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Speech by His Excellency the Governor Daniel Pruce

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Daniel Pruce

Rotary Club of Tortola

Security Is Rooted In Community

Thank you for the opportunity to join you today to talk about our work on security here in the Virgin Islands. Before I come to some of the practicalities and the work of the National Security Council - the NSC - I wanted to reflect a little on the broader context.

When I arrived here security was often described to me as an issue which was largely the business of the RVIPF. Of course, in part that is correct. But only in part.

Secure societies, secure communities are characterised by ***a shared responsibility for security***. Everyone plays their part in making their environment safe. The police are not seen as a separate agency but as an integral part of the community. To paraphrase the principle developed by Sir Robert Peel, seen as the father of modern policing methods: the police are the people. And the people are the police.

This shared responsibility is central to our approach here in the Virgin Islands. Each and every one of us has their part to play. And this extends well beyond government.

Rotary itself shows the remarkable contribution that people can make voluntarily. The work of Rotary provides many outstanding examples of communities offering

young people support, activities and interests to help them develop in a way that enables them to make a positive contribution to these islands.

Alongside Rotary we have many other remarkable voluntary organisations throughout this Territory giving young people opportunities to learn and develop positively: the cadets corps, the girl scouts, the boys' and girls' brigade, the Lions; there are programmes to learn music, arts, drums, dance, photography, film-making; hiking, biking, studying flora and fauna, looking after the less fortunate; and these activities are supported by many dedicated volunteers sharing skills, insights, wisdom and, ***above all, kindness.***

Creating these positive pathways helps to give young people choices. It counters what to some might appear to be the irresistible pull towards criminality.

Security is rooted in community.

So the steps we are taking to strengthen our front line interventions will fail if the community does not engage. I hope we can all ask ourselves what can I do to help my community? What can I do to help the young? What can I do to help those in prison so that they never return there again? What can I do to help the police?

Just yesterday I had the privilege of meeting the team that coordinates Crimestoppers here in BVI. They provide a confidential hotline (800 8477) so that people can report information, or "Tips", that may help in our collective effort to combat crime. Crimestoppers is led by volunteers. It is independent of the police. The hotline is completely confidential. It is a proven model which has been successful around the world and has led to over 1 million arrests. I was delighted to hear that Crimestoppers here in the BVI is relaunching - with a new website

going live shortly. It is another great example of a way in which the community can get involved and make a positive difference. I was delighted to agree to become its Patron. But I should add they are interested in other support, including a second patron who is, and I quote, **“cooler and younger”** than me!

We all need to take responsibility to find solutions to the security challenges we face now. And this is not only important for our own safety. Security underpins prosperity and we all want to see the Virgin Islands grow and flourish. Our wonderful offer to the many tourists who visit these remarkable islands is underpinned by their having the confidence that they are visiting a safe, as well as a beautiful, environment. Security, prosperity and a better future for these islands are inextricably linked.

Let me now talk in some more detail about the **practical work** we are taking forward.

The RVIPF faces a challenging year: the criminal environment is becoming more complex, with overall crime up 12% in 2024; the force is facing a major transition with the appointment of a new Commissioner later this year; and the second volume of the HMICFRS law enforcement review, due next month, will I expect include far-reaching proposals for the police force – laying the foundations for a programme of change that will take several years.

My duty as Governor is to do all I can to support the RVIPF. So I am working with policing colleagues in the UK to support Acting Commissioner Vanterpool in the coming months.

Experts from the UK will work under the Acting Commissioner and focus on priority areas including improving our marine capability, strengthening our intelligence work and coordinating our emergency response. They will be fully integrated into the force, and take their direction from the Acting Commissioner.

The NSC considers matters relating to internal security and any significant security developments in the Territory, including the occurrence of significant criminal activity. It is the main forum for collective discussion of internal security matters. The NSC is comprised of members including the Premier, the Minister for Communications and Works, the Attorney General and the Commissioner of Police. As set out in the Constitution its role is to advise me. I welcome the rich discussions we have around the NSC table.

Initially, I gather the NSC met on an ad hoc basis, but when I became Governor, I convened us to meet monthly and then last autumn we increased that momentum to weekly meetings, reflecting the importance of information sharing and problem solving across the criminal justice system. One of the many ways we are working together at the NSC to deal with crime is by improving the flow of information and data.

All of this allows us to be much more strategic and pro-active in our work. So that we can get ahead of the issues rather than just be reactive. It also means we can bring in key agencies and Ministries to discuss issues with them, provide support and foster improved joint working. Two examples:

- it has become clear that the Joint Task Force – bringing together the police, customs and immigration – is an essential component of our law enforcement capability. The NSC will help support all three agencies to realise our shared vision for the JTF.

- the NSC is also taking forward work with the Ministry of Education to better understand the link between juvenile delinquency and adult criminality. So that we can break that link: through partnership across agencies, social support, activities to channel energy positively, and - yes - firm discipline where that is needed. This discussion has been informed by the Minister for Education's recent successful visit to the UK, including visiting London's Violence Reduction Unit. I hope we can develop a similar model to the VRU here in the Virgin Islands.

I also hope we are also about to start the vetting of key agencies: the police, the prison service, the immigration service and the customs service. This is a critical step in protecting the officers in those organisations from inappropriate external influence or coercion. It will help build public trust in those agencies. For example, the police can only do their work effectively if there is public consent, and confidence in them. Vetting will also facilitate the joint working across agencies that is crucial to our collective success.

I talked about shared ownership. That extends across government. So through the NSC and other bodies we are **mainstreaming security** into other policy areas:

- For example by ensuring adequate planning for the busier days of cruise ship arrivals to preserve public order and ensure our visitors have a wonderful and safe experience here.
- We will discuss security in the context of the new tourism policy under preparation.
- The NSC will shortly discuss road safety from a security perspective.
- And, in accordance with the protocol established some years ago, we are overseeing cross agency preparations to ensure the Vybz Kartel concert on

15 March is safe and secure.

Just before I wrap up I wanted to illustrate how, alongside the NSC, we are driving change in other ways.

Every month I chair the Criminal Justice Advisory Group which brings together all players in the criminal justice system. It reflects the **“end-to-end”** approach we are taking to improve the way the whole system works together. For example, we are engaged in the work of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court to introduce new Criminal Procedure Rules:

- The new Rules will improve the efficiency of how we manage and process cases;
- This in turn should lead to people spending less time on remand at Balsam Ghut prison:
- That will ease the overcrowding there – currently over 120 prisoners in a prison designed for 80.
- Reducing numbers will create more capacity to develop rehabilitation activities.
- These activities will help break the cycle of re-offending so that former inmates can make a positive contribution to society and help bring overall crime levels down.

I visited the prison two weeks ago – the team are already doing great work there, with super support from the community.

I hope these few practical examples help illustrate the breadth of the work we have underway.

To **conclude**:

I said security was my top priority when I was sworn in as Governor a little over a year ago. That remains the case.

My approach is an inclusive and pro-active one. We all have a contribution to make. No single person has all the answers. The more of us who become involved the greater our chances of success. I look forward to our collective activity expanding still further in the coming months.

My hope is that by the end of this year we will have **started to turn the corner** on the many security challenges we face. And by so doing be fulfilling our shared duty to make the Virgin Islands a safer place.

Thank you.