



**Cabinet of the Prime Minister
Leona Romeo-Marlin
The Government of Sint Maarten**

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**Prime Minister Romeo Marlin gives elucidation on
Ministry General Affairs at National Budget 2019 debate**

PHILIPSBURG –

National Budget 2019 Presentation

By: Prime Minister Leona Romeo Marlin

News Release

Madame Chair, it is without a doubt that our country is experiencing some of the most challenging times to date. These challenges, be it fiscal, political or otherwise in the wake of our recovery efforts, requires firm leadership and a commitment to lead progress for St. Maarten and its people.

Madame Chair, for the Budget 2018 we humbly requested for the handling to be done in an atmosphere of understanding, collaboration, and non-confrontational. For the 2019 budget, I respectfully ask the same considering the serious times ahead for our country.

This draft national ordinance establishing the budget of the year 2019, which is similar to previous budgets, is a management tool indicating the (policy) direction of Government. In this particular case, the government's approach has been guided under the premise of the Governing program 2018 -2022, "*Building a sustainable Sint Maarten.*"

During the Central Committee meeting, I provided Parliament with a copy of the year plan 2019 of the Ministry of General Affairs, which encompasses to a great extent the activities related to the execution of the governing program.

Madame Chair before I elucidate more on these plans and priorities of the ministry, as it relates to the budget 2019 and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), it is important to note that there is a distinct difference between the draft budget we discuss today and the Trust fund (and the projects) for the recovery. The funding related to the trust fund as it is often referred too, is not represented in the country's budget, however I will give an update later in the presentation.

This budget is primarily to fund the operations of government. Government has the responsibility to provide services to the citizens and maintain the day to day operations of the organization. In addition, government's apparatus, apart from its daily activities, has to also focus on the prominent portfolio of disaster management and provide support for recovery activities.

Madame Chair, my focus, and instruction to the Ministry for the fiscal year are to prioritize, maximize our opportunities, and optimize public services.

It is important to underscore that in the absence of identified priorities for the ministry (and this goes for all ministries), the organization will not be able to achieve their objectives if financial discipline is not exercised. Therefore, departments are cautioned to monitor their expenditures

closely to ascertain that they are in compliance and remain on target in accomplishing intended goals.

Restructuring within the ministry:

An important trajectory being undertaken by the ministry relates to the restructuring of several departments including Fire department, merging of HR departments, the Department of Interior Affairs & Kingdom Relations (BAK), and Facility Services. While we are building- and maximizing capacity and improving service levels, we must ensure self-reliance through proper training and empowerment of our civil servants.

To continue on this example and my instruction to maximize our opportunities, please note that in this draft budget, funds are allocated for training. The instruction to the ministry, however, remains unequivocally that training will only be approved as part of an overall plan. By doing this, we will be able to better measure the results, and by doing so, if needed, the plan can be adjusted.

Furthermore, I would like to inform parliament on some of the actions already executed by the Ministry in 2019.

Service delivery to the public.

The Public Service Center Department continues to make strides in service delivery. For 2019, initiatives such as E-GOV or VGO (“Versterking Gegevensbeheer Overheid”) project once truly realized, will serve to improve the quality of services and interaction with citizens. A recent mission by the World Bank identified PSC as an important stakeholder for E-GOV. During this mission, activities to develop government digital or e-Services, online government portal needs, and services to automate (including digital identification and automation of key services (i.e., Civil Registry Department) were discussed. With reference to the Civil Registry, providing authentic documents such as extracts from the civil register, Passports, ID cards, and Driver’s licenses is of utmost importance. The Civil Registry will be converting services and products to a paperless system via a secure portal, which will reduce the influx of customers. For such an endeavor to take shape; however, information must be standardized and accurate (cleanup procedure). Against this backdrop, the goal is to synchronize our system with all Government entities/departments and the objective is to improve the service of the entire government, which will eventually lead to giving better service to the people of Sint Maarten. Simultaneously with mentioned initiatives, the training of staff and related formation will be an ongoing trajectory. The E-GOV’s objective, as mentioned before, in the end, will ultimately compel the government to work more effectively and efficiently.

