

Stork: Island can be 'more ambitious' with MDGs

~ Enlightening public lecture on MDGs at USM ~

PHILIPSBURG--St. Maarten, poised to become a country within the Dutch Kingdom, has an opportunity to be "more ambitious" with attaining the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Deputy Resident Representative for the Netherlands Antilles, Sur-

name, and Trinidad and Tobago Edo Stork told *The Daily Herald* in an interview early Tuesday.

Stork said St. Maarten was far from an underdeveloped or now-developing country, so it could be more ambitious when pursuing the development goals.

"Let's face it: St. Maarten is no Somali. There is already universal primary education, so now this has to be taken a step further," said Stork who is on the island for

a two-day MDG workshop. Stork, Director of the Department for Development Cooperation DE-POS Ralph James and other officials were also key speakers at a public lecture on MDGs at University of St. Martin (USM) on Tuesday evening.

Stork told attendees at the lecture that St. Maarten had made "tremendous strides" in attaining the desirable MDG levels over the past few decades. "In fact, you can say that St. Maarten is a front-runner in the Caribbean, especially considering its size," he said stressing the need for statistical information to gauge the island's progress in attaining appropriate MDG levels.

"In St. Maarten and the Netherlands Antilles there has been tremendous progress. We can't com-

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ISLAND CAN BE 'MORE AMBITIOUS'

pare St. Maarten to places such as Africa, but there are areas to be explored and this is a major opportunity for St. Maarten to take these MDGs and to see how we can fit it here and make it useful for St. Maarten."

During his interview with this newspaper, Stork pointed out that with the first MDG - providing decent employment - countries now had to work with the private sector to see how this could be achieved within the backdrop of the waning global economic crisis.

Similarly, with the second goal - proper and accessible education for all - St. Maarten, which has policies in place that give all children access, is an island that can do more. It's time to look at more specific educational areas such as special needs/education and improvement on them, the UN representative said.

Gender empowerment is the third MDG. Immediately, people think of women's empowerment, but the Netherlands Antil-

les is facing problems with too many boys dropping out of school. "So this is not a women's issue, but a real gender issue."

The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015, form a blueprint agreed to by all the world's countries and leading development institutions. They have galvanised unprecedented efforts to meet the needs of the world's poorest.

The eight MDGs were decided on by world leaders at the Millennium Summit September 2000 as the minimum standard all countries must attain for the living, health and environmental conditions for their populations. These goals had to be translated into policies and programmes by the countries.

The two-day MDG workshop, in the UTS Training Centre, started Tuesday and was attended by rep-

resentatives of government departments, the private sector and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). MDG Policy Advisor for the UNDP Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (RBLAC) Stefano Pettinato is leading the workshop.

Creating partnerships is a goal of the workshop. Government has to create the policy, the private sector has to carry out the parts relevant to its workings and the NGOs have to give feedback on whether the policies and implementation are up to par with the MDGs, Stork said, adding that the media also had a monitoring role in the attainment of the MDGs.

Data and statistics need to be collected to better assess the attainment of the minimum level of the goals in each country. This is where the workshop in St. Maarten comes in.

A goal of the workshop is to build the MDGs into a report that outlines "practical purposes" such as projects and programmes everyone in the community can understand and play a part in. "We don't want a report that will be shelved. We have to make the MDGs relevant to the people in the streets."

Stork hopes this review will be completed before 10-10-10, the date for the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles and the emergence of St. Maarten as a country. "The report will be a tremendous help for country policy makers," Stork said.

James, who opened the workshop, said it brought together the policy makers and the long-run implementers. The forum is the review of the MDGs in St. Maarten.

The Netherlands Antilles, as a country, has to prepare

a review of the MDGs for the midterm review by the United Nations this September. This review will be presented by Prime Minister Emily de Jongh-Elhage.

The indicators for the MDGs to suit St. Maarten will be ironed out with input from the stakeholders. The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) will use these indicators with its collection methods to gather the necessary data. This data can also be used by the government of country St. Maarten to amp up its compliance with the MDGs.

James said countries like the Netherlands Antilles had a unique opportunity to measure the quality of life for their citizens, especially their poor, because improvements to health care, education and access to opportunities directly impacted their lives.

The Antillean Government "fully committed" to achieve the MDGs, James said. "Documenting our actions, successes, experiences and the challenges ahead, the upcoming MDG report will prove our firm commitment and spur all parties to work together in building a strong partnership for the development of St. Maarten."

"... Putting St. Maarten on the global map of the MDGs requires promoting a collective responsibility and strengthening of the local capacities for coordination, advocacy and also regional cooperation," James stated.

At Tuesday night's lecture, Health and Social Affairs Commissioner Hyacinth Richardson spoke about developments in the area of health and social development over the years. He elaborated on issues such as the health study "How Healthy is St. Maarten," the results of which, he

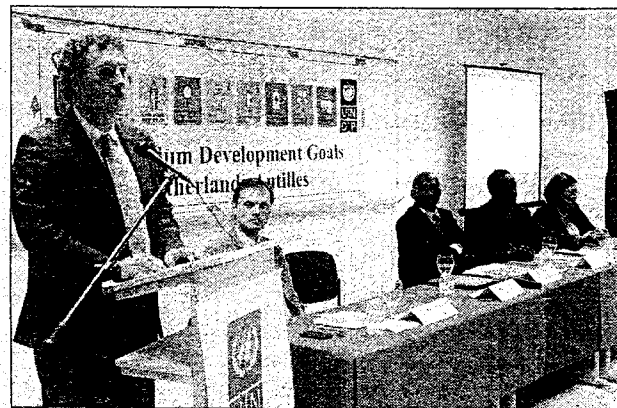
said, showed that residents were not "as healthy as one would imagine."

He also alluded to the study "Building a Healthy Island" and other programmes that focused on improving eating habits and promoting physical exercise, which stemmed from the How Healthy is St. Maarten study.

In addition, he touched on activities in the area of HIV/AIDS and awareness efforts of the Collective Preventive Services (CPS) and government's integrated neighbourhood development programme, among other issues.

Other speakers at the lecture included James; Pettinato; USM president Josianne Fleming-Artsen; Project Manager, Capacity Development for Nation Building in the Netherlands Antilles Jamila Romero; and Joy Arnell of the Island Government's policy unit for Social Development.

Terry Peterson moderated the event and speakers fielded questions from the audience at the end of the lecture.



United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Deputy Resident Representative Edo Stork (at podium) addresses attendees at the lecture on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at USM on Tuesday evening. Sitting at the head table (from left): MDG Policy Advisor for the UNDP Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (RBLAC) Stefano Pettinato; Director of the Department for Development Cooperation DEPOS Ralph James; Commissioner Hyacinth Richardson; and Project Manager, Capacity Development for Nation Building in the Netherlands Antilles Jamila Romero. (Judy H. Fitzpatrick photo)

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