GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

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Statement By Premier Hon. Dr Natalio D. Wheatley Update On 76th Meeting Of The OECS Authority And Other Matters

Release Date: 21 March, 2025

Press Conference

21st March 2025

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Update On 76th Meeting Of The Oecs Authority And Other Matters

A pleasant good morning to the people of the Virgin Islands.

Welcome to the Members of the Press Corps to this press conference. My Government’s regular updates to you reflects our ongoing commitment to public engagement, transparency and democratic accountability.

I would like to acknowledge the Senior Public Servants present.

Before I deliver my substantive remarks, I want to extend deepest condolences to the families and friends of those persons who recently lost loved ones.

As a community we grieve with you and pray God will give you strength to get through this difficult time.

While we mourn every death, it is deeply troubling when a life is taken by violence and crime.

Not only will it take a concerted effort by our law enforcement to effectively deal with this problem, but also the entire community.

Crime and violence are not just issues affecting one segment of our society. They impact everyone who lives and work here in some way, as well as the persons visiting us here on our beautiful islands known for their tranquility and safety.

Feelings of insecurity are amplified even more when a famous person like Pressure is robbed at gun point in a parking lot by a gang of young persons. It is unacceptable and highly regrettable that he and others went through this.

Crime and violence are not what we want as a society and certainly not the image we want to project to the world.

We must redouble our collective efforts to steer our young people away from crime and violence, especially our young men. This is why I am looking forward to the Crime Summit that is currently being planned so that we can organise ourselves as a society to better respond at every level.

For those individuals who insist on terrorizing our community, the police will continue to pursue you vigorously and I am sure are redoubling their efforts.

Lastly on this issue, I want to appeal to the young men and women of our community to turn away from a life of crime and violence. Resist the temptation of the fast life. It could cost you your own life or that of someone you love. It is not worth it. I repeat, it is not worth it.

I call on the members of our community to share any information you may have with the Royal Virgin Islands Police Force that may assist them with their investigations.

I will now turn to my substantive statement.

From 19th to 20th March, I attended the 76th Meeting of the OECS Authority in St. Martin. The other Heads of Government and I officially welcomed St. Martin into the

ranks of the organisation as an Associate Member State.

I also personally congratulated President Louis Mussington on this accomplishment.

By becoming a part of the community of states and territories that comprise OECS, the Government and people of St. Martin will have a seat at the table in which we collaborate on challenges that are best addressed collectively.

This is one of the primary purposes of OECS, to provide a platform in which we work together as a subregion to address problems that are beyond the scope and capacity of any one Government to address, especially given the small size of our respective societies and the sheer scale of the challenges confronting us.

Among other things, at the meeting in St. Martin we discussed the challenges posed by the ongoing tariff wars, the importance of stimulating intra-regional trade by harmonizing our own tariffs, and a number of other sensitive matters.

Given the shifts in the global economic and geopolitical landscape, we have agreed that our governments will remain in close communication so that we can respond as we required.

I am also pleased to report that the OECS has expressed full support for the self-governance of the Virgin Islands as we continue to pursue constitutional advancement.

As you are aware, the Virgin Island is a member of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court. We host the court’s Commercial Division that is of mutual benefit to us and the OECS. It is a critical component of what makes us attractive and successful as a jurisdiction and international finance centre.

Allow me to speak to a few other matters.

Last week I welcomed back to the ranks of the Government Honourable Lorna Smith, OBE. Her wealth of experience and the respect she commands in the financial services industry and business community can be of best use to us as a Territory by her being a member of the Government.

I have requested the creation of two Minister of State positions of which she would occupy one, if the request is successful. A Minister of State is a senior Minister who works within a Ministry to support the Minister responsible for the overall portfolio.

Additionally, I have also requested the addition of Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State positions that would be a least senior Minister within a Ministry.

These Ministerial positions are normal in the Westminster System of Government, particularly in the United Kingdom.

Currently in the Virgin Islands we are limited to Ministers and Junior Ministers, but hopefully we can get this changed. I will provide an update on the status of my request to the Governor in due course.

Earlier this week I was honoured to launch the UN-Eastern Caribbean Overseas Territories Roadmap for Improving Access to Development Finance. Among other things, the roadmap provides a strategic plan for:

- improving engagement between the Governments of Eastern Caribbean Territories and development partners and international financial institutions;
- strengthening our capacity to mobilize and manage resources; and
- deepening regional partnerships to unlock development financing opportunities.

Our objective is to gain access to concessional financing and grants so that we can continue to pursue sustainable development and build climate resilience. I am most grateful to the UN Resident Coordinator for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean His Excellency Mr. Simon Springette who joined us here in the Territory for the launch.

Finally, I want to congratulate Mr. Steve Parillion and YOLO promotions on the resounding success of the Vybz Kartel show. It was an amazing evening in which Vybz Kartel and other artists entertained thousands of fans who came to the Territory for the show.

The show undoubtedly generated significant economic activity and stimulated the economy. We are beginning the process of analyzing its economic impact and will

provide an update in due course. For now, I am confident that the hotels, rental car companies, vendors, restaurants, ferries, taxis, gas stations, clothing stores, salons and barber shops are happy with the outcome. I am also encouraging persons to support the remaining activities for Agricculture and Fisheries month, with market day in Anegada on March 24, and in Jost Van Dyke on March 29.

With that I will end my remarks and I am happy to take questions. I