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Bonaire has been damaged and is adrift in the ocean after being hit by a violent, proverbial storm. Our small boat has no rudder, no engine and no sail. The corona crisis (COVID-19) arrived on our coast within months of discovery in Wuhan, China. There were few infections on Bonaire, but the devastation caused by the closure of the island was serious. Even if we had remained open, there would be few economic activities. No one would have come because airlines and cruise ships cancelled all flights and sailings. Everything had stopped. The quarantine and social distance kept us at home and away from work. Traffic disappeared. Noise disappeared. The island went silent.

Silence After the Storm

There is now a temporary rest as we assess the damage. The strictest measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus are being relaxed. Some parts of life have restarted. Now that people are getting out, they are realizing what this storm has done to our society. Meanwhile, food is being provided to the hungry. Income is being provided to the unemployed. And rent, debt payments, and other financial obligations are being deferred. But there is still a mist of uncertainty caused by the storm. The damage we have suffered is now a reality.

A major reset is inevitable for everyone. And now is the time to start. The future will be different from the past. The island's largest source of income - tourism has fallen to zero. Tourism needs time to recover. If you have any fear of the uncertain time ahead, it's no wonder. That fear is real and justified. Be calm, but don't ignore the fear.

New Future for Bonaire

Bonaire will have to design a new future that does not depend on one industry. And fast. We must act now and navigate the emerging wave of crises, with a clear goal in mind. That takes leadership and courage. The current quiet is no reason for complacency. With COVID-19 crisis financing from The Hague, part of the pain has been postponed for the time being. But this will not last forever. The real tsunami after the first shock will strike soon. We will see unprecedented global unemployment. Bonaire will not be spared by this wave of unemployment. Jobs, livelihoods and dreams for the future will be lost - some forever. This will be a sad and visible reality that will be felt by everyone.

Strategic Master Plans Can be Discarded

From an administrative point of view, we can discard the old strategic master plans, because they are no longer relevant now. Many of the pillars that formed the basis for these

plans have disappeared. In the near future, there will be few tourists, few flights, and few, if any, cruise ships. Furthermore, the number of residents of Bonaire will decrease in the short term, instead of increasing. If the world continues in the current way, global funding will dry up. This will affect the feasibility of large projects on Bonaire. Developers may be back at the drawing board already, to figure out what to do with the financial models that have been destroyed. It will be a difficult time.

But is there anything positive?

Yes, there is. If we seize this moment, this is a unique reset moment for Bonaire. In fact, out of this crisis we can create an opportunity for a prosperous future for all.

How do you create a prosperous future for everyone?

This is what we should do:

Make Bonaire attractive to residents

- Inclusive Society: Avoid the current dual society and be an inclusive society that cares for all citizens. For those who fall below the poverty line, let's see how we can implement Universal Basic Income.
- Good Governance: Emphasize transparency in government behaviour.
- Homeownership: Create a homeownership program from government owned land, especially for local Bonaireans, who may not be able to afford it easily.
- Crisis Transition Fund: Create an emergency provision to help transform the companies most affected by the crisis, into companies that fit in the new Bonaire.
- Self-sufficiency: Become self-sufficient in agriculture, animal husbandry and energy. Bonaire used to export to other islands. As a special municipality of one of the world's largest food exporters, there is no reason why we cannot be a food and energy source for ourselves, if not for others in the Caribbean.
- GDP diversification: Reduce dependence on conventional tourism to no more than 30%. The dangers of over-reliance on one industry are clear to all.
- Security: In a world that is panicking about well-being, we can offer a paradise without worries. This can be achieved by ensuring that there is a reduced risk of coronavirus (or other communicable) diseases on Bonaire.
- New Communities: Our quality of life is an attractive option for retirees, especially those who unite with Bonaire's conscious / creative ethos. Build such communities.

Focus on Quality Tourism

- Focus on Quality: Instead of being a mass tourism destination, we should focus on being a low volume, high quality one. This focus makes better use of the cultural and ecological benefits of Bonaire. It also makes use of our competitive advantage as a pristine, unhurried, unforgettable place. And it creates a superior and sustainable economic model.
- Better Branding: Reset our brand. Bonaire should not only focus exclusively on the sea. Instead of just being a “Divers Paradise” or a “Blue Destination” - which we should stay - we should have a master brand as a “Destination for Mindful and Creative Spirits,” that has a deeper link to the real wealth of Bonaire: its precious land, culture and soul. All spending, marketing and policy decisions must be made through this filter.
- Yachts: Explore the possibilities to attract yachts and sailboats looking for a safe haven outside the hurricane belt. They spend more and pollute less.
- Night Sky: Highlight the beauty of our night sky, so that those looking for places without light pollution can enjoy this underutilized asset.

Restore infrastructure

- Public Works Program: Negotiate with The Hague for a “New Deal” program for public works and volunteers. Our dilapidated infrastructure must be fixed, which will also lay the foundation for the future, with roads suitable for bicycles and energy-efficient mobility solutions, connected to a reliable public transport system.

Focus on Education and Culture

- Education: Start teaching English already in kindergarten and encourage the establishment of schools that develop technical skills. This should be easier with current distance learning technology.
- Culture: Support our local artists so that we are a destination with authentic culture and also an attractive place for foreign musicians, film producers and other artists to come and work.
- Attract Creatives: We must attract value-adding creatives: entrepreneurs, innovators, digital nomads, artists, musicians, etc. They would add value to Bonaire and be more in line with our nature and free spirit.

Finally

It is clear that the current crisis is a rare occurrence. A Bonaire reset is inevitable and must be pursued with all its might. The future should no longer depend on one industry. The

plans made in the past are no longer a guide to the future. We will only experience this moment rarely, so we must seize this opportunity. In fact, out of this crisis we can create an opportunity for a prosperous future for all. The best days of Bonaire lie before us, if we are proactive. Together we can do this!

On A Personal Note

Bonaire is in my heart. Twenty years ago, I married my wife, who has a Bonairean mother and a European Dutch father. Her maternal family consists of some of the oldest names on Bonaire. Their roots have been growing in Bonairean soil for over two centuries and they have shaped our history. Roads are named after family elders. Children are born on Bonaire. And at the end of their lives, our family members are buried in the soil of Bonaire. The spirit, culture and soul of Bonaire has been passed down at our dining tables for generations. Bonairean blood flows in the veins of my three children. Bonaire will always be part of our family. For me, the future of Bonaire is personal. So, I give my opinion as a professional, and as someone with a great personal interest in the future of Bonaire.