

# Tourism symposium benefits from consultancy expertise

MARIGOT—No less than twelve invited panellists in the fields of international tourism development contributed to the Territorial Symposium on Tourism held at Radisson Hotel in Anse Marcel on Wednesday, making it one of the most ambitious conferences to date in helping define the French side's long term tourism goals.

The conference was convened by Vice-President in charge of Economic Development Daniel Gibbs and "How does hospitality as a follow-up to the consultations held between with tourism stakeholders January and June when six themes were discussed. The Vice-President in charge of Economic Development Daniel Gibbs and "How does hospitality as a follow-up to the consultations held between with tourism stakeholders January and June when six themes were discussed. The

Lines" in the afternoon. It was noted early in the conference that the French side had gone from 4,000 hotel rooms in 1995 down to 1,893 in 2008 due to France's tax break (defiscalisation) policy implemented in the 1980s, which had a disastrous effect in St. Martin.

There was discussion about whether the French side wanted brand-name hotels or boutique hotels, how many, and in what proportion. In any event, hotels on the French side have to be upgraded and re-classified, a complex task as French norms are not the same as American norms for grading.

Atout France Director General Christian Mantei said investment in the product was very important to attract the new generation of tourists, and especially important in St. Martin's case. "Product is four to five times more important than communication," he said. "Product is the best vehicle to facilitate efficient marketing. Communication alone is not enough."

Mantei said re-classifying hotels could take up to three or four years. Asked about the high cost of utility charges hotels have to pay in St. Martin, he said this was a matter for the French Government to resolve.

Atout France in its presentation noted the economic crisis had impacted the rate of visitor arrivals throughout the Caribbean during the first semester. St. Martin visitors arriving by air saw a drop of 12.5 per cent, those from North America specifically 22.3 per cent. The figure for

St. Martin was not known because data is not reported to SMTT Travel Research. The top performing destinations for repair, in order, are the US Virgin Islands, the Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Tobago. At the opposite end of the spectrum was the Netherlands Antilles (Curaçao), down 35 per cent.

Jordan said the Caribbean had an advantage over the US because there was limited new supply coming into the market. There are 2,300 hotels but only 86 new projects planned. In addition, demand for rooms in the Caribbean

Tourism Organisation (CITO) General-Secretary Hugh Riley noted that in his opinion the recession had reached "its bottom point" and tourism should soon start to see an upswing.

## Jules discusses incident office

ST. EUSTATIUS—Egbert Jules, acting project manager BES incident room (meldkamer) on his visit to St. Eustatius met with Police Division Head Quintin Rogers, Acting Harbour Master Austin van Heyningen, Head Nurse Gerard Berkel, Head of the Community Health Service (GGD) Carol Jaek, and Acting Fire Chief Chester Tearr.

Jules discussed with his hosts on Statia the set-up of an incident office for the BES Islands (Bonaire, St. Eustatius, Saba) saying that this office should be functioning at the start of the new constitutional status of the three islands on October 10, 2010.

The idea is that all emergency calls would go to Bonaire, while St. Eustatius and Saba will each have a back-up office in case of a fall out with the system on Bonaire.

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## New USM dean

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Joyce Watson

other educators Tuesday, management said the committee had been working from the day of Pribble's departure to choose a new dean. USM staff members were considered first, the e-mail said. Five university workers applied for the job.

The committee, which represents USM management and its board members, rated the applicants on their résumés and then chose the best two candidates after interviews. Watson was chosen after the second interview.

Watson graduated from University of the Virgin Islands with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1981. Three years later, she graduated from Bank Street School of

Education, New York. She has done graduate studies in English Language and Curriculum Development. Presently, she is pursuing her Dutch doctoral degree in policy and management at Open University in the Netherlands.