Training & Development:

The government’s agenda is specifically geared towards creating an operational baseline throughout the public administration, thereby enhancing knowledge, efficiency, and effectiveness along with transparency and accountability. It is with this agenda that the ministry will continue to strive for a knowledge-based and enhanced quality output within the organization.

A staple initiative titled “An introduction program to incoming ministers and staff” kicked off last year. The purpose of this training was to equip ministers and their cabinet staff with essential information aimed to 1) to impart knowledge about the functioning of government; 2) provide them with essential information related to the responsibilities of their cabinets and 3) accommodate a smooth transition period.

Other initiatives include the production of an “Internal Operational manual” highlighting the shared services and the steps that guide the use of these services. Considering that we have entered into hurricane season is the Disaster Management manual, an essential manual created

recently, this manual outlines the actions that Civil servants must take in preparing for a hurricane. Quarterly manuals on specific yet important subject matters were published and disseminated to the civil service.

Madame Chair, as stated before, creating a knowledge-based civil service continues to be a priority for the ministry and the organization as well.

To illustrate further, recently, the ministry organized a session for the Secretaries-General on litigation and the expectation of the role of the Department of Legal Affairs and Legislation. During the presentation, insight was given on legal proceedings that occurred in 2018, the roles/tasks of each (internal) stakeholder (ministry), and the process of litigation itself. Noteworthy to mention is that this department regularly organizes, information sessions for the legal minds of government, in the so-called "Judicial Platform. The purpose of the information sessions is to share knowledge but also to give recommendations/advice to the organization on how we can improve the quality of decisions. The last Judicial Platform held provided insight given to civil servants about the advisory bodies and High College of State, the Ombudsman, and the SER.

The coordinating role of the Ministry about Disaster Management:

On a coordinating level, the ESF 9 group (Government Affairs), led by the Ministry established a Ministerial Operations Center. This Center is charged with ensuring continuity of government in the event of a disaster and consists of representatives from all ministries. This center is tasked with further developing and defining the Continuity of Government's plans per ministry in the event of a disaster. These efforts orchestrated by civil servants who willingly and selflessly go beyond the call of duty to ensure that as government is better prepared for the inevitable.

Furthermore, and for the first time in disaster management, the ministry initiated the development of a "Back Office" for the Emergency Operations Center. The purpose of this Back Office will be to provide (administrative and logistical) support to the EOC during disaster-related events.

Speaking about support, just recently the emergency response departments received specialized equipment that will help them to adequately respond to disaster-related incidents. Within short, additional equipment and safety attire such as satellite phones, radios, and fire resistant suits will be available to this group.

Finally, the ministry also developed and implemented the "Clean Desk policy" as of June 2019. The policy sets the guidelines to ensure that authentic important government documentation is rendered secured mainly throughout the hurricane season.

Update on Insurance Claim (post-Hurricane Irma);

Madame Chair, during the Central Committee meeting, I provided an update on the developments about the insurance claim. During the meeting, the parliament received updates about the works done by the public adjuster at that time. Government is currently awaiting the outcome of the appraisal report, which was sent to the Insurance Company. Discussions between the public adjuster and insurance company are yet ongoing. Although an estimate of the length of this exercise is difficult to determine at a time since both parties (the insurance company and the public adjuster) need their time to address the concerns of each other. The public adjuster promised the representatives of government that as soon as they finalize the first batch, they could give government a more accurate estimate.

On the Foreign relations agenda:

Maintaining and establishing sound international, regional and cross-border relations for St. Maarten as a country within the kingdom remains paramount and requires active participation in my capacity as Prime Minister and Regional Authorizing Officer at high-level engagement that inextricably ties to the development of the country. Government resources or travel in this

regard is used in the most effective manner possible. Just to highlight a few meetings that warranted travel were meetings to the Netherlands with the NL Prime Minister, Tripartite meeting in Aruba, Recovery Steering Committee meeting in Washington. D.C, meetings wherever scheduled for OCT countries. Other travels involved building relationships and establishing cooperation with other Caribbean Islands and countries. I specifically mentioned this because ...

