

*“Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. but it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning”, Sir Winston Churchill*

*“Trouble no set up like rain”. “Haas weh lazy fii back dem own grass will starve”, Enough is enough.*

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On our islands, for too long we have not used our intelligence for proper action; The Colonizer with its agents has decided everything for us. Our People might have survived similar happenings in the past century, but conditions were different, and there was Faith with action, with unity. It is vital that we unite, have Faith, and fight for autonomy without stopping until we get it so that we can construct our future.

Conditions on our island territory now are much more vulnerable to events like the current pandemia/endemia, effects of global warming, or hurricanes, earthquakes, in part due to the continuous catastrophic impact of over population and of irrational mass tourism.

Allow me to present a limited brain storming exercise I did of how things could change and some short ideas on possible strategies in order of priority:

### **Health services**

Health personnel on the islands are excellent although well underpaid.

Until there is more knowledge about the virus causing Covid-19, it is necessary to keep: 1) Social distancing, 2) proper testing, 3) isolation and contact tracing, and 4) wearing masks and proper protection. But if we can do 2, 3 & 4: test, trace isolate and protect, then social distancing

could be modified.

It is essential to have a laboratory on the island to do rtPCR testing that can give results in 6-7 hours max and let us know who has live virus. Later it might be good to have credible rapid antibody tests to know who is immune when we know if the virus definitely gives lasting immunity.

Telemedicine use is more widespread. Initial consultation and possibly treatment arrangements are done by phone unless there is a life-or-limb threatening emergency event where it is absolutely necessary to take the patient to a Health Center or to the hospital. Attention would be made at the Health Center closest to the area of residence. Otherwise, further management would be arranged via phone, whether it be prescription or self-care, or indications to consult at a center.

The Health centers would also again become the important centers for Health Promotion and Prevention.

Providence should construct a new hospital as planned since 1996 when a property was purchased in Old Town, blueprints exist for over 20 years, with enough parking space, away from the dangerous site where it is now.

Sale of hospital services to enterprises in Colombia and elsewhere who offer Tourism in Health for ambulatory procedures would make it self-sustainable, and would offer Access to certain specialties for the local inhabitants of Old Providence and St. Ketleena, as well receive some income from family members who come with the patient.

### **Sustainable population - population relocation**

If overpopulation has been the biggest problem for more than 40 years and should have been the priority for the past governors, with all reasons it is more so now when economies have collapsed, food becomes scarce and all other resources and services are limited. -**All investment should go toward relocation**

. The Development Plan presented to the assembly should be modified and concentrated only on this.

The food that the government is distributing will not last forever. It is easier to feed persons in Colombia where transportation can be made from farm to home, than on an island where food has to be brought by ship or airplane.

For the past 40 years we have not had enough Jobs for the working age group living on San Andres, but there have been too many Jobs considering the land area. In other words, we have not been lacking Jobs; we have had an excess of unemployed persons due to overpopulation.

The Design of a Carrying Capacity Model / census is not needed to start actions to decrease population. Based on Colombia's official estimate we have approx. 70K inhabitants, our estimate is at least 140K, whichever is right anyone should agree that at least 30K must leave. In fact, we understand that many are willing to leave now. A census and a Model can be made later but we should not waste time.

Airplanes are now parked and it is the best moment to exert pressure on the Colombian government to offer free transportation initially to those who voluntarily want to return to their country and to those illegal/undocumented, then work on the rest.

The Colombian government should give lands and technical support on its territory for families to live, cultivate or otherwise be productive, with a guarantee of health services, education, and even a possibility that most of their products would be exported to our islands. Colombia should thus create a policy with its own budget for the coming years.

We will find that the need for more health services, more jobs, schools, transportation will decrease on our islands once our population has decreased, and that is the best Development Plan.

### **Food security and food sovereignty**

Two things become a priority, essential and vital in the midst of a pandemia: Health and Food – and Overpopulation is a threat to both

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Once we are autonomous we could be exposed to policies of genocide by starvation - a "holodomore"-, if we don't prepare ourselves.

Promoting sustainable farming, aquaculture and fishing, food processing and marketing will grant us less dependency. Efforts also need to be made to restore Islander ownership of the land. Water sources and supply need to be handled as a very high priority.

Diversifying crops that might be more productive, like the suggestion by Derrick of medicinal cannabis, or growing spices.

Boatbuilding and repair will increase the fishing capacity and also offer repair services for quality yacht tourism.

Non-islander industrial fishing should be stopped. All the fishing banks that were not taken by the Hague should only be exploited by local islanders and legal residents.

### **Technology**

As all communities are moving to a digital society internet is a crucial tool. A generalized community digitalization will allow shopping, banking, paying, and health attention. This not only helps to alleviate the stress imposed by social distancing but helps in all activities, and has a huge post-pandemia potential.

Tourism, agriculture and fishing are no longer our only options, but these and most other activities can become more productive with the use of internet. However, we need a reliable internet connection cost what it may.

Call centers, application development, Access to a plethora of digital information to encourage self-taught knowledge/skills, production and commercialization of music, online meetings are some of the possibilities.

### **Tourism**

For one thing, tourism will not be the same. Tourists will have to be charged much more to cover a lot of additional costs and will be at a much smaller scale, and more offering of ecotourism. Tourist will need to be cleared by Health. This situation for one should bring more selected tourists with higher spending capacity, and less negative impact compared to previous cheap, massive, destructive tourism.

Airlines will have to limit the amount of persons on each flight. Hotels will have to modify the amount of persons they can receive and attend.

Transport to the cays, the beaches on Johnny Cay and Haynes will not again see multitudes.

Employment, formal and informal by the tourism sector will shrink greatly.

### **To sum it all...**

San Andres cannot possibly survive with the massive population density it has. Persons need to be sent back in a dignified manner to their home.

At least 70% of investment should be to decrease population, maybe even invested in Colombia to construct roads, health centers, urbanizations, and other services for returning persons, instead of spending it for them in San Andres.

This, with the help of our Creator, should allow safer better quality of life for all residents, with a truly sustainable development.

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Este artículo obedece a la opinión del columnista. EL ISLEÑO no responde por los puntos de vista que allí se expresen.