Remarks by U.S. Consul General James R. Moore
Independence Day Reception
Curacao, July 4, 2013

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Good evening and a very warm welcome to Roosevelt House.

Distingido invitadonan, damas y cabajeros. Bon nochi y un caluroso bon bini na Roosevelt House.

Thank you for honoring us with your presence this evening as together we celebrate the 237th anniversary of the independence of the United States of America.

I would like to recognize, in particular:

From Curacao:
Her Excellency Acting Governor General Adele van der Pluijm-Vrede,
His Excellency Prime Minster Ivar Asjes, and
Distinguished ministers and members of Parliament.

From Aruba:
Director of Foreign Affairs, the Honorable Andy Lee.

We would also like to extend a special welcome to:
Former Governor General of the Netherlands Antilles Jaime Saleh and Former Prime Minister Daniel Hodge.

Your presence with us this evening is a testament to the strength and depth of the friendship between the United States and the Dutch Caribbean. Thank you for joining us.

It is truly a privilege to represent my country to Curacao, as well as to Aruba, Bonaire, Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten.

I arrived in Curacao just one short week ago. Already, in that brief period of time, Richard and I have experienced the warm hospitality for which your beautiful islands are – deservedly – so well known.

I have also seen firsthand in that short period of time the deep roots of partnership that unite your governments and your people with the United States.

Since arriving, I was honored to meet with Acting Governor van der Pluijm Vrede and Prime Minister Asjes, as well as with our valued colleagues in the Directorate of Foreign Relations. We began what I am certain will be a continuing and fruitful dialogue on numerous areas of cooperation and collaboration.

I was also privileged to attend on Tuesday the impressive celebration of Dia di Bandera. It was the perfect way to begin a posting to Dushi Korsou.

The United States and the Dutch Caribbean share a long history and many common values.

We are both known for our diversity, for welcoming people from other countries and other cultures.

The fabric of our societies is enriched and renewed by being multicultural and multiethnic.

We both have a deep and abiding belief in democratic values and democratic governance.

We both enjoy freedom of expression and religious tolerance.

We share in common a history of eliminating the scourge of slavery. Many determined individuals, such as Tula here in Curacao and Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln in my country, contributed mightily in the long struggle for freedom, equality, and the abolition of slavery.

And a literal example of building bridges between our peoples is that of Leonard Smith, the U.S. Consul in Curacao who in the late 19th century helped to construct the floating pontoon bridge across St. Anna's Bay that is still in use today.

Our interconnectedness is longstanding, deep, and enduring. To this day, the Dutch Caribbean and the United States of America stand proudly together as friends and partners.

I'd like to share with you a short personal story.

Many years ago, as a recent university graduate, a classmate and I made a long trip that was formative – and even life-changing. We sailed a small boat from the Chesapeake Bay – near Washington, DC – to the southern Caribbean and back again. Our voyage lasted six months. It was an unforgettable experience.

We enjoyed the warm hospitality of this region and met people from all walks of life. The sailing was good – yet a sense of adventure was ever-present. With no radio communication, GPS, or other technology that is common today, we learned a great deal about meeting challenges and staying on course.

Now, more than three decades later, here I am as the U.S. Chief of Mission to the Dutch Caribbean.

I look forward to again meeting challenges and staying on course as together we build on and fortify the important relationships between the United States and the Dutch Caribbean.

The multi-faceted nature of this relationship is demonstrated by the wide array of U.S. Government agencies that collaborate with your governments.

The Department of State, the Department of Defense, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Department of Homeland Security all have a robust and valued presence in the Dutch Caribbean. The dedicated representatives of these agencies work closely with local counterparts on your islands to ensure safety and security for all of us.

They do so in the pursuit of the important objectives we share with our Dutch Caribbean friends:

First, together we continue to build partnerships to promote security and to stop trafficking in narcotics. I would like, in particular, to recognize the important contribution of the U.S. Forward Operating Location to this effort. I would also like to acknowledge our gratitude to Curacao for hosting the FOL – and to Aruba for also hosting an FOL.

The FOL's personnel cooperate with local law enforcement authorities, the DEA, and other agencies to help bring about drug seizures and arrests. The men and women of the FOL are also known for their frequent volunteer work in local communities.

Second, we are building partnerships to assist the nearly three million American citizens who visit the Dutch Caribbean each year. These efforts will also help to enhance the local economy and to increase and diversify trade and investment between the United States and the Dutch Caribbean, benefiting all our peoples.

Third, we share a commitment to good governance, the rule of law, and respect for human rights.

Finally, through cultural exchange programs and through collaboration in education and in scientific research, we are strengthening people-to-people ties between the United States and the Dutch Caribbean.

For example, our consulate recently invited two American filmmakers – who happened to be brothers – to share experiences and tradecraft with young local filmmakers during the Second Annual Curacao International Film Festival.

The research on biodiversity and climate change that the world-renowned Smithsonian Institution is currently conducting on the deep reefs off your coastline is likewise exciting and important.

And we are very pleased to see a growing number of students from the Dutch Caribbean pursuing higher studies in the United States.

These types of people-to-people interactions bring us ever-closer together.

We share a rich and ambitious agenda, and I can assure you that every member of the U.S. Mission to the Dutch Caribbean is honored to play a role in advancing that agenda.

Before closing, I would like to offer a heartfelt thank you to the 20 sponsors of this Independence Day celebration. You saw their names in the foyer as you entered. Without their tremendous generosity, this event would not have been possible. Please give our sponsors a round of applause.

I would also like to thank my incredible colleagues in the consulate for working so hard for many weeks on this event. Every single member of our consulate team was intimately involved with preparations for this evening's celebration. Thank you so much.

And, again, our deep thanks to all of you – our guests, our friends – for honoring us with your presence this evening.

I would like to conclude by sharing with you an excerpt from President Obama's Independence Day message:

"On Independence Day, we celebrate a small, audacious group of patriots who, in signing a declaration, ignited a revolution that made us free…

They created a government of, by, and for the people, entrusting each generation to keep safe our founding creed.

Two hundred and thirty-seven years later, their words are just as bold and revolutionary as they were when they were first inscribed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...'

When our way of life has been challenged and tested, brave members of our Armed Forces have stepped forward to defend our convictions at home and abroad…Today we also honor their extraordinary sacrifice, and we pay tribute to those who gave their last full measure of devotion so that we might live free.

On this day, we celebrate our founding creed that what binds this Nation together is not the colors of our skin, the tenets of our faith, or the origins of our name. What makes us American is our allegiance to an idea first declared in a spare hall in Philadelphia – that all of us are created equal.

This idea guides us still, and calls on us to carry into an uncertain future the precious light of freedom..."

President Barack Obama

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, these ideals are by no means uniquely American.

These rights belong to everyone.

They are values that many share, and they represent the aspirations of people the world over.

Please join me now in a toast: To the bonds of friendship and partnership between the Dutch Caribbean and United States of America. May they thrive and continue to grow.

Thank you very much for being with us. Please enjoy the evening, the food, the fellowship, and the fireworks -- and we wish you a very happy 237th American Independence Day.