

English speech – President Daniel GIBBS

Saint-Martin's Day 2019

Seul le prononcé fait foi

Your Excellency Governor Holiday,
Madame la Préfète déléguée auprès du représentant de l'Etat dans les
collectivités de St Barthélemy et Saint-Martin,
Honorable President of the Parliament of Sint Maarten,
Monsieur le Sénateur de Saint-Martin,
Honorable Prime Minister of Sint Maarten and Council of Ministers,
Chers vice-présidents et membres élus du conseil territorial de Saint-Martin,
Chers élus et représentants des organisations socio-professionnelles,
Chers représentants des Conseils de quartier, et présidents des associations
de quartier,
Distinguished guests,
Fellow Saint-Martiners,

Every November 11th, St. Martin's day, is a time of joy and of sharing for all of
the **Saint-Martiners**.

It is an opportunity to come together to celebrate the traditions on which is
based our shared identity and to showcase the richness of our culture and
traditions.

**Our patronal celebration was built on the values of solidarity initiated by
Saint-Martin of Tours.**

The act of generosity of this man of faith, who illustrated himself in the 4th
century by offering the lining of his coat to a homeless person, is deeply rooted
in our collective memory.

He defines who we are: a supportive, welcoming and generous people.

**Our unity around the great symbols of equality and fraternity, we owe it
also to the Treaty of Concordia, signed in March 1648.**

This Treaty, which sealed our binational friendship, abolished the trade borders between north and south and facilitated our trade for 371 years.

It is an exceptional longevity, which must be emphasized!

But far beyond the commercial stakes, it is a fraternal and family bond that we have maintained for nearly 400 years.

This unity is what makes the singularity and attractiveness of Saint-Martin.

While at the international level, the whole world is undergoing severe social changes, our island and our societies are not spared.

In Saint Martin, some of the most profound changes are the result of Hurricane Irma, which has changed the social and economic landscape.

In this context, it is important for me to convey to you a **message of solidarity.**

I have come to tell you - with all the frankness you know me - that we must join forces to preserve the unity dearly bought by our ancestors and which is still important for the Saint-Martiners.

Saint-Martin, land of welcome and of openness, finds itself threatened at the very core of its fundamental values.

A threat that touches the principles dearest to our hearts:

The value of our land, our culture, our secular traditions ...

A sad reality against which we must fight in the name of the history of our island, in the name of our unity.

The slogan "One island, one people" makes perfect sense, this November 11th, 2019!

Yes, we must - TOGETHER - consolidate our achievements and insist on the points of vigilance that concern us all.

The Cohesion Policy that unites us must go further in its fulfillment because cooperation is an essential tool for the growth and development of our two territories and our inhabitants.

This union for the benefit of the entire island, must take into account the needs of each of us, our interests, the global vision that we have for this island that we cherish.

We have both northern and southern backlogs of basic infrastructure. These structural delays are inherited from past decades and are much more visible since the passage of Irma.

For many, these are construction sites on which we should combine our strengths.

Let's be clear: we need each other because in many ways our island is one:

One, when it comes to securing the island and protecting all its inhabitants

One, when it comes to promoting our image around the world

One, when it comes to tackling some cross-cutting issues such as:

- Waste management,
- Sanitation,
- Urban transport,
- Health prevention,
- The protection of our heritage,
- Major risk management,

And more broadly, the protection of our environment, a valuable collective asset for our future and that of future generations.

**Therefore, the question that concerns us all is the following:
What to do?**

How to interact to protect our island and bring concrete solutions to the problems we share?

Dear friends, brothers and sisters,

Successful cooperation between us and with our nation states - France and the Netherlands - is essential in this process.

And we are committed to meeting this need for multilateral discussions, through our quadripartite meetings.

The mobilization must come from us. We need to carry out actions together for the good of Saint-Martin/Sint Maarten.

I remain convinced that we are in the best position to know what is best for our people and our island.

As we are celebrating our unity, I wish to remind that the relationship with our nation states have to abide to listening and dialogue.

