GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

PRESS RELEASE

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Courtesy Call Highlights Gender Equality Priorities and Partnership Opportunities

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Strengthening collaboration to advance gender equality in the Virgin Islands was the focus of a recent courtesy call between Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health and Social Development, Ms. Tasha Bertie, and Gender and Equality Adviser at the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Ms. Claire Allan.

The engagement provided an opportunity to discuss the mandate of the Office of Gender Affairs, key challenges affecting its work, and areas for strengthened partnership support could add value. Challenges highlighted include the need for sustained training and capacity building, limited public engagement in gender-related issues and policy development, and gaps in the collection and availability of gender disaggregated data. Participants noted that these data gaps hinder evidence-based planning and the design of targeted interventions to address gender-related issues affecting the Virgin Islands.

The meeting also recognised progress made by the Office of Gender Affairs in advancing its mandate. Particular attention was given to the strengthening of the Domestic Violence Protocol, which establishes clearer legal and operational framework for law enforcement and other frontline agencies in the management of domestic violence cases. Updates were also share on the progress under the Partnership for Peace Programme as well as ongoing collaboration with social and community organisations to support programme delivery and outreach.

Discussions further explored opportunities to deepen collaboration between the Ministry of Health and Social Development and the FCDO, with a focus on improving institutional capacity, improving data collection, supporting gender policy development, and increasing public awareness and engagement on gender-related issues.

Permanent Secretary Ms. Tasha Bertie welcomed the engagement and underscored the importance of strategic partnerships. She stated, "Meaningful collaboration is essential to advancing gender equality in the Virgin Islands. By strengthening capacity, improving data collection, and increasing public awareness, we can better support the work of the Office of Gender Affairs and ensure our policies and programmes respond effectively to the needs of our

communities.”

The Ministry of Health and Social Development remains committed to working with local, regional, and international partners to address gender-related challenges and to promote equality, safety, and wellbeing across the Virgin Islands.

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