

News Items and Public Crime Summary for Week Ending March 6, 2010

Curacao – Refinery Workers Demand PdVSA Guarantees

Rumors concerning another strike by disgruntled Isla Refinery workers again caused fear for gasoline shortages, thus sparking panic buying and long lines at gas stations all over the island yesterday. Last week, Venezuelan State-owned Oil Company PdVSA-operated Isla refinery employees, united in the contractor workers union SGTK and refinery union "Petroleum Workers Federation Curaçao" (PWFC), went on a three-day strike. They blocked the entrance gates to the refinery prohibiting gasoline trucks from entering or leaving the refinery. PWFC chairman Angelo Meijer said that the strike rumors about independent workers demanding similar guarantees from PdVSA director Asdrubal Chavez concerning the refinery future are unfounded and not true. Isla Refinery spokesperson Kenneth Gijsbertha stated that geopolitical aspects should be regulated between governments; labor unions have no business there.

Isla refinery workers continue to fear for their jobs after repeated threats by PdVSA and Venezuela's oil Minister Ramirez to possibly withdraw from the Isla refinery to protest U.S. military counter-drug operations. The Curacao government has asked Ramirez to clarify his recent statements that Venezuela may order PdVSA to abandon its lease (expires 2019) of the Isla refinery.

PdVSA executive Manual Medina reportedly stated that PdVSA values the good relationship with Curacao, has empathy for the refinery employees, but that its commercial activities are secondary to its national interest. (Various media)

Kingdom – U.S. Security Firms Reap Huge Profits, Go Offshore to Avoid Taxes

U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) auditors revealed in its 2008 report, updated in January 2010, that U.S. corporate subsidiaries in tax havens such as the Bahamas, Switzerland, the Cayman Islands, Bahrain, Netherlands Antilles, Aruba, Jersey, Bermuda, the Channel Islands, Luxembourg, Macao, Lebanon, Liechtenstein and Cyprus "helped the 29 contractors reduce taxes, with about one-third decreasing their effective U.S. corporate tax rates in 2008 in part through the use of foreign affiliates, lower foreign tax rates, and indefinite reinvestment of foreign income outside of the United States."

Citing reports by the GAO, Dutch MPs from left-wing PVDA party asked Dutch Finance Minister De Jager if he is aware that the Netherlands Antilles and/or Aruba are used by U.S. firms to avoid taxes and how this might influence the Dutch Defense acquisition policies. (Antilliaans Dagblad)

Antilles – Dutch CG in Miami Leaves for Trinidad and Tobago

The Dutch Kingdom Council of Ministers approved the nomination of Lucita Moenir-Alam to become Kingdom Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago. Moenir Alam currently serves as the Dutch Consul General in Miami and was previously the head of the Netherlands Antilles Foreign Directorate. (Various media)

Statia – Gerald Berkel Appointed Island Governor

The Dutch Kingdom Council of Ministers approved the nomination of Gerald Berkel to become St. Eustatius' Island Governor as of April 1. Berkel, the current acting Island Governor, replaces Hyden Gittens, who ended his term in December 2009. (Daily Herald)

Curacao – Isla Refinery May Rent Compressors from Texas

The Venezuelan State-owned Oil Company PdVSA-operated Isla refinery in Curacao, which has been completely shut down since March 1, amid power problems and damage to an air compressor, may have a temporary fix: using rented compressors hauled in from Texas.

Officials at the Curacao Utility Operating Company, or CUOC, which supplies most of the electricity, steam, water and compressed air to the refinery, said Monday they are considering renting up to six moveable air compressors, which would take about a week or so to arrive.

Those compressors could help to allow processing to resume at the Isla refinery and has a capacity to process 320,000 barrels a day.

Before the refinery's shutdown a week ago, it was only processing about 230,000 barrels a day. But that still makes it an important part of PDVSA's refinery network.

The CUOC officials, who asked not to be identified, mentioned Sweden-based Atlas Copco AB (ATCO-A.SK) and Aggreko (AGK.LN) as potential suppliers of rental compressors, and said the units would probably come from locations in Texas. Representatives at Atlas Copco and Aggreko weren't immediately available for comment.

Problems at the refinery began as a result of a power outage and damage to one of two air compressors at the power plant run by the CUOC.

The CUOC officials said that apart from possibly renting air compressors, they are working to repair problems to the plant that could allow a partial restart at the refinery by the end of this week. Refinery officials reached by telephone confirmed this.

"The CUOC plant is now beginning to start up some of its operations, so it's possible that by the end of the week we can also begin to turn on some units," said an Isla refinery official, who asked not to be identified. Officials at PDVSA in Caracas were not available for comment Monday. (Various media)

Curacao - USFOL Gift To The Community of Curacao

On February 25th staff from the U.S. Forward Operating Location (USFOL) in Curacao donated computers to two worthy organizations on the island. A small group led by Chaplain, Captain Brad Phillips and Senior Master Sergeant Wendell Simms arrived around 9:00 AM in the morning to make the first donation of 13 computers to the Kolegio Annie Koenraad in Tera Kora. Principal Majorie Joseph was very excited about the tremendous impact and promise these computers will have for the 380 students that attend the primary school. She said, "These computers will be used for the students to learn language, math, and science in conjunction with the laptops already present in classrooms. The students will also be able to use the internet to research current events

and other topics.” The smiles on the faces of the children that morning told the whole story. It really IS the gift that will keep on giving to the futures of all Kolegio Annie Koenraad School students.

