



Minister of Justice Nathalie Tackling Breaks Ground on Long-Awaited Construction of the New Point Blanche Prison

Philipsburg, Sint Maarten — 15 January 2026. The Ministry of Justice has officially launched the construction of the new Point Blanche Prison, marking a major milestone within the Detention Sector Reform Program and a decisive step toward strengthening Sint Maarten's justice system and improving detention conditions.

The construction project, implemented by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) forms part of the broader Detection Sector Reform Program led by the Ministry of Justice. It represents a joint investment of USD 52 million from the Government of Sint Maarten and the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations of the Netherlands. The new facility will be modern, resilient, and sustainable. It is designed to meet the highest international standards and ensure safe, humane, and dignified conditions for prison staff and those incarcerated.

Minister of Justice **Nathalie Tackling** underscored the significance of the moment:

"This groundbreaking marks a long-awaited turning point in the reform of Sint Maarten's detention system. It speaks to our responsibility to the people who live, work within, and are affected by that system every day — our prison staff, our inmates, and the wider community. The launch of the construction of the new Point Blanche Prison reflects our commitment to safety, dignity, and rehabilitation. This facility represents a future built on fair second chances, stronger institutions, and detention conditions that uphold international standards, ensuring justice is served with humanity, integrity, and purpose."

The new prison will cover approximately 10,000 square meters and feature a four-story main building, more than doubling the country's current detention capacity with space for up to 196 inmates. The design includes healthcare facilities, a basic mental health unit, family visitation areas, indoor and outdoor recreational spaces, workshops, and classrooms for vocational training such as carpentry, welding, and mechanics. These components support a rehabilitation-centered approach aligned with international detention standards, incorporating social, gender, environmental, and sustainability considerations.

While today's focus is on the groundbreaking of the infrastructure, the Ministry of Justice and its partners continue to advance other key pillars of the Detention Sector Reform Program. The reform has never been about infrastructure alone. The soft components, including staff training, leadership development, rehabilitation programming, education, mental health support, and reintegration initiatives, are already underway.

These efforts ensure that meaningful change within the detention system does not wait for the completion of a new facility, and remain just as essential as what is being built today.



The facility is engineered to withstand Category 5 hurricanes and seismic activity, using reinforced concrete and corrosion-resistant materials suited for coastal environments. Natural ventilation and energy-efficient design principles are integrated to enhance long-term resilience and sustainability.

Dalila Gonçalves, UNOPS Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, stated:

“Today, we are laying more than the first stone of a building, we are laying the foundation for a more humane, resilient and forward-looking justice system in Sint Maarten. This project reflects the commitment to dignity, rehabilitation and the rule of law that the Ministry of Justice have, demonstrating that safe detention conditions and respect for human rights can and must go hand in hand. UNOPS is proud to support the Government of Sint Maarten in delivering infrastructure that improves inmates living conditions, strengthens institutions and serves the country for generations to come.”

Construction is expected to take approximately three years and will employ an average of more than 100 workers daily, combining local labor with international expertise. As one of the most significant public infrastructure projects in the coming years, it will engage local suppliers, subcontractors, and service providers, contributing meaningfully to economic activity.

UNOPS has contracted Artelia JV as supervising engineer and CESAF JV as contractor. Both companies will prioritize local engagement, skills development, and knowledge transfer while delivering the high-technology systems required for a modern correctional facility.

The launch of construction reaffirms the Ministry of Justice’s leadership and commitment to delivering a safe, modern, and rehabilitation-oriented detention system that upholds the rule of law and the dignity of all individuals in Sint Maarten.

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Notes to the editors:



Photo 1

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