Managing sick-leave within Government:

Madame Chair, the Department of Personnel & Organization, has executed an assessment, within the six ministries that they currently cater to, of persons who frequently report sick and are on leave due to illness for an extended period. A company will be contracted to execute medical reassessment of employees who fall in the categories mentioned above. This medical reassessment will determine whether persons can reintegrate into the civil service within a short period or whether persons are deemed medically unfit to continue working. In the event persons are medically unfit, they will qualify for a disability pension.

These are just a few of the activities the Ministry is/will be engaged in, which are also outlined in the governing program and the year plan and the country’s budget.

The budget of the Ministry of General Affairs is composed as follows:

- Personnel expenses are 28.9 million guilders, which represents 41% of the ministry’s budget.
- The operational expenses are 42.4 million, which represents 59% of the budget.
- Majority of the operational expense budget is used to provide services to the other six ministries. The biggest operational expense for the ministry is related to the rental of office spaces. Other expenses related to service sharing are software licenses, electricity, office supplies, insurance, and communication.
- Together with the ministry, we are exploring innovations in service sharing to continue to deliver quality services to the other ministries and at the same time, cut costs.

Madame Chair with your indulgence, I would like to highlight a few policy priorities that have been and will be executed during this year.

Policy Priority:

Policy Priority	Department	Budget Allocation
Align the NDP and NRRP with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals	BAK	Personnel budget-3201
Reinforce the short-term disaster preparedness operation	Fire Dept., WB and Bak	Personnel budget -3102, TF, 3201
Improve the disaster communication structure	DCOMM Fire dept.	Personnel budget-3102 and 43470-3302
Replace and repair	NRPB/AZ	TF, insurance claim

damaged assets of the emergency response units		
Facilitate urgent home repairs	NRPB	TF
Execute an advanced disaster preparedness plan	Fire Dept.	43499-3102
Revive and update the legislation on disaster management and ensure that there is a disaster management component in all legislation	Fire Dept., JZW/BAK	Personnel budget-3102, 3200, 3201
Work with Dutch embassies to explore opportunities to generate international trade and economic activities	DBB/Gev. MIN	Personnel budget-3011 and 3202
Ensure finalization of repairs to the Government administration building on Soualiga Road	DMO	Insurance claim
Conduct a personnel assessment of each ministry	P&O	Personnel budget-3306
Address absenteeism	P&O	Personnel budget-3306
Review and fill critical vacancies	P&O,	Personnel budget, Review budgeted under 3306 Recruitment budgeted under 3021 (600,000)
Empowerment of civil servants and organizational improvement	BAK, P&O	Training budget-3201, 3306
Improve the accountability of ministers to parliament	COM/Secretariat	--
Execute electoral reform	Cabinet AZ, JZW, Civil Registry	Personnel budget-3010, 3200, 3103
Promote transparency and create awareness within government and	Dcomm	Personnel budget & advertisement 3302

government institutions		
Review the role, policy, and staffing of the National Security Sint Maarten (Veiligheidsdienst Sint Maarten (VDSM))	Cabinet VDSM	AZ, Personnel budget-3010 and 3104
Address findings by Ombudsman based on the survey of civil servants on “obstacles to good governance.”	BAK, JZW	Personnel budget-3102,3200,
Promote corporate governance	SG AZ/JZW	Personnel budget-3021 and 3200
Thoroughly execute the role of shareholder of Government-owned Companies, Foundations, and ZBO’s.	SOAB	SOAB Audit plan, 43479 4100
Provide appropriate expertise and support to the shareholder and ministers in executing their tasks and understanding their responsibilities	SOAB	SOAB Audit plan, 43479 4100
Review and modernize IT operations and technology	ICT	KD-3307
Clean up, synchronize and secure all data registries	ICT	KD-3307
Modernize the Civil Registry	Civil PSC	Registry, 3103,3203
Continue cooperation with Saint Martin	DBB	Personnel budget-3102
Start new projects with Saint Martin	DBB	Personnel budget-3102
Finalize ongoing inter-regional cooperation (EU sponsored) projects with Saint Martin	DBB	Personnel budget-3102
Discuss new initiatives with France and Saint Martin	DBB	Personnel budget-3102

Finalize the border demarcation	DBB	Personnel budget-3102
Establish a closer working relationship with neighboring islands	DBB	Personnel budget-3102
Strengthen regional relationships	DBB	Personnel budget-3102
Set up and emergency response and evacuation program for the government administration building	FZ	Personnel budget-3305

Madame Chair as I conclude my presentation for this round, I would like to state that each minister and the civil service has worked tirelessly on presenting the most practical budget given the country's liquidity challenges.