The second location for the computer donation was the Fundashon Amigunan di Cristo (Fuik Community Center). At this location, 15 computers were donated to be used in the community center and out in the community by teen students who are regular participants in the afterschool tutoring program offered Monday-Friday. Cesar Eman the president of the Fundashon Amigunan di Cristo foundation said, “This gift of computers from the USFOL will make a monumental difference in the lives of our students. For the first time, students will have the opportunity to complete their computer work at home. What a blessing!” Cesar and Emma Eman also offer an OANSA program on Sundays with more than 40 children & teens involved. (Various media)

Antilles - Listed Among Top Importing Countries for U.S. Diamonds

The U.S. global trade in diamonds fell by over 30% in 2009. U.S. diamond exports fell by 32.3% to US \$9.99 billion in 2009, from US \$14.75 billion in 2008.

The Netherlands Antilles is ranked at 15 on the top importing countries for U.S. diamonds list with US \$56.3 million (0.56%, down 7.2%). (La Prensa)

Aruba - Trade Union FTA Criticizes Valero-Agreement Procedure

The Aruban Workers Federation (FTA) is of the opinion that the government should have forwarded the letter of intent between Valero and PM Eman to parliament first, before it was signed. Aruba and Valero signed a declaration of intent last month which states that Valero will continue to keep the plant’s employees on the payroll until at least June 1, 2010. FTA believes that the Eman Administration is trying to bypass parliament by taking unilateral decisions. (Various media)

Curacao – ISC and Public Prosecutor Not Involved in Sudduth Trial

The International School of Curacao (ISC) and the Public Prosecutor are not directly involved in the Stephen Wayne Sudduth trial and will not travel to the U.S., according to an ISC spokesperson. Sudduth, a former ISC teacher (2006-2009) has his pretrial date set for April 13, and his tentative court date for May 3. He faces 30 counts of possession of child pornography and 10 counts of promotion of child pornography. Sudduth is in jail in Texas since his arrest in July 2008. (Extra)

Netherlands – Dutch Parliament To Publish Definitive List of Controversial Issues Today

The Dutch Parliament is due to publish today (3/9) the definitive list of the controversial issues that it will not take into consideration before the new parliament is elected and in office. The preliminary list, 33 pages long, was published on Friday (3/5). The Dutch political parties had an opportunity to make proposals for removing or adding topics to the list. The laws regarding the Netherlands Antilles’ constitutional changes are reportedly not deemed controversial by Dutch parliament. (Various media)

Caribbean – CTO Sees 'Reason for Hope' As Arrival Numbers Improve

Encouraging signs point to "progressive improvement" in Caribbean tourism this year, according to Hugh Riley, secretary general of the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO). While officials are reluctant to forecast percentage gains in arrivals this year over last year, Riley described the U.S. as on the rebound.

Although 2009 tourist arrivals overall declined 3.6%, to 22.1 million visitors, down from 22.9 million in 2008, fourth-quarter arrival figures showed the first increase all year, posting a 1% rise, far better than the 6.6% drop in the first quarter. Riley described the decline as "consistent with the decline worldwide." In 2009, The Dutch Caribbean (Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, St. Maarten, Saba and Statia) fell 3.7%. (Various media)

Curacao – Isla Refinery Presents Future Plan

Isla Refinery management presented its future plan, before 650 of approximately 1000 employees. The plan includes an estimated US \$1.5 billion investment that could turn the refinery into a modern plant within five years. Phase one and two of the Adequacy Project Curacao Isla Refinery (PARIC) plan were reportedly approved by Venezuelan State-owned Oil Company PdVSA that operates the Isla Refinery. Future phases require Curacao government approval and will probably include lease contract negotiations (lease expires in 2019); talks between PdVSA and the government have been very strenuous. The main PARIC goals are improving fuel quality, increasing refinery capacity, and meeting environmental standards.

The plan was presented a week after Isla refinery workers went on a three-day strike, because they fear for their jobs after repeated threats by PdVSA and Venezuela's oil Minister Ramirez to possibly withdraw from the Isla refinery to protest U.S. military counter-drug operations. Geo-political elements were not discussed during the presentation. (Various media)

Netherlands – BES Laws Non-Controversial; Process Continues

The BES-laws process can continue as planned after Dutch parliament declared the laws non-controversial. The main focus for De Jongh-Elhage II (the current Prime Minister's new administration) is the continuation of the Antilles dismantling process and the formation of the new Kingdom entities. However, the Kingdom Charter amendment to formalize the new constitutional relations will be handled by the new Dutch parliament for which elections are scheduled on June 9. (Various media)

Aruba – Valero Still Considering Options For Refinery

Valero Energy Corporation Chief Executive Bill Klesse said Tuesday that he is considering selling the Aruba refinery or taking on a partner in the money-losing operation that has been idle since last year.

The US-owned Valero refinery could also decide to keep and restart the 235,000 barrel-a-day plant, Klesse told reporters. Valero has been able to improve the future of the plant by settling a tax dispute with the Aruba government, the chief of the San Antonio-based company said. The agreement spans 20 years and is subject to approval by Aruba's parliament. The latest negotiations were eased by a much more open-minded government under new leadership of PM Mike Eman, Klesse said.

In January, Klesse said the Aruba refinery would not be profitable if it had been restarted and running then. (Various media)

"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."