GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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Official Statement by Honourable Sharie B. de Castro Minister for Education, Youth Affairs and Sports on the 75th Anniversary of the Legislature of the Virgin Islands

Release Date: 10 November, 2025



Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, Honourable guests in the gallery, people of these Virgin Islands, good morning. Every time I walk into this House, I feel the weight of history. And today, as we commemorate the 75th anniversary of our Legislature, that weight feels especially profound.

I think of my forefather, Captain Carlton deCastro — one of the first men to sit in this chamber when the Legislative Council was restored in 1950. A sea captain by trade — steady at the helm, calloused hands gripping the wheel, eyes fixed on the horizon, steering through both calm and storm.

But in 1949 he was captaining more than a vessel. He and his peers — Theodolph H. Faulkner and Isaac Glanville Fonseca — were steering a people back toward self-belief. They took the helm at a time when the Virgin Islands had drifted too long without direction, when decisions about our future were made far beyond our shores.

In 1949, more than 1,500 Virgin Islanders filled the streets of Road Town. All marching to the Commissioner's Office with one message: "Let us steer our own ship." That march was our launch. They built a vessel not of cedar and canvas, but of conviction, courage, and community.

Those first men — Honourable Carlton deCastro, Honourable Isaac G. Fonseca, Honourable Theodolph H. Faulkner, and Honourable Howard R. Penn — were the first elected crew on deck, who formed that first Council. They didn't have fancy offices, big budgets, or consultants. But they had heart — and they had the will to keep the vessel afloat even when the seas were rough.

They laid the keel of representation. They hammered in the planks of accountability. They raised the sail of self-determination. And for me, as a descendant of one of those men, I feel both honour and obligation. Honour, because their legacy is my lineage. Obligation, because that legacy demands more than remembrance — it demands stewardship.

In 1950, when the Legislative Council was restored, it was like the christening of a new ship — the Virgin Islands' vessel of representative government, launched on the open sea of self-determination. So today, we do not just celebrate 75 years of the Legislature — We celebrate 75 years of ourselves. Of a people who refused to be passengers. Of a small territory that proved democracy can grow even in the smallest soil.

We celebrate every Virgin Islander who stood up, spoke out, or served. We celebrate the courage it took for those men to believe that their children could one day sit in these seats — and the faith that one of those children, one of their descendants, would stand here now.

But Mr. Speaker, as we honour this history, let us also remember the audacity that made it possible. We like to recall the 1949 March as a proud and peaceful moment — and it was.
But it was also disruptive. It was bold. It was impudent. It was gallant. It was defiant. The Great March of 1949 was the sound of a people waking up — the sound of courage echoing against the walls of complacency.

It took gall for Virgin Islanders to march to the Commissioner's Office and demand their say in their own affairs. It took nerve to stand up to a system that had forgotten their worth. And that same gall — that same Virgin Islands audacity — that same spirit that moved Faulkner, Fonseca, and de Castro — to say, "We will no longer be silent passengers on someone else's ship." – lives in us still.

So, let us remember: We are not here to be comfortable. There is nothing comfortable about the journey toward self-determination. Because, Mr. Speaker, if we forget the courage that built this vessel — if we forget the reason why it was launched — then one day the people might decide to march again. And none of us should ever want it to come to that. We must steer this ship with purpose. We must make our presence here meaningful. Our fore parents fought for the right to hold this wheel — and we must never let it spin idly in our hands.

That is why I fight — for our children, for education, for innovation, for opportunity, for fairness. Because when we steer with courage, the vessel stays steady. When we steer with conviction, the people trust the course. So let this anniversary remind us not only of what they built, but of the boldness it took to build it — and the boldness it still takes to keep it moving forward.

Seventy-five years later, the question before us is "What will we do with what they began?" Are we rowing together, or are we drifting apart? Are we listening to the people, or talking over them? Are we building a Virgin Islands where every child feels they belong, where every voice matters, where every dream can find a home?

The vessel is still in motion. But the sea is changing — global currents, economic storms, the rising tides of self-determination and identity. We cannot sail backward. We cannot let fear keep us tethered to the dock. We must chart forward — boldly, wisely, together. Because the strength of this vessel is not in its size, but in its crew. And we — the Members of this Honourable House — are that crew. We must steer wisely, navigate carefully, and leave this vessel in better condition than we found it.