To this end, for those who believe that we are operating as "business as usual," I must sadly disappoint them by stating that this is far from reality. We are in the midst of recovery where any wrong intentions could severely undermine the efforts undertaken by so many thus far. Building a resilient country does not happen overnight; it takes time, keen decision-making, and commitment to guide us through the challenging times ahead. We, and I mean specifically this coalition was formed as a government of Willingness. Willing to and accepted monies to rebuild this country. I can proudly state as Prime Minister with the support of the Council of Ministers,

Opening remarks on Trust Fund

Less than a year ago, the Government of Sint Maarten signed its first grant agreement with the World Bank. To date, four grant agreements has been signed totaling an **amount of 127.7 million US dollars, of which 22 million has been disbursed to the National Recovery Program Bureau and the Sint Maarten Medical Centre.** These funds has been disbursed from the Trust Fund to accounts at the Central Bank of Curacao and St Maarten. When needed, the funds are transferred to the different project accounts to make the approved payments. From the disbursed funds, **about 1 million has been spent by the Sint Maarten Medical Centre and about 9 million on behalf of the National Recovery Program Bureau.**

EMERGENCY INCOME SUPPORT AND TRAINING

The vast lion share of the funds spent has is used to provide income support and training to the unemployed and underemployed persons of Sint Maarten. With the support of the Sint Maarten Training Foundation, NIPA and USM, over 1000 persons continue to benefit from income support and training in hospitality and construction services, including carpentry, plumbing and general maintenance. While participating in the training program, individuals receive a monthly stipend, a transportation allowance and medical insurance.

As you may have seen in the media, madam chair, our Minister of VSA has recently visited a construction site, where some of the trained individuals are presently working. These are early signs of success of the Trust Fund, as unemployed persons are finding their way or their way back to the labor market thanks to the Income Support and Training Program.

HOUSING

Another important area in which the Trust Fund continues to provide support is housing.

Over the past months, the National Recovery Program Bureau has managed to get the private home repair program up and running.

The first batch of the private home repairs has started and includes the repairs to 14 homes located in Dutch Quarter, Mount William Hill, Middle Region, Sucker Garden, St. Peters, South Reward and Cay Bay areas. The repairs will take several months and focuses on roofs, doors, windows and electrical works, using the Build Back Better method.

The second batch of this program include minor repair repairs to more than 25 additional homes. Consultations with the homeowners took place last week at the NRPB. The contractor and supervisor are being selected and the contracts for this second batch are expected to be signed in the coming weeks.

While the first and second batch are ongoing, preparations are also under way for the other batches of home repairs, including the tender process for technical assessment and repair works. The registration for the home repair program closed on April 26 and the social assessments of all applicants are being finalized by the NRPB. This includes a check on the established qualification criteria. In order to qualify for the home repair program, the applicant must (1) be a legal resident of Sint Maarten, (2) legally own the house that requires repairs and (3) have a monthly income of no more than ANG. 4,000. At this moment about 200 households have been qualified for support under the home repair program of the NRPB and the Government of Sint Maarten. Every household that qualifies will receive assistance through the Trust Fund.

In addition to the private home repair program, the NRPB has been working diligently on the execution of its social home repair program with the Sint Maarten Housing Development Foundation. More than 100 homes are repaired with financial support of the Trust Fund and additional repairs are ongoing.

Criticism has been levied left and right against the Trust Fund and the World Bank. Personally, I can agree that it has taken too long to bring us to the point of actual implementation of the home repair program. However, madam chair no one can deny that our people and those who are most vulnerable are being assisted. No less than 500 homes will be repaired through the home repair program, financed by the Trust Fund.

