GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

PRESS RELEASE

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Belonger Status Ceremony Welcomes New Members into The Virgin Islands Family

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One hundred and thirteen individuals were officially welcomed into the Virgin Islands family on 29 January, 2026, during a Belonger Status Ceremony held at the Eileene L. Parsons Auditorium, H. Lavity Stoutt Community College Campus, Paraquita Bay.

The ceremony, hosted by the Department of Immigration, marked the formal granting of Belonger Status in accordance with Section 16 of the Immigration and Passport Act. The Honourable Dr. Natalio D. Wheatley, Premier of the Virgin Islands, presented certificates to the recipients.

In his remarks, Premier Wheatley described the occasion as both a celebration and a recognition of long-standing contributions to the Territory. He noted that many recipients have lived, worked, raised families, and served their communities in the Virgin Islands for years, emphasizing that the granting of Belonger Status formally acknowledges what has long been true.

“You have lived among us for many years, and have made these islands your home. And you have contributed in countless ways to the life and progress of our territory. Long before this afternoon, you were already part of our story. What we are doing now is simply acknowledging the truth in an official and public way. Today we open our hands and our hearts and welcome you into the Virgin Islands family,” the Premier said. “You belong, and we are proud to say so.”

The Premier further reminded recipients that while Belonger Status carries significant benefits, including the right to vote, own land, and conduct business, it also comes with responsibilities. He encouraged new Belongers to actively participate in nation-building, preserve the Territory’s culture and environment, and uphold unity within the Virgin Islands community.

Chairperson of the Board of Immigration, Ms. Kamika Aisha Forbes, also addressed the gathering, congratulating recipients and acknowledging their contributions to the social, cultural, and economic fabric of the Territory. She encouraged them to continue giving their best as Belongers and active members of the Virgin Islands community.

Delivering the closing remarks, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Financial Services, Economic Development and Digital Transformation, Mrs. Natalie Fahie-Smith, encouraged recipients to embrace both the privilege and responsibility of their new status.

“Today your status has changed in meaningful and practical ways,” Mrs. Fahie-Smith said. “You now enjoy the right to live and work freely in the Virgin Islands, and to participate more fully in national life. With these rights come shared responsibility to contribute to our economic and social development and to help build a Territory that is inclusive, resilient, and strengthened by your presence.”

She further encouraged recipients to wear their Belonger Status with pride, exercise its privileges responsibly, and continue investing in the future of the Virgin Islands.

The ceremony concluded with the recital of the Territorial Pledge by the recipients, a benediction, and a group photograph.

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