

President Daniel GIBBS' address

Treaty of Concordia Commemoration, March 23rd, 2021

[English version](#)

Monsieur le Préfet délégué auprès du représentant de l'Etat dans les
Collectivités de Saint Barthélemy et Saint-Martin,

Your Excellency Governor Holiday,

Honorable President of the Parliament of Sint Maarten,

Honorable Prime Minister of Sint Maarten,

Honorable members of the Council of Ministers of Sint Maarten,

Chers vice-présidents et membres élus du Conseil territorial de Saint-Martin,

Dear friends,

Today, March 23rd 2021, marks the anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Concordia 373 years ago.

We are therefore celebrating this morning the founding text of, how I like to call it, our "Common House".

It is an integral and constitutive part of our identity, imprinted in the collective memory of the Saint-Martiners.

The "spirit of Concordia" so intimately permeates the relations between the two parts of the island.

I am therefore, particularly pleased to celebrate this date, here, in this symbolic place, and especially in **your** company.

Even though, due to restrictions, we are still obligated to limit our numbers and increase our social distancing ...

I am hopeful that next year it will be the other way around!! ...

On the brighter side of things, at least today, we have avoided having another virtual ceremony.

I have been insisting on this point for a year:

In order to exchange good practices and get messages across, nothing can substitute human interactions.

For we do not make History on Zoom or Teams ...

We cannot build a common future only by videoconferencing.

All the more so when the health situation has significantly improved on both sides of the island.

Last September, the Saint-Martiners came together as one to contest the closure of the border. And rightfully so.

Honor, courage and common sense prevailed.

And the predicted health apocalypse that was so greatly apprehended, did not happen.

Today, we lead a more or less "normal" life, while the virus circulates twice as less than in our respective metropolises ...

Naturally, great caution remains in order, while waiting for the life-saving collective immunity, in particular thanks to the increasing of vaccination campaigns.

Contrary to received ideas, I know that Saint-Martiners are being cautious and respectful of the barrier gestures.

And are doing so with practicality and responsibility, without giving in to panic and collective hysteria.

Even though we have avoided being wrapped in cotton wool once again, the French side is never-the-less experiencing a form of "house arrest" for the last two months.

The drastic limitations of air travel to our metropolises, to our regional environment and to our most important tourist market hamper us, handicap us, suffocate us.

I am at the head of a Territory which essentially lives from Tourism, whether it is international, national or regional.

Without tourists, we can no longer function, I cannot breathe !

Flexibilities are necessary, even vital, in the coming weeks if we want to save our tourist economy and save our social cohesion.

Because a social explosion would have substantial economic, societal and security consequences on the entire island of Saint-Martin.

As hurricanes do not distinguish between the North or South of the island; neither do social storms...

Saint-Martin must therefore continue to welcome tourists, without unjustifiable restrictions that are not justified by the health situation.

While at the same time, all Saint-Martiners, from the Northern and the Southern side of the island, must be able once again to travel freely to Europe.

And be able to renew ties, particularly family ties, with the surrounding islands, such as Anguilla, Saba, Guadeloupe to name a few ...

With this in mind, today more than ever, we must find solutions, among ourselves and in conjunction with the French Republic and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, in terms of shared health protocols and increase our rapid testing capacity.

The need for multilateral discussions, through our quadripartite meetings, the famous "Q4s", are therefore necessary more than ever.

The elected officials of Saint-Martin, unanimously asked, in September 2020 and in February 2021, that a "Q4" face-to-face meeting be held as soon as possible, specifically dedicated to health issues.

Perhaps there will be, in the coming weeks, a window of opportunity for such a meeting since the legislative elections in Holland have just been courageously held, a few days ago despite the threats of a potential "third wave" ...

Beyond health issues, we must, and this is a theme dear to me, improve and deepen cooperation between the two parts of the island.

On November 11th, on the occasion of Saint-Martin's Day, I made a few suggestions in which I've firmly believed in for several years.

A French and Dutch United Congress, bringing together on an equal footing, the Executives of the two territories (Executive Council of Saint-Martin and Government of Sint Maarten), will undoubtedly constitute the appropriate political tool.

And this, in order to be able to progress together, to define priorities, to retain half a dozen subjects and to set a program of actions to be carried out in the medium term.

The mode of operation of this political body has yet to be defined together. Our Collectivité has made a commitment by proposing a first draft for reflection.

The Prime Minister of Sint-Maarten sent me a few days ago a draft "Declaration of Intent" and I warmly thank her for it.

This text will be carefully examined by my Services. The Collectivité of Saint-Martin will therefore make its suggestions in the coming days.

I will meet in the process, my Executive Council to discuss this project.

I would like for this Document to be officially signed, perhaps right here, and as soon as possible.

This will be an opportunity to set up, a Steering Committee intended to bring the United Congress project to completion as quickly as possible.

This Working Group would include technicians from our two Territories, assisted by consultants: those, on the Dutch side, from the European Development Fund (EDF) and those, on the French side, from the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT).

I wish for the United Congress to be set up, informally to begin with, as soon as possible.

Ideally, the first session of this insistence could be held on September 7, 2021.

A symbolic date, four years after Hurricane IRMA, which devastated our entire island, which would convey new hope, an accelerated rebirth, in unity, consultation and harmony.

I will therefore conclude on a positive note.

On November 11th, I ended my speech as follows:

“These are worrying times for us. Especially, in the face of our civil liberties being attacked and threats of endless restrictions. But, if we pool our energies, tomorrow will be synonymous with hope, audacity and achievement ”.

It is that very unity that makes our strength and which defines us as Saint-Martiners.

Let us therefore continue to move forward, by ourselves and for ourselves, by overcoming hurdles together.

We will then emerge stronger, united and exemplary.

Thank you.