



2015 Curaçao Chamber of Commerce board members from left to right Arthur Rosaria, Ivan Moreno, Jr., Vice President, Marcos Cova, Michael Marugg, Jeanette Hooi-Bonet, President Willem Jonckheer. Missing: Marc Cheis, Raoul Behr and Bryan Irausquin.

Chamber of Commerce Annual Meeting

On January 27, 2015, the Chamber of Commerce held its Annual Address at the World Trade Center. The annual address is an event where members of the Chamber are invited to come together to reflect on the previous year and set common goals for the future. Typically, the President of the Chamber of Commerce opens the meeting. There were approximately 700 people present, including the Governor of Curaçao, Ms. Lucille George-Wout, the Minister of Finance, Mr. José M R. Jardim, the Minister of Economic Development, Mr. Stanley Palm, and other relevant authorities, representatives of labor unions, and chamber members.

The theme for this year's Annual Address, or Jaarrede, was "Organizing Growth and Exports." This year, the recently re-elected Mr. Willem "Billy" Jonckheer opened the event with a speech reflecting on 2014 and laying the foundations for a plan for 2015, with a view to making our economy more resilient to changing global conditions.

He emphasized the link between public and private finances, and how important it is that government works with the private sector to create the right conditions for export to stimulate lasting economic growth. To facilitate the communication between the private and public sector, there is now a social dialogue that plays a significant role in building trust, discussion and planning for the

future of Curaçao. An important thing that Mr. Jonckheer mentioned was the creation of the "political and investment horizon," which basically refers to a common vision that allows both the public and private sector to adequately benefit from developments in Curaçao.

Mr. Jonckheer mentioned that Curaçao's focus should be on providing our products and services to the world outside of the island, even if they happen to be the same markets that sell to us. He mentioned that it is important that we focus on developing certain industries to tap into international niche markets: business services, airport-based services, data distribution and security, ICT services and international education.

Government, according to Mr. Jonckheer, needs to do its part in supporting businesses in Curaçao, working to eliminate bureaucratic processes that inhibit businesses from getting the licenses that they require. In addition, the government should limit its intervention in affairs of the private sector, dismantling policies such as the dismissal law.

Mr. Jonckheer also mentioned that the private sector must take its responsibilities to the community more seriously, to make it easier for the government to take a more hands-off approach. The private sector must be willing to change and comply with new regulations, taxes and adopt principles of corporate social responsibility. Although some businesses do really give back to the community, it is becoming increasingly important for businesses to go further than just making money and providing donations. As part of a small community, each business should contribute to making our island a better place, because this too affects our investment climate and the way we can position Curaçao in the global market.

Mr. Jonckheer's speech was relevant, particularly given other important events that have already taken place this year, for example the STEP conference, which was based on profiling Curaçao as a mid-shore entity for international financial transactions. With government developing new organizations to better work with the private sector, as well as establishing areas of communication on a political level in other countries, it is important that the private sector remains well-informed so that they can take advantage of any opportunities that become available in the region and in the world.

At the end of his speech, Mr. Jonckheer recognized his new fellow board members: Marcos Cova, vice president, Marc Cheis, Raoul Behr, Jeanette Hooi-Bonet, Michael Marugg, Bryan Irausquin, Arthur Rosaria, and Vanky Moreno.

With many important guests and business owners in attendance, the event was successful and the foundational vision was laid for the upcoming year. With ever changing global dynamics, it will be interesting to follow the goals set by the Chamber for this year and see to what extent some of these changes can be implemented.