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Statement by Premier, Honourable Dr. Natalio D Wheatley, on the Completion and Submission of the Government of the Virgin Islands Self-Assessment Report on the Implementation of the Recommendations of the 2022 British Virgin Islands Commission of Inquiry

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08 May 2025

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to provide this Honourable House with an update on the Completion and Submission of the Government of the Virgin Islands Self-Assessment Report on the Implementation of the Recommendations of the 2022 British Virgin Islands Commission of Inquiry Report (COI Report).

1. Madam Speaker, it is a little over three years ago that the COI Report was published in the Virgin Islands on 29 April 2022. History will mark that date as

the beginning of a transformational journey of governance change for the Virgin Islands. Today, Madam Speaker, I can announce with a strong sense of Virgin Islands pride that we have reached another milestone in the governance transformation of the Virgin Islands with the submission to the United Kingdom Government of the Government of the Virgin Islands Self-Assessment Report on the Implementation of the Recommendations of the COI Report.

2. You will recall Madam Speaker, that the Minister for the Overseas Territories visited the Virgin Islands on 4 - 6 November 2024 and requested a Self-Assessment Report by the Government as one of the four items to be submitted to the UK Government (UKG) to support the review of the progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the COI Report. The Self-Assessment Report, along with the Governor's Final Review, review of specific recommendations by FCDO officials and submissions from the public are to be key determining factors in whether the Order in Council to partially suspend the Constitution of the Virgin Islands would be lifted.
3. Madam Speaker, the journey of the last three years has not been an easy one. We were on the brink of erasing over one hundred years of governance progress had we allowed the recommendation for direct rule to happen. The period challenged us as Virgin Islanders to the core and forced us to confront some harsh realities of our governance deficiencies. We had to make the choices necessary to uphold the values imparted to us by our fore parents. We had to defend who we are as a people and protect our future aspirations. Whilst we may question the motive of COI's origin, I have no doubt that the COI and the reforms that came out of it have set the Virgin Islands on a new plateau of growth towards greater self-government.
4. Madam Speaker, we recognized that the implementation of the COI recommendations presented an opportunity to enact essential governance reforms that should have accompanied the level of autonomy granted under Ministerial Government in 1967. In the process of implementing the recommendations, we gained appreciation for our accomplishments since 1967 and realized that the rapid development of the Virgin Islands was achieved without the systemic and institutional structures that typically facilitate such growth. This confirmed that the socioeconomic advancement

of the Virgin Islands as evidenced by leadership in global industries, a high standard of living, and a diverse population, is a testament to Virgin Islands political and administrative leadership.

5. Madam Speaker, this same confidence in the capability, resilience, and dedication of Virgin Islanders, particularly our public officers, is what allowed us to successfully implement the recommendations of the COI reforms under democratic governance. Our public officers developed and implemented the structures, processes, and procedures necessary for the reforms to be carried out and executed them whilst simultaneously managing daily operations of the public service. This was especially challenging given the systemic conditions highlighted in the COI Report which persisted during the implementation. Madam Speaker, it makes you wonder how much progress could have been made had these overdue reforms and proper institutional structures been implemented earlier.
6. Madam Speaker, in many instances, the reforms implemented extended beyond the scope of the COI Report recommendations as the Government prioritized nation building over a box ticking exercise to implement recommendations needed to advance our governance. In areas such as public assistance, residency and belonger status, and crown land management, we integrated longstanding plans and accelerated pre-existing reforms into the COI framework. The implementation of these recommendations addressed core values of public interest and incorporated them into governance structures that meet transparency, accountability, and fairness standards, whilst preserving cultural and historical values.
7. Madam Seaker, I said at the beginning that that governance reform is a journey, and it does not end today with the completion and submission of the Self-Assessment Report. We have already embarked on ongoing governance reform through our Governance Reform Transition Plan approved by Cabinet on 30th April 2025. The Plan outlines how the Government will implement the seventeen pieces of legislation and the nine major policies coming out of the COI reforms. It also provides a comprehensive communication plan to ensure the people of the Virgin Islands are educated about the various changes and the impact on their lives, as well as how they can benefit from the changes.

8. So, Madam Speaker, the submission of the Self-Assessment Report signifies completion of the process of implementing the 48 recommendations. The OT Minister will now have further discussions with the Governor, the Foreign Secretary and the Government of the Virgin Islands to determine the next steps. The OT Minister committed during his November 2024 visit that this would be decided by 30 June 2025. It is my expectation Madam Speaker, the Order in Council would be removed.
9. Madam Speaker, as we close this chapter on our governance reform journey, I would like to express my profound appreciation to the public officers for the herculean task of implementing these recommendations under very challenging conditions. I must also thank my colleagues in the Cabinet and the House of Assembly for their tireless efforts to ensure we enacted the measures in the best interest of the people of the Virgin Islands. I thank the reviewers for producing excellent reports to provide insights and information to make the recommendations relevant to the Virgin Islands.
10. Madame Speaker, I must give special recognition to the Permanent Secretaries, the Financial Secretary, the Cabinet Secretary, the Attorney General and their respective teams who did the heavy lifting over the past three years to get us through this process. I wish to also recognize the team of the COI Implementation Unit and the Governance Reform Delivery Manager for being the constant and driving force to keep the implementation on track. And of course, Madame Speaker, I thank you and your team for your pivotal role in guiding this Honourable House through the process.
11. Madam Speaker, I also wish to thank His Excellency the Governor and his team and the United Kingdom Government for the collaboration in implementing the recommendations. And last but most importantly, Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the people of the Virgin Islands for their patience and understanding over the past three years as we divided our attention to carry out the implementation, sometimes at the expense of attending to their daily needs.
12. Today is a day we should all applaud, Madam Speaker. It symbolizes our collective resilience and commitment to the ideals that make us Virgin Islanders and commits us to the pursuit of self-determination. Thank you, Madam Speaker

Additional Documents or Media

- [coi_self-assessment_report-fina version.pdf](#)