

News Items and Public Crime Summary for Week Ending March 27, 2010

St. Maarten - Missing files in human trafficking case found

The files of two convicted human traffickers, Sribaskaran Sivananthan (45) from Sri Lanka and Terrence Williams (46) from St. Kitts, which had gone missing prior to the start of their appeal cases by the Joint Court of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba last week, have been retrieved. The court stated that the appeals had only been suspended and that the hearings have been rescheduled for June 24. The Public Prosecutor's Office had filed for appeal against the sentences meted out by the Court of First Instance in September 2009. Sivananthan had been sentenced to three years, Williams to 34 months. Both men had been found guilty of involvement in transporting Haitians and Sri Lankans from St. Maarten to the U.S. Virgin Islands in January 2009. Their vessel capsized after hitting a reef off the British Virgin Islands. A passing fishing boat rescued 13 migrants, while ten others went missing (Daily Herald).

Aruba - Justice wants possible photo Holloway body

Until recently, the Public Prosecutor's Office (PPO) in Aruba was entirely unaware of an underwater picture that, according to an American couple, may show skeletal remains of Natalee Holloway, who disappeared in 2005 while vacationing on the island. The couple had taken the picture during a diving holiday there in October last year and had forwarded it to the FBI after their return home. When a response remained forthcoming, John and Patti Muldowney approached the media. Both police and the FBI declared before the American media that they were not aware of the picture's existence. PPO spokesperson Ann Angela said the news had come as a surprise. "We emphasize that the information will indeed be taken seriously," Angela said. "We take every tip seriously... Justice first wants to determine whether the picture indeed induces us to conduct a search operation, as the picture published is quite vague" (Daily Herald, Amigoe, La Prensa).

Aruba - Police Diving for Possible Holloway Remains

The Public Prosecutor's Office (PPO) announced that the Aruba Police Department will conduct a diving operation along an area of the Aruba coast where American teenager Natalee Holloway was last seen in 2005. The dive operation is a result of a photograph taken by a U.S. couple on vacation on the island last year which was recently published in the American media. Last Saturday, the PPO received a copy of the photo from the FBI. PPO spokesperson Ann Angela told the press that "unfortunately, the people who took the picture are not able to indicate the exact spot." Should the diving team find any human remains, they will be sent immediately to the National Forensic Institute in the Netherlands for further investigation (Amigoe, Diario Aruba, La Prensa).

Curacao - IAPA Meeting in Aruba Discusses Media Law, Criticizes Venezuela

Due to the constitutional changes, it is up to the parliaments of the new entities Curaçao and St. Maarten to decide on the media law, PM Emily de Jongh-Elhage told the press during a meeting of the Inter American Press Association (IAPA) in Aruba this past weekend. "Our government believes it is very important to maintain a high standard for the media and we believe it is important to regulate such through a media law... we currently have a draft in its final phase and hope parliament will approve such shortly," De Jongh-Elhage said. She underlined the importance of freedom of opinion, calling it "one of the pillars of a real democracy" while at the same time pointing at the right to demand a moral, professional and objective press. "The press should strive for a balance between freedom of opinion and respect for... privacy." During its closing session, the IAPA criticized Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's attempts to eliminate the independent press by closing electronic media stations and other measures, and strongly condemned the growing trend toward violence and intimidation against journalists (Amigoe, Antilliaans Dagblad).

Curacao - Pierre (NPA) and Damoen (FK) to Become Independent MPs

Nelson Pierre (NPA party leader) and Gregory Damoen (Forsa Kòrsou party leader), who were both on the combined Lista di Kambo (LdK) list of candidates together with the MAN leadership for the January 2010 parliamentary elections, announced they intend to become independent members after Parliament is sworn in on March 26. Last week, both NPA and Forsa Kòrsou withdrew their support from the LdK after MAN leader Charles Cooper had asked them to integrate their parties into MAN, an option they rejected. However, they participated in the elections under the LdK banner and must by law enter Parliament in that capacity. Nevertheless, nothing prevents them from changing their status after they have been sworn in (Extra, Antilliaans Dagblad).

Bonaire - Small aircraft crashes in sea near Bonaire

A small private aircraft with three occupants crashed into the sea 40 miles north of Bonaire yesterday afternoon. The Piper Seneca which had taken off from Curaçao, was on its way to St. Maarten when it experienced engine problems. The pilot attempted to return to Curaçao, but had to ditch near Bonaire. All three occupants (pilot, co-pilot and passenger) managed to escape unharmed and were rescued by a Coast Guard vessel. This was the third aircraft incident near Bonaire in seven months' time (Various newspapers).

