

PRESS RELEASE

From: Sint Maarten Communications Union (SMCU)

Date: August 24, 2025

Issued by: President N. Frans

To: The Government of Sint Maarten (Shareholder Representative of TELEM)

Subject: Immediate Action Required to Protect TELEM and Our National Telecommunications

The Sint Maarten Communications Union (SMCU) expresses grave concern following the recent approval of a five-year license for Starlink SXM B.V. by the Ministry of Tourism, Economic Affairs, Transport and Telecommunications (TEATT) on May 6, 2025, allowing this foreign operator to provide broadband across terrestrial, maritime, and aviation zones in Sint Maarten.

While we acknowledge the need for improved connectivity, this decision threatens TELEM, our national telecommunications company, which continues to operate under strict legal and regulatory compliance requirements. TELEM's current fragile financial state is made worse by foreign competition entering the market under a streamlined concession, bypassing the regulatory and financial obligations imposed on our national company.

TELEM is our national asset. It is built on decades of service to the people of Sint Maarten, providing jobs and critical infrastructure. Yet, its leadership has remained silent regarding the Starlink concession, leaving employees and the public in the dark about the potential impacts on jobs, services, and the national economy.

The government, as shareholder representative, has delayed the cash injection necessary to stabilize TELEM and allowed foreign operators to enter with minimal oversight. The lessons of Hurricane Irma remain painfully clear: businesses abandoned, employees unpaid, and infrastructure left in dilapidated condition. TELEM's physical structures are still reminders that resilience must be prioritized.

The SMCU is seeking the immediate intervention for government to:

1. Inject necessary funds into TELEM to stabilize operations and protect local jobs.
2. Avoid granting further concessions to foreign operators that undermine TELEM's ability to compete.
3. Strengthen TELEM to become a resilient, locally owned telecommunications company capable of withstanding future crises.

We remind the government that previous government officials failed to act decisively against the blatant mismanagement of TELEM by former directors. During this time, the board of directors was incomplete, ineffective, and failed to prevent and address the ongoing mismanagement. This neglect has pushed TELEM into the dire financial situation it faces today. Meanwhile, employees have paid the price, suffering two rounds of layoffs, while the company's financial position has not improved. This failure of oversight and accountability cannot be repeated. The government must act now to protect TELEM, its workers, and the people of Sint Maarten. If this continues it will risk job losses again, weaken national infrastructure, and harm the island's economy. Foreign concessions must never come at the expense of our people, our company, or our nation.

It is time for the government to stand with TELEM, its employees, and the people of Sint Maarten. Invest in our national company. Protect local jobs. Preserve our sovereignty in telecommunications.

The SMCU calls on this government to stand with the people and the nation, not against them. It is time to end the cycle of neglect and replace it with genuine care and decisive action. Too often, change comes only at the end of a government's term, buried under endless red tape and delays. Sint Maarten cannot afford more excuses or empty promises. The time to act is now, break the cycle, stand with your people, and protect our national company, our jobs, and our economy.

Issued by:

N. Frans

President, Sint Maarten Communications Union (SMCU)