



# NEWS

## United States Consulate General

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Smithsonian Institution's Deep Reef Observation Project Supports Curacao**

Kirk Johnson, the Director of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC arrived on Curacao August 13 to support Curacao's inclusion in the Smithsonian's planned global marine biodiversity network of coastal monitoring sites. Mr. Johnson oversees a collection of more than 126 million specimens and artifacts—the largest collection at the Smithsonian. The Museum of Natural History hosts an average of 7 million visitors each year, and its scientists publish about 500 scientific research contributions a year.

The world of science and the public at large realize and understand that shallow coral reefs are in peril worldwide, but comparatively little is known about tropical deep reefs (30 to >300 m). The Smithsonian Deep Reef Observation Project (DROP) aims to help fill this major gap in knowledge. Capitalizing on exploratory submersible diving, DROP is discovering a new world of biodiversity and beginning to monitor long-term changes in environmental and biological parameters that may help to determine the interconnectedness of deep and shallow reefs.

Substation Curacao's Curasub submersible (<http://www.substation-curacao.com>) addresses questions related to biodiversity and conservation of deep reefs. Curacao is an ideal location for monitoring because shallow reefs are in good condition relative to many Caribbean localities; deep reefs are easily accessible because the bottom slopes rapidly to great depths right next to shore. The manned submersible Curasub is available and equipped with the necessary hydraulics to deploy and retrieve monitoring gear.

A private enterprise initially established to accommodate tourists, Substation Curacao now supports deep-reef research efforts by scientists from around the world. Deep and shallow reefs are not isolated ecosystems, and their interconnectedness may be significant. It seems likely that deep reefs may play an important role in the survival of shallow reefs above. Deep reefs should therefore be candidates for designation as marine-protected areas, but such management decisions require scientific data on a multi-year basis. Curacao is the ideal place to support these efforts.

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