

“ The Case of Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in Curaçao”.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Thanks for the opportunity to be included in this important and much-needed Symposium on Migration. As we have been instructed to keep it short, I will use this brief opportunity to represent the voice of the Human Rights Caribbean Foundation and to share some of our ambitions, viewpoints and a few recommendations. I will focus on the case of Curaçao, where the urgent issue of Migration and Refugees from Venezuela, has been dominating the agenda of our Foundation, on an almost daily basis. In the near future we plan to broaden our approach to a broader spectrum of human rights issues.

Human Rights Caribbean was launched on the date of the 70th Anniversary of the iconic UN-Declaration for Human Rights on December 10. 2018. It was founded by some citizens, who were growing increasingly concerned by the insufficient respect for the human rights of Venezuelans, fleeing from their beloved country to Curaçao, Aruba and Bonaire. And as I understand, also to St. Maarten. The fact that in-depth reports by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Ombudsman and also analysis by local experts, served as a call for action.

Just like all over the world it is not easy to be human rights defenders, but in the five months since the birth of the Foundation we have been hard at work – on a voluntary basis- to build bridges with Government and Parliament, with other ngo’s (here and in the Netherlands) and with international organizations, such as UNHCR, IOM and Red Cross.

We have started a fruitful cooperation with the University of Curaçao, giving awareness and capacity building courses on human rights. Also, we have constructive ties with the media, in Curaçao and abroad.

Many refugees appeal to us for help, through a helpdesk, because there are little options and facilities. We are trying to help in spite of two major hurdles: very limited human and financial resources.

Migration between Curaçao and Venezuela has been a fact of life for centuries. History has yielded many family and friendship ties, strong economic and cultural linkages. It is not strange that on both sides of the sea we eat funchi, enjoy aguinaldos and dance to the rhythms of tambú. And there are still traces of Papiamentu in Coro.

Many speakers before me have already highlighted that Migration does not have to be a reason for fear and intolerance. HRC shares this opinion. Well-managed, transparent policies and procedures and temporary work permits can offer security and opportunities for the Refugees, who can contribute to the social-economic development and progress of our country.

From the start our position has been that the governments of all parts of the Kingdom of the Netherlands should approach the incoming flow of Venezuelan Migrants and Refugees, from a policy of the correct human rights standards.

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) Respect for human rights of migrants and refugees. As the European Court has already indicated an asylum policy should be put in place, with a speedy and humane screening;
- 2) Research, quantitative and qualitative, to overcome fear and xenophobia.
- 3) assistance and opportunities should be provided, such as temporary work permits to the bonafide Venezuelans who have requested permits to the Immigration Office;
- 4) stopping of degrading detention in Vreemdelingenbarak, behind barbed wire, but awaiting in dignity and FREEDOM.