This process of consultation and implementation must go through a reliable legal framework. A framework that allows us to make concrete progress.

The **United Congress French and Dutch**, which I have been longing for, a logical continuation of our historical geopolitical relations, can fill this operational gap, and strengthen the ties of cooperation that unite us.

Yes dear friends, we have been Europe, before Europe ...

We have always had the support of the government of Sint-Maarten on this project and we are now counting on France and Holland to help us achieve and sustain it.

In the effort to overcome the structural deficiency and new economic projections for our two territories, this institutional body becomes an urgent necessity.

It would allow us to consider our **Friendly Island** as one entity to defend and promote.

We already do this through some joint public policies - the Memorandum of Understanding signed after Irma, in 2018, for the touristic promotion of the destination.

And we can do it in other areas of competence!

This is why I call for the involvement of the future Sint Maarten Government, for a serene and open cooperation integrated in the implementation of our mutual public policies.

Urgent topics that concern us:

I am referencing here to the development of the cross-border **European program** and the 3 projects that we have identified together:

- The construction of the Cay Bay Wastewater Treatment Plant
- The development of Simpson Bay Lagoon where the removal of shipwrecks is an emergency before the next hurricane season, to be able to go further
- The drainage program in the sector of Belle Plaine - French Quarter for which the Collectivité and its Water Treatment Plant Satellite (EEASM) have just launched the first development work on the Paradise ravine.

We must move forward together with the benevolence of the State which is the managing authority, to avoid suffering the automatic decommissioning for the 2019 year and spend the European envelope of 10 million euros over the next three years.

As part of the **INTERREG CARAIBES regional cooperation program**, I want to discuss with you this morning:

- The installation of the Weather Radar in St Peters, an major project for the protection of our populations in the event of a hurricane. We have already launched the fulfillment contract and now we have to sign a partnership agreement

- The Leeward Islands Geothermal and Digital Interconnection Hub project, which has been validated by the INTERREG selection committee, which will enable us to carry out pre-feasibility studies

Important agreements must also be maintained:

- Maritime arrangements planned within our quadripartite meetings
- The signature of the MOU for cooperation between our French and Dutch Taxi federations.

In the long term, this agreement will harmonize the price list of professional taxis on both parts of the island.

Dear friends,

Before concluding, I would like to remind you that November 11th, besides the celebration of our patron saint's day, is a significant date in the history of France.

We commemorate the Armistice of the First World War, signed on November 11, 1918; the "Great War", as we call it, which caused 18 million deaths in Europe ...

An armistice that marked the end of the fighting and recorded the victory of the Allies over Germany.

For the sake of neutrality, the Netherlands remained out of the fighting, but all of Europe, including your country, has suffered the consequences of this war. This past situation still proves to us, if it were still needed, that salvation lies in dialogue, exchanges, communication, and in mutual understanding.

Power-struggle has never solved ANYTHING ...

**In this sense, Saint-Martin is an example and we can be proud of it!
Let us beware as to not weaken what makes our strength and what defines us as Saint-Martiners!**

I would like to remind you:

It is by ourselves that we will succeed in writing the new page of our collective History:

With the resources that are available to us, with our deep energy and our convictions, to ensure that Saint-Martin is an island where it is pleasant to live, an island that is welcoming and open to the world, but an island which also knows how to preserve itself and protect its values and natural assets.

To quote the late Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations:

"The only way to hope for a better future for all humanity is through cooperation and partnership. "

At our level, I reaffirm my political will to work for territorial unity!

And I urge you to remain vigilant and keep in mind this message from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in The Force to Love:

"We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools. "

Let us keep moving forward, side by side, as brothers, to defend our **Friendly Island** and its crossed interests.

Dear compatriots, I am convinced that we will succeed together!

On this day of observance of our annual celebration, I extend my fullest consideration and sympathy to all the Saint Martiners.

Happy St. Martin's Day everyone!

Let us celebrate in joy, sharing and benevolence.

Thank you.