

St. Maarten, April 12, 2014

Good afternoon fellow Democrats.

Protocol has been observed and I would therefore like to immediately go to addressing this gathering, this community of likeminded “believers in the Sint Maarten dream” about the way forward.

I want to talk **to** you and **with** you about what we all should want for the institution that we hold dear in our hearts, our party, the Democratic Party of Sint Maarten.

In preparing myself to do so, I considered my own experiences and searched my own feelings about what it is to be a DEMOCRAT.

In my opinion it comes down to two things: 1)Holding on to your principles and 2)always moving forward. **Always moving forward**. Constantly striving to improve and change in order to meet the needs of the times and the goals of and for the people of Sint Maarten. That to me is being a DEMOCRAT and that means PROGRESS.

From since I know myself, I have been mesmerized by cars and it should therefore not be a surprise to anyone when I say that in terms of progress, I am guided by the words of a REAL automobile fanatic, one who literally changed the world with his ideas and his vision; I am speaking about Mr. Henry FORD.

History teaches us that Mr. Ford knew a thing or two about progress and the ways to meet the needs of the times and of the people. Amongst other things, he once said: “**Coming together** is a beginning; **keeping together** is progress; **working together** is success”.

As individuals, many of us joined the Democratic Party because we shared common goals, principles and beliefs about what is needed for Sint Maarten. For 60 long years, through many elections and indisputably the most terms in government, the Democratic Party has proven itself. What Sint Maarten is today, is without doubt directly attributed to the hard work and dedication of our party, the DEMOCRATIC PARTY of St. Maarten. So when the critics out there want to blame us for all that is wrong with St. Maarten, they MUST also THANK us for so much more that is RIGHT on St. Maarten. It is not for nothing that people from over 100 cultures have flocked to our shores and chosen this 16 square mile half of an island to plant their roots.

The founders of this party, Mr. Clem Labega and Dr. Claude Wathey, together with what became loyal followers and supporters of this party may not always be afforded the gratitude or appreciation for the efforts put in to the growth and development of St. Maarten. That is life, but that is not why we do what we do! Progress is a goal in and of itself. Personally I subscribe to the notion that if St. Maarten does well, we all should do well. Not some of us, but ALL of us!

The Democratic Party has faced challenging times. Not everyone can face adversity and persevere. We, as a party, have had to deal with our share of challenges. Challenges from within and challenges from without. The biggest challenge undoubtedly came just 4 years ago when a part of our guts was ripped out and former Democrats went to what was sold as “greener pastures”. For many of them it turned out to be only “Pie-in-the Sky”. Now we learn some are waiting for a call!

However, be taht what it may, it makes no sense to dwell in the past, but suffice to say that a true DEMOCRAT believes in the party, believes in the people and will always go the distance. And while there are those who can't, or could not wait, can't or refuse to work through the challenges and see the light at the end of the tunnel, it is a fact that THIS Democratic Party is not made up of "quitters".

We have been extremely fortunate to have great leaders. From the founders, to our current political leader.

Mrs. Sarah Wescot-Williams knows that for there to be true success, the motto to live by is: **"slow and steady wins the race"**. She often refers to the process of progress with the words: "Building St. Maarten block by block". After all, perseverance is the SNAILS reaching the ARK. It took a while, but they too made it!

Sarah knows that working together is the only way that real progress is achieved for the Country and the community.

Many people, especially some who have left our ranks to seek their political fortune elsewhere, need to be reminded that the very existence of Country Sint Maarten, was made possible by Sarah's perseverance through 10 years of tough negotiations with governments in the Netherlands, in Curacao and oddly enough, especially here at home.

Had Mrs. Wescot-Williams flinched and backed down every time Holland said "NO" to St. Maarten's objective of becoming an autonomous country, where would they all be today?

We now benefit from the new system of government, where St. Maarten is in the driver's seat of its own destiny. The future of this Country since 10/10/10 HAS to be made here, by St. Maarteners, those BORN HERE together with those BORN TO BE HERE. We DEMOCRATS MUST continue to play a leadership role in this process.

As good Democrats, we need to be aware of the new system of elections now in place on Sint Maarten. There are new rules and regulations such as the National Ordinance on Registration and Financing of Political Parties, as well as new institutions, such as for example the Electoral Council, which require us to adjust. The way we organize as a party is now governed by law.

