GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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Press Statement by Premier Wheatley at Press Conference on 21 November 2025

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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, members of the media. Thank you for joining us today

Welcome to the second Press Conference for November 2025.

Today, I will address several vital matters concerning our Virgin Islands.

1. Police Commissioner

You would be aware that His Excellency the Governor, Daniel Pruce, has appointed Mr. Richard Ullger as Interim Acting Police Commissioner of the Royal Virgin Island Police Force (RVIPF) on Wednesday. This was preceded by having the Acting Commissioner Jacqueline Vanterpool revert to her substantive position of Deputy Commissioner after acting in the role of Commissioner for one year.

You would also be aware that last week persons exercised their democratic right to assemble and peacefully protest, which was supported by myself and my colleagues in the House of Assembly.

Yesterday, I had a call with the Minister responsible for the Overseas Territories, Stephen Doughty, and I have been in dialogue with the Governor on the matter, via both Cabinet or the National Security Council. I respectfully expressed my disagreement with the decision to move forward with Mr. Ullger's appointment.

The Police Service Commission has made a recommendation to the Governor for the appointment of a substantive Police Commissioner and that recommendation will be coming to the National Security Council imminently. In my view, it would have been better to conclude that process before appointing an interim Acting Commissioner.

Whilst the Governor is within his Constitutional rights to act contrary to the advice of the Police Service Commission and the National Security Council, subject to providing reasons as to how this advice prejudices his Majesty's service, I am concerned that the way that the Governor's discretion has been exercised is not in keeping with the modern partnership that the United Kingdom has committed to. I also believe that the process of appointing a Police Commissioner has been poorly handled and does not reflect transparency, good governance, or sensitivity to the legitimate concerns of the people of the Virgin Islands.

The handling of this matter underscores the importance of negotiating a

constitution that provides greater democratic accountability to the people of the Virgin Islands through devolving more responsibility to the elected government, including responsibility for internal security.

As I depart the Virgin Islands to attend the Joint Ministerial Council, I will continue to engage in respectful dialogue with the Minister of Overseas Territories and the Governor as we remain steadfast in defence of the security of the people of the Virgin Islands and their democratic rights.

2. Joint Ministerial Council (JMC)

Tomorrow, I depart for the Joint Ministerial Council, which I will co-chair with Minister Doughty, in my capacity as president of the political council.

The JMC is the highest-level annual forum for dialogue between elected leaders of the United Kingdom's Overseas Territories and ministers of His Majesty's Government. This year's meeting will be hosted by the Minister for the Overseas Territories, Stephen Doughty, MP, at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

The 2025 JMC carries particular significance, forming part of a broader reset in the relationship between the UK and the Overseas Territories. Central to this reset is the development of bilateral Compacts—tailored frameworks between the UK and participating Territories designed to clarify shared priorities, strengthen commitments, and improve long-term planning. The UK Government will also introduce a proposed Charter on Engagement with the Overseas Territories, establishing principles for transparency, communication, and collaboration.

Throughout the week, Overseas Territory leaders will participate in plenary sessions, technical workshops, bilateral meetings, and political engagements covering some of the most pressing issues of our time. As Chair of the UK Overseas Territories Association (UKOTA), the Virgin Islands will play a leading role. I will guide collective OT engagement with the UK, set the tone for our discussions, and open several major sessions.

The agenda includes artificial intelligence in healthcare and cybersecurity, the outcomes of COP30, the launch of the new Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy, and efforts to improve access to climate finance. Security will remain central, with discussions involving the Home Office, Ministry of Defence, and

Ministry of Justice on internal security, irregular migration, border management, and criminal justice.

Other sessions will address illicit finance, beneficial ownership transparency, FATF preparedness, Overseas Development Assistance, and planning for the 2026 Commonwealth Games.

Supporting me in our ambitious agenda will be my delegation consisting of the following:

1. Hon. Kye Rymer – Minister of Communications and Works
2. Hon Lorna Smith – Junior Minister of Financial Services, Economic Development and Digital Transformation
3. Mr. Jeremiah Frett, Financial Secretary
4. Mr. Benito Wheatley, Special Envoy
5. Ms. Dwynel Davis, Ag. Director of International Affairs
6. Ms. Karia Christopher, Director of Communications
7. Mr. Kedrick Malone, Governance Reform Delivery Manager/Chief of Staff

The members of the delegation will be participating in JMC and other meetings to help us further the interest of the people of the Virgin Islands.

3. UBER Soca Cruise

Lastly, I am pleased to reflect on the triumphant arrival of the UberSoca Cruise to the Virgin Islands. This event drew thousands of visitors to our shores, underscoring our growing status as an emerging hub for entertainment-driven tourism in the Caribbean. It showcased the very best of who we are - our culture, creativity, and spirit - and demonstrated the powerful economic potential of entertainment and cultural expression that can enhance our tourism product.

While the Leader of the Opposition has termed this as just another party and government squandering resources, the Uber Soca cruise confirms that entertainment tourism is a legitimate sector of our tourism industry and can also give an economic boost to the retail and wholesale sectors of our economy. Many vendors were able to benefit.

There will always be critics. Nevertheless, we all should congratulate our awesome entertainers, Jougo, Boss, TJ and Pascal, who were musical ambassadors for the

Virgin Islands electrifying the Uber Soca cruise, introducing a new demographic to the beauty of Virgin Islands culture.

We should congratulate Hon. Luce Hodge Smith, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sustainable Development, Dirk Walters and the Events Management Team at the BVI Tourist Board, and a whole host of volunteers for making excellent preparations for the arrival of our friends from across the waters.

We should congratulate our businesses and vendors, including the Pub, for seeing the opportunity with the arrival of thousands of enthusiastic cruise goers. We had vendors who made thousands of dollars in a few hours. We also had Uber Soca cruisers who supported local restaurants, went on tours, and pledged to return to the Territory.

We must also thank the Uber Soca team for the marketing opportunity. During the activities, Uber Soca's Instagram page received more than 2 million views. The Virgin Islands was at the center of the Soca world between the ship's arrival and departure, and the promotion the Virgin Islands received was well worth the money.

Lastly, we thank the Virgin Islands public who came out to welcome our visitors, show them hospitality, share in the lifelong memories which were created, and invite them to come back to our shores. Whenever, we have visitors we should always show them our best face and recognize our responsibility as tourism ambassadors.

We are presently analysing the data, so we can understand the economic impact of this event. We have surveys being completely by vendors and cruise goers. This will be the approach we will take to any event with significant government sponsorship.

In 2026, we will continue to strengthen our tourism sector by enhancing our product with the incredible talents of our artists, musicians and promoters who are making entertainment tourism possible.

4. Closing

Thank you for your attention. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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