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Remarks by Hon. Sharie de Castro for the Foreign Languages Immersive Extravaganza

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Minister of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports

Promoting Bilingualism for a Stronger Economy and a Brighter Future

Date: 8th April 2025

Good day to all.

As the Minister of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports, I am proud to reaffirm this Government's strong commitment to preparing our students for a dynamic and interconnected world. Today, I underscore the vital importance of teaching Spanish and French at both the primary and secondary levels across our education system.

In today's global landscape, the ability to communicate in multiple languages is not just a competitive advantage—it is a necessity. Bilingualism opens doors: it empowers our young people to engage meaningfully with the world, it strengthens our economy, and it enriches our society.

In the Virgin Islands, our tourism industry stands as a pillar of economic growth. By equipping our citizens to converse fluently in Spanish and French, we enhance the visitor experience, foster deeper cultural connections, and position ourselves to welcome a broader, more diverse range of guests. In doing so, we make our islands not just a destination, but a home away from home for travelers from Spanish-speaking and French-speaking nations.

Equally, in our thriving financial services sector, the ability to build relationships in multiple languages is crucial. Spanish and French are two of the most widely spoken languages across the globe. Strengthening our multilingual capabilities allows us to better serve clients, cultivate trust, and attract investment—further establishing the Virgin Islands as a respected global financial centre.

Investing in foreign language education is, quite simply, an investment in our future. Research has consistently shown that learning additional languages improves cognitive development, nurtures adaptability, and broadens cultural horizons. By embedding Spanish and French learning opportunities into our

curriculum from the earliest stages, we are empowering our students with the tools they need to succeed not just locally, but globally.

It is in this spirit that I warmly invite the entire Virgin Islands community to join us at the Foreign Languages Immersive Extravaganza, taking place on 8th and 9th May, 2025, at the Multipurpose Sports Complex in Road Town. This exciting event will showcase the incredible talents of our students and educators in Spanish and French, celebrating the beauty, creativity, and importance of bilingualism in our territory.

I encourage all residents, educators, businesses, and community leaders to attend. Let us come together to celebrate language learning, support our young people, and embrace the rich diversity that bilingualism brings to our shores.

Together, we are building a brighter future—one conversation, one connection, and one new language at a time.

Thank you, and may God continue to bless the Virgin Islands.