For me, as a descendant of Honourable Carlton de Castro, this is not symbolic — it is personal. When I stand to speak in this chamber, I can almost hear the creak of

the deck, the call of the crew, the waves against the hull — echoes of those first Virgin Islanders who dared to believe we could chart our own course.

Their faith challenges me. Their example reminds me that leadership is not about the title — it's about the tide. It's about how you steer when the seas are uncertain, and how you treat the people who trust you to bring them safely home. So yes, I carry his name — but more importantly, I carry his mission. My pledge is to steer with integrity, listen to the wind of the people, and never lose sight of the compass of justice and truth.

Mr. Speaker, before I close, allow me to lift my voice in salute — to every Member who has ever served in this Legislature, from that first fearless crew of 1950, to this present persistent crew of 2025. To all who have sat in these sacred seats — who have spoken with conviction, debated with passion, and weathered the tempests of public life — I salute you and I thank you. Each of us has taken your watch at the helm. Sailed through calm waters; braved raging storms. Charted new courses; held firm against the wind. Yet all of us helped to keep this vessel afloat.

Our service, our sacrifice, and our steadfastness are the timbers that strengthen this ship.
Our courage is the canvas that caught the wind. Our commitment is the compass that kept her true. Without us — this voyage would have faltered but because of us, this vessel still sails.

And to my colleagues here today, I say: We are heirs to that helm. We are stewards of that same sea. We are guardians of the course that our forefathers began. May we never forget that the hands that now grasp this wheel are part of an unbroken chain — from Fonseca to Faulkner, from de Castro to each of us. They have passed the helm to us; let us hold it with honour.

Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate seventy-five years of representative government, we must also take a hard, honest look at the course we're steering today. Because if we are not careful, the same vessel our forefathers built with courage can be weakened by carelessness, and lost to the tides of our own making.

Mr. Speaker, we have to stop playing politics in this Honourable House. We cannot keep treating the wheel of leadership like a prop in some performance, turning it one way for applause and another for advantage. We were not elected to perform — we were chosen to pilot. We were not called to quarrel — we were called to chart a course. This is not a stage. This is not a sport. This is the sacred ship of the Virgin Islands — and every careless word, every empty promise, rocks her from within.

We must stop speaking unity with our mouths while we divide with our motions. We must stop proclaiming integrity in our speeches while ignoring it in our decisions. Unity is not a slogan — it is a standard. Integrity is not a statement — it is a lifestyle.

And, Mr. Speaker, history cannot be rewritten. Every motion, every moment, every meeting in this chamber becomes part of the logbook of this ship. And long after we have left the deck,
the people will read what we wrote.

So let us write something worthy. Let us prove that we have learned from the storms that came before us. Let us raise the sails of sincerity, tighten the ropes of responsibility, and steer with courage and conviction. Because when this House is united in purpose, when we lead with integrity and act with humility — no wind, no wave, no world power can move this vessel off her course.

And, Mr. Speaker as I say these words, I do not stand apart from them. For I, too, am part of this crew. And it is the honour of my life to serve in this House of Assembly. Every time I rise in this chamber, I remember: I am standing on the deck my forefathers built. And the people of these Virgin Islands have trusted me to help steer their ship through uncertain seas.

To me, service here is not about privilege — it is about purpose. It is not about comfort — it is about calling. My passion, my purpose, my fight — all of it —is for the Virgin Islands: for our children, our communities, our people, our future.

And when I think about this vessel — this House, this Territory, this journey — I think, too, about my own life as a vessel. Because that is what I am — a vessel

being used by God to do His work for these Virgin Islands. I thank Him every day for the strength to weather storms, for the wisdom to read the tides, and for the grace to serve with heart and humility.

So, as we celebrate seventy-five years of local government, let us each remember that we, too, are vessels — crafted for purpose, called for service, and carried by divine design. Let us keep our keel strong, our compass true, and our course steady. Let us steer not by ego, but by excellence; not by fear, but by faith.

And when our watch is done, and we pass the wheel to those who will come after us,
may they say of us what we now say of those before: They kept her steady at the helm.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May God continue to bless these beautiful Virgin Islands.

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Additional Documents or Media

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