

HIS EXCELLENCY MR. WILLYS DELVALLE, AMBASSADOR OF PANAMA
TO THE NETHERLANDS

“Panama and the Netherlands have many things in common”

Ambassador Delvalle arrived in The Netherlands in 2014 and presented his credentials to His Majesty King Willem-Alexander in November of that year. Before being posted in The Netherlands, Ambassador Delvalle was a member of the Board of Directors of the Panama Maritime Chamber holding various positions in the Board, before getting elected President of the Chamber from 2012 to 2014.

BY BONNIE KLAP | PHOTO: EMBASSY OF PANAMA

Ambassador Delvalle has kindly agreed to answer a few questions for the *Diplomat Affairs Magazine*.

Panama is often associated with the Panama Canal. Can you tell us about the latest developments of this famous canal?

“Last year the Panama Canal turned 100 years old. This told us that changes were needed for the Canal to keep its competitiveness and to keep up with the changes in technology and modern commerce. After many years of studies the project to expand the Canal was taken to a referendum, as per our Constitution, in order for the Panamanian people to decide. By a huge majority it was decided that the Canal needed to be brought to modern times and in 2007 and at a cost of more than \$5.2 billion dollars construction began.

The work to build a third lock has many components. In the construction area; dredging of more than 24 million cubic meters of material and over 50 million cubic meters of material were removed from various hills along the waterway, a

water saving system to allow recycling of the water used for each vessel to transit, and of course the design and construction of the third set of locks. The new locks will allow vessels with more than double the capacity of the current ones to safely cross from one ocean to the other. The largest ships that are able to transit the

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current locks are called Panamax and vessels that could not fit these locks were called Post Panamax. With the construction of the third set of locks the vessels that will transit these new locks will now be called Neo Panamax. In other words Panamax vessels had a capacity of around 5,000 containers and Neo Panamax will have a capacity of 14,000 containers. This will also apply to

break-bulk, chemical, petroleum, car carriers, passenger and a new segment of LNG vessels, Liquefied Natural Gas which are one of the larger vessels in the world commerce.

But the Canal expansion is not only moving dirt, dredging and building a third set of locks, it also has to take into account the environment. Thousands of species have been moved to safe locations in other areas to preserve them, and also archeological work had to be done. During the construction many discoveries related to thousands of years ago were found and these had to be handled with major care to avoid damaging history. Archeologists worked for many months and many times the work to expand the Canal had to be stopped. Other discoveries found were on the construction work of the Canal by the French and the Americans in the late 19th and 20th centuries.

The construction of the third set of locks will open up new routes and markets for products around the world. We believe



H.E. Mr Willys Delvalle Velasco & Mrs Tatiana Arias de Delvalle.

that the expansion of the Canal will become ‘a game changer’ for the business community. The opening of this project is scheduled for the first quarter of 2016.”

Which are the main import and export products of Panama?

“Panama unfortunately is very dependent on imports, from cars to clothing to food. We are a small and young country with a population of less than 4 million people and only 111 years as a Republic. Our main exports are bananas, plantains, coffee, melons, watermelons, pineapples, gold, copper and palm oil. But we are a very service oriented country with over 10 years of sustained growth. Last year growth was 6.5%, and this year we

expect 6%. We have many things to offer in Panama; a solid banking system, world insurance companies, over 100 regional headquarters of major companies from all over the world, a huge logistical center in the Colon Free Zone and Panama Pacifico, major port terminals in both coasts with a railroad connecting them. Our airport is known as the Hub of the Americas because of the many connections to Latin American, tourism has experienced a consistent growth year after year. The dollar is the legal currency making it very stable for commercial transactions and many others which make Panama a very attractive country.”

Please tell our readers about the relations between Panama and The Netherlands.

“In one word excellent. We have a wonderful relationship that has been developing closer and closer over the years. We have had diplomatic relations for over a century, but it was not until 2012 when both countries opened their Diplomatic Missions in each country. This has definitely been an asset. Panama and the Netherlands have many things in common. We both have large airport hubs, major ports, excellent geographical location, low unemployment, stable economies, big logistical centers, many regional headquarters, and many other similarities. Our cultures are very different, yet our people are friends and like to do business together. It is a sort of familiarity which makes us very good friends and colleagues.”