Moreover, through direct financing from the Netherlands, hundreds of homes were repaired by UNDP, the White and Yellow Cross and the Sint Maarten Development Fund.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Another priority of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan approved by this Parliament is the strengthening of Sint Maarten's emergency services, especially the police and fire department. I am glad to report that great progress made in these areas with support of the Trust Fund and direct financing from the Netherlands.

The Fire Department has recently received much needed emergency equipment, including helmets, boxes of batteries, tubes and maintenance kits for the compressor and the quaestor equipment. Other important goods for the fire department, including communication equipment, is on its way, and new fire trucks, ambulances and other emergency vehicles are being procured. All of this financed by the Trust Fund.

The first phase of repairs to the police stations in Philipsburg and Simpson Bay is completed, and the second phase has started last week – both with financing from the Trust Fund. The first phase included window repairs, doors, shutters and roof sealing to make the police stations water and wind tight. During the second phase, the roofs ceilings, floors and wall partitions of

both stations will be renovated. Simultaneously, works will be conducted for the air conditioning system and ducts, the IT system and electrical cabling. Total costs for the second phase is estimated to be 1.1 million US dollars. The expected completion is within approximately three months.

In addition, the Police department and the prison facilities in Point Blanche have received significant support in direct financing from the Ministry of BZK. Costs for repairs to the prison facilities will be reimbursed up to a maximum amount of 300.000 Euros, and the Netherlands has financed the procurement of new cars, uniforms and equipment for the 911-dispatch center for the police department.

HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS

In supporting our emergency services, the Trust Fund has made a great contribution to Sint Maarten's hurricane preparedness. Other examples of how the Trust Fund has already helped us to prepare for future disasters is the strengthening of the roof of the Hospital and Sint Maarten's membership to the Caribbean Catastrophic Risk Insurance facility, CCRIF. Both financed by the Trust Fund. This has increased the resilience of our critical infrastructure and public financial management and this will prove crucial, should God forbid, Sint Maarten is hit by a hurricane this season.

LANDFILL

Another project on which the Bureau is working diligently on is the Debris Management Project. Through this project, the Government and the Bureau will clean up the island, the shipwrecks in the lagoon, and, of course, and the thorn in all our eyes: the dump!

Equipment and material were shipped to support the daily treatment and prevention of the dump fires. Meanwhile, the Bureau and the Ministries of VROMI and VSA are making all the necessary preparations for the start of the actual fire suppression activities. This extremely complex project requires proper preparation. There is really no quick fix for a problem that has developed over generations. Thanks to the Trust Fund, Sint Maarten finally has the knowledge and financial means to resolve this matter once and for all, in a safe and sustainable manner.

PROJECTS UNDER PREPARATION

Madam Chair, beyond the four projects that are currently under implementation, we are working hard on the preparation of the second batch of Trust Fund projects with a total value of more than 200 million US dollars. This includes projects that will provide financial support to micro and small businesses on Sint Maarten, a project that will provide grants to local NGOs as well as projects on solid waste management, road connectivity and digital governance.

AIRPORT

Another key project under the preparation is the Airport Terminal Reconstruction Project. With the support of the Trust Fund, the European Investment Bank and the Government of the Netherlands, Princess Juliana International Airport will receive very favorable financing for the reconstruction of the terminal for 100 million US dollars. After the completion of the ongoing remediation works, the airport will be responsible for implementing this project under the supervision of the NRPB.

CONCLUSION

Madam Chair, the bottom-line is that many projects will be implemented in the coming years thanks to the support of the Trust Fund and the Government of the Netherlands. Much can be

said about the expediency, conditions and procedures of the Trust Fund, but there is really no denying that the Trust Fund projects are directly benefitting the people of Sint Maarten. In debating our national budget this week; let us focus on what has been achieved and what is yet to be accomplished with the funds made available to us through the Trust Fund.

As a member of this Executive Branch of Government, I must state that working on restoring our beloved country in a time of grave uncertainty remains an absolute honor and a task that I take very seriously. **I firmly believe that as representatives this is what we have pledged under oath to do!**

Madame Chair, with that, said I await the questions from the members of parliament.

In Photo L-R – Prime Minister Leona Romeo Marlin presenting during the Budget 2019 Debate