We had to form an association by notarial deed and the articles of association had to comply with the National Ordinance I mentioned earlier.

The objectives and ideals of the Democratic Party are now listed in the Articles of Association and we would do well never to forget them, as doing so would be tantamount to failing!

Lest we forget, allow me to remind you what they are:

- First and foremost, the Democratic Party will function for the whole community of St. Maarten. We have always said it, and we will continue to live it. The Democratic Party is about inclusiveness. We reject all forms of discrimination. Our inclusiveness extends to working with other political organizations that maintain compatible goals as the Democratic Party.

- We respect and uphold the constitutional rights of every individual and we will work to promote patriotism and social cohesion.
- As was the case of our founders, we seek to continuously improve the quality of life for all of St. Maarten.
- We will promote the socio-economic welfare of the people according to Christian, Social Democratic principles and ideals.
- In so doing, we strive to achieve more opportunity for Country St. Maarten.
- We will continuously work to raise the political awareness of the people. Our political candidates and political program will reflect our political vision.

The Democratic Party has a tradition and a record of success. Those objectives I listed here above, are the backbone of the party.

Just as “Sweet St. Maarten land” has changed, has progressed, so too must we as a party. That is not to say that we are going to leave what has worked for us and for this island behind. No way. However, to succeed we do need to adjust. We need to work harder at working together towards the goals and objectives of the Democratic Party.

You may be thinking: So Mikey, you just told us we are to maintain our ideals, but yet you are now talking about the “need to change”!?

Change must come in the way we achieve our objectives and ideals. The very manner in which we have worked together (or not!) must change. The way we COMMUNICATE with each other, must change!

We all need to contribute to the achievement of our party objectives by developing and sharing innovative ideas. The party must be a collection of like-minded people.

Contribution from every member must be a continuous process. Ideas are not only for campaigns and elections. The success of Sint Maarten didn’t just happen around elections. Remember what I said about perseverance. It is the ability to keep at it all year round.

Furthermore, success in achieving our party goals cannot only be relegated to what we do in government. Success for the Democratic Party is also being able to work for the people of this island outside of government. We want to promote the improvement of our country and that is an ideal that requires more than government. It requires a dedication to serve the people all the time in every aspect of our society. Working in government is obviously the medium to achieve a large impact on the largest group of persons, however, true Democrats always work and advocate for the people.

It means that we need to stay in touch with the people. A party cannot survive without the people and the people will only follow if they feel that the party understands their needs. St. Maarten’s population is diverse and we are an inclusive party. That means we have to know and understand what drives individuals and groups. We also need to understand what separates them? And more importantly, we need to form policies and programs that foster the needs of all the community.

We have new means in this digital age at our disposal. The Democratic Party can spread the message, can explain our ideals and most importantly, can receive information from the diverse community of St. Maarten through both new and traditional means.

Social media (Face Book, Twitter, Instagram) is an area that we need to embrace and use to stay “in touch” with the people. That tool must supplement the personal time that we invest in connecting with the community.

Most importantly we need to communicate and reach out with one voice. We have our history, or track record, our achievements. The RED THREAD of the Democratic Party runs through ALL the progress this island has made in the past 60 years. Our leader, Prime Minister Sarah Wescot-Williams, is a prime example of service above self. We should all strive to be like her. Remember the words of Henry Ford: keeping together is progress; working together is SUCCESS!

Loyalty to our Country, our Party and our Party Leader is critical if we are to be truly effective and successful.

In concluding, as President of this awesome institution called the Democratic Party of St. Maarten for the past 5 years, I admit not having attained all the goals I set for myself and our board back in 2009, but progress has been made. Mindsets have been changed and achievements have been reached. After all, the Democratic Party is the ONLY party that has been in government for the past 4 years without a break and Country St. Maarten up to now has known only ONE Prime Minister, the Honorable Leader of the Democratic Party, Mrs. Sarah Wescot-Williams

For this and more I thank the outgoing board and I ask Richelda, Lourdes, Margarete, Leopold, Roy and our Leader, Mrs Wescot-Williams to come on stage and take a bow.

May the new Board we elect today be blessed with knowledge, vision and tenacity to take our grand DEMOCRATIC PARTY of St. Maarten to new heights.

God bless you, God bless our party and God bless St. Maarten.