

SHTA reiterates the need for the Electoral Council

PHILIPSBURG -- St. Maarten Hospitality & Trade Association (SHTA) on Wednesday stressed the urgency for having the Electoral Council (EC) functional as soon as possible.

The association opined that with the 2014 elections around the corner, it is imperative that the EC is able to carry out the tasks that it has been entrusted with, i.e. facilitating the registration of political parties wishing to participate in the elections, financial supervision of party campaign funds, etc. Even though the 'Landsverordening Registratie en Financiën Politieke Partijen' (the National Ordinance) prescribes an EC, SHTA said, to date, the long-awaited appointments of the EC members have not been made.

"It is commendable of Parliament to have passed a motion on regulating campaign paraphernalia and combating vote buying, in cash or in barter, via the drafting of legislation, but without an EC the recent call from Parliament requesting government to prepare the accompanying legislation may be pointless," a release from SHTA read.

In accordance with the National Ordinance, the EC is an entity which operates independently of Parliament and government. A political party, wishing to take part in the next election, will have to submit a writ-

ten request to be registered to the EC. They will only be registered if they comply with the requirements as set forth by the National Ordinance.

Amongst other things, registered political parties are required to submit an annual report outlining the organizational makeup of their parties, the number of contributing members, the financial outline of contribution fees accumulated each year and the annual activities. In addition, they have to submit a detailed financial report, which shows, amongst others, an overview of the income and expenses. The EC ensures that these reports are available to the public for inspection.

"As was suggested by SHTA in their April article, individuals who are campaigning should be required to make public certain information as it pertains to the election process, including sources and amounts of campaign donations in cash, services and in kind. Candidates should make public their business interests and either take positions that don't have conflict of interests or dissociate from those investments prior to taking office. Candidates should declare after the election how the money was spent. When elected, these officials should be focused on developing criteria, transparency, policy, legislation and oversight,"

the association said.

It continued: The people of St. Maarten should be able to hold their elected representatives to the highest ethical and moral standards. Qualifications and experience are to be properly evaluated when selecting the best man or woman for the job. With regard to any future elections, SHTA considers electoral reform an absolute must to safeguard the democratic rights of the people of St. Maarten when choosing a government to represent them. One, whose goals are solely focused on the best interests of the country as a whole, and not just in the short run, but also in the long run."

SHTA said that not having a fully-functional EC in place can hamper the electoral process and result in a repeat of forgone years, when the oversight of political parties was minimal. This, the association added, creates a discrepancy in the intention to elect the right people for the right purpose, instead of for financial reasons.



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