Aruba - Negative Results in Underwater Search for Possible Holloway Remains

Last Sunday, Aruba police conducted a dive operation in search of possible remains of missing American teenager Natalee Holloway. The search was ordered by the Public Prosecutor's Office (PPO) after it had received an underwater picture taken by an American couple vacationing in Aruba in 2009. The PPO announced that the police divers had not been able to find the exact location. "The police are currently working on the reconstruction of the location... together with the company that had conducted the

dive with the couple”, said PPO spokesperson Ann Angela. The American couple could not recall the exact location where the picture had been taken.

Forensic expert Josh Maat of the University Museum of Leiden (Netherlands) doubts the authenticity of the skeleton seen in the picture. In an interview with Dutch World Broadcast, he stated, “Let’s take into account that this could have a disappointing outcome. An awful lot of people have died and sunk to the sea bottom... In addition, it will also be difficult to identify the mortal remains. DNA degrades quickly in the sea and the tropical waters further the process of decomposition” (Amigoe).

Curacao - Parliament Amends Dissolution Regulation

The amendment of the Netherlands Antilles Islands Regulation (ERNA), called the “Duncan Law” after its initiator Constitutional Affairs Minister Roland Duncan (NA), was passed unanimously by Parliament yesterday afternoon during its last sitting. The new Parliament elected in January takes office March 26. The amendment makes possible the dissolution of the Island Councils of St. Maarten and Curaçao, as well as early elections. A two-thirds majority (15 or more seats) was required to pass the law. A similar change of the ERNA was also introduced for Saba, St. Eustatius, and Bonaire (Various newspapers).

Aruba - Island-Wide Power Failure

Early Wednesday morning Aruba experienced an island-wide power failure. A utility company (WEB) spokesperson said that a boiler went offline at 4 a.m., causing a domino effect in other parts of the company’s infrastructure, resulting in the failure. Power was restored in most neighborhoods around noon yesterday. The cause of the blackout is under investigation (Various newspapers).

Statia - Statia Political Party PLP Elects New President

Members of Statia’s Progressive Labor Party (PLP) have elected Brenda Van Putten as the party's new president. Her task along with the rest of the board is to improve the party's image and widen its support base. Van Putten is a relative newcomer on the political scene, having run for the first time in the January 22 Parliamentary elections. The PLP failed to gain a seat at these elections (St. Maarten Island Time).

Aruba - Police Divers Find Coral, No Holloway Remains

Aruba police have stopped their latest search for the remains of U.S. teenager Natalee Holloway at a popular diving site off the island. A two-day search of the area failed to produce any results. The search was prompted by an underwater photo taken by a visiting couple which possibly showed human remains. The investigators are now assuming that the shapes on the picture were of a dead coral formation and not the skeleton of Holloway, who went missing on the island in 2005 (Various newspapers).

Curacao - New Parliament To Be Sworn In

Today the new Members of the Netherlands Antilles Parliament will be sworn in by Governor Frits Goedgedrag. The swearing-in ceremony will take place at the governor’s palace, and afterwards there will be a first meeting of the new Parliament with the

election of Pedro Atacho (PAR) and Faroe Metry (PNP) as President and Vice-President respectively on the agenda. On Monday, the meetings of the various parliamentary committees will start with the elections of their respective chairpersons. There are ten standing committees in Parliament at the moment and one ad hoc committee (Amigoe, Daily Herald, St. Maarten Island Time)

St. Maarten - U.S. Returns Human Smuggling Suspects

The Public Prosecutor's Office commended American authorities for extraditing two suspects in a high-profile local case this week. U.S. police arrested R.R. (36) and his wife M.R. (35) on an unrelated charge of shoplifting, after which American officials realized they were wanted in St. Maarten for human smuggling. The couple had been involved in the tragic January 2009 human-smuggling boat trip that ended with more than 13 men, women and children dead. The couple are the last two persons believed to be behind the *Ajada* tragedy in which a boat from St. Maarten sank off the British Virgin Islands with 25 persons who were trying to go to the U.S. Other suspects in the smuggling case have already been sentenced to prison terms of six to 34 months (Daily Herald, St. Maarten Island Time).

"The Weekly Press Summary is a compilation of stories running in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruban press that is intended to alert readers about items of interest to them. There is no interpretation or verification of the facts contained therein."