documents concerning the history of slavery in the Antilles had already been digitalised by the National Archives. But, unfortunately, not much that concerned the Windward Islands, which highlights the general focus on Curaçao, Aruba and Suriname, which still pervades Dutch history writing on the former colonies in the Caribbean.

There are still massive technological challenges and funding problems to complete the process of digitalisation. "Many documents need preservation and unfortunately many of them are in a bad state, especially those of the nineteenth century printed on low quality paper."

The history of the Windward Islands with the Dutch colonial empire often gets forgotten because Curaçao and Suriname were the darlings of the Dutch empire as they made more money than the other islands. "I hope to make people in the Netherlands more aware of the history of the Windward Islands. It makes me mad that the historical focus is always on Curaçao and Suriname, and the Windward Islands are simply forgotten," she said.

Migration has played a big part in the history of the Windward Islands. That is why Roitman will also look at the links between the islands. "My perspective is regional. I will look at migration from a social, cultural and historical per-

spective, and see how it has formed and continues to form people's identity. One of the consequences is that multiple languages are spoken on the Windward Islands."

The Leiden-based researcher plans to travel to the Windward Islands at least twice per year until the completion of the project late 2018. Roitman aims to have her sub-project published in hard-copy academic book format. She also hopes to publish the results via so-called open-access by making it available online. The advantage of open-access is that it is freely accessible for a larger public since academic books are expensive to buy and make it harder for the general public to have access to the results of the research.

Roitman's acquaintance with the Dutch Caribbean dates back to her work in a previous large, historical project, the "Dutch Atlantic Connections" project in which trade, including the slave trade, in the seventeenth and eighteenth century played a prominent

role. Roitman, who studied Latin American history and did her PhD at Leiden University, worked on this project from 2011 to 2014.

Researcher Dr. Wouter Veenendaal, who will visit St. Eustatius in June, will provide a comparative study on the impact of the new municipal status on the opinions and behaviour of island residents, civil servants and politicians in the Caribbean Netherlands. Researcher Sanne Rotmeijer will focus on the islands' media, their role in the small island communities and the choices that are made in covering the news.

PhD student Stacey Mac Donald, who was born in Curaçao, will chart local politics in two fields that are considered vital for sustainable development in these small-scale economies heavily dependent on tourism, nature conservation and cultural heritage. Mac Donald will also visit St. Eustatius and Saba in June for an introductory visit and later return to the islands for a more extensive data collection.



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United Telecommunication Services (UTS) has provided Internet bandwidth for the 14th St. Martin/St. Maarten Annual Regional Trade Show (SMART) in Sonesta Maho Beach Resort and Casino, which starts today, Wednesday, and continues until Friday. The service will allow local and international participants to conduct their business as usual while at the trade show. "We are happy to support this yearly initiative in its aim to further strengthen the main pillar of our economy, which is tourism," said UTS Marketing and Communication Officer Ivy Lambert (left). SMART is jointly organised by L'Association des Hoteliers de St. Martin and St. Maarten Hospitality and Trade Association in conjunction with the St. Martin Office du Tourisme and St. Maarten Tourist Bureau. Also in photo is SHTA Executive Director Anenda Zaandam.