GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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Statement by Premier Wheatley on the Visit of Speaker of the UK House of Commons, Sir Lindsay Hoyle

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Madam Speaker, Honourable Members, distinguished guests, and the people of the Virgin Islands:
Today is a proud and historic day for our Territory. On behalf of the Government and people of the Virgin Islands, it is my distinct honour to welcome The Right Honourable Sir Lindsay Hoyle, Speaker of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom, on the occasion of his first official visit to our shores.

Madam Speaker, the Government and people of these Virgin Islands are genuinely delighted to host Sir Lindsay as a special guest. We trust that his visit will be memorable, that he will feel the warmth and hospitality for which our people are known, and that he will have the opportunity to experience the natural beauty, culture, and world-class tourism products that have made the Virgin Islands renowned across the globe.

Madam Speaker, Sir Lindsay has long been a true and respectful friend of the United Kingdom's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. Over many years, he has consistently shown a commitment to our development, our democratic institutions and our place within the wider British family. His relationship with the Virgin Islands did not begin with his election as Speaker.

As Chair of the British Virgin Islands All-Party Parliamentary Group, he played an important role in fostering awareness of our Territory and advancing constructive dialogue about our affairs amongst his colleagues in the UK Parliament.

His tenure as Speaker has been marked by a consistent and sincere engagement with the issues that matter most to small island democracies such as ours. He has taken a keen interest in the challenges we face - challenges that are not abstract, but deeply felt realities for our people.

He has recognised, for example, Madam Speaker, that climate resilience is not a distant policy concern for the Overseas Territories, but an urgent and existential

priority. Rising sea levels, stronger storms, and environmental degradation threaten our communities, our infrastructure, and our way of life. The protection of our natural environment - our reefs, our coastlines, our mangroves - is essential not only to our tourism sector, but to our long-term survival. Sir Lindsay has understood these vulnerabilities and has used his platform to highlight them.

He has also acknowledged the importance of security for the Overseas Territories - security in all its dimensions: border security, economic security, and the security of our democratic institutions. These matters require partnership, respect, and mutual understanding, and Sir Lindsay has consistently demonstrated all three.

Madam Speaker, Sir Lindsay has opened the doors of the Speaker's House to the Overseas Territories, including the Virgin Islands, on numerous occasions. He has hosted receptions that have allowed our leaders, our youth, and our communities to feel recognised and valued. Most recently, he welcomed the Virgin Islands to the Speaker's House with the same dignity and warmth he extends to all parts of the British family.

Under his leadership, a dedicated space was established within the Speaker's House to honour the British Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies - complete with stained-glass windows bearing the OTs' coats of arms. This is more than symbolic. It is a visible affirmation that the Overseas Territories are part of the wider British family, and that our voices matter within the parliamentary life of the United Kingdom. He also sponsored OT Day, with the flags of OTs flying high over Parliament Square.

Madam Speaker, it was also during Sir Lindsay's tenure, in November 2025, that young representatives from the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies joined over 300 members of the UK Youth Parliament for its 15th annual session in the House of Commons. They debated issues such as education, climate change, and mental health - issues that shape the future of every society. Their

participation marked a significant step forward in giving the youth of the Territories a voice in the democratic processes. For many of our young people, it was the first time they felt truly included in the democratic life of the United Kingdom. I am sure he will agree with me that the Virgin Islands Representative last year, Adrienne Thomas, made an effective representation when she addressed the funding challenges Overseas Territories students face when it comes to higher education.

Sir Lindsay's genuine belief that the Overseas Territories should be treated fairly is reflected not only in words but in action. The substantive engagement now afforded to Overseas Territory representatives within the UK Parliament, and the arrangements for a dedicated Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies room within the Parliamentary Estate, stand as practical demonstrations of his commitment to ensuring that our voices are heard and respected.

Madam Speaker, Sir Lindsay's visit comes at a particularly meaningful moment in our own democratic journey. Last year, 2025, marked the 75th anniversary of the return of legislative functions to the Virgin Islands - a milestone that reminds us of our long and determined path toward self-governance, accountability, and democratic maturity.

This visit also coincides with the coming into effect of the House of Assembly (Management) Act, 2025. This landmark legislation establishes a semi-autonomous management structure for our Legislature, strengthening its professionalism, efficiency, and independence in line with best practices across the Commonwealth. It represents a major step in the continued evolution of our parliamentary democracy.

Madam Speaker, this moment is further underscored by the recent approval in the UK House of Lords of the Virgin Islands Constitution (Interim Amendment) (Revocation) Order 2026. This Order will revoke the 2022 Order in Council that had been held in reserve and which, if ever brought into force, would have suspended

portions of our Constitution. Its revocation is a powerful statement about the progress we have made, the hard work we have done, and the capabilities of our local talent.

It reflects the tremendous work done by the Government, the public service, and the wider community to implement what has been the most comprehensive exercises in governance reform ever undertaken in these islands. Our people embraced the reforms as an opportunity to strengthen our institutions, improve our processes, and reinforce the foundations of good governance. A significant portion of these reforms required legislative action, and I commend Honourable Members for the volume and quality of the work they have undertaken.

Madam Speaker, adding further to the auspiciousness of the timing of Sir Lindsay's visit is the fact that this House has also been engaged in preparations for the review of the Virgin Islands Constitution. Our current Constitution is now approaching its 20th year. We believe that this constitutional reform exercise is a pathway to strengthening our institutions and deepening our democracy. One of the major proposals we intend to advance is the transition to a bicameral parliamentary system - an evolution that we believe will enhance scrutiny, improve law-making, and support the long-term development of our democratic governance.

Madam Speaker, during Sir Lindsay's short stay with us I hope to have the opportunity to share with him the aspirations of the Virgin Islands people, and my Government's vision and commitment to building a sustainable nation and a model democracy - one that is resilient, inclusive, and forward-looking.

As most persons would know, my Government has adopted the National Sustainable Development Plan as the blueprint for guiding our work. It shapes our national budgets, our development priorities, and our long-term vision for a prosperous Virgin Islands. It ensures that our progress is measured not only in

economic terms, but in the well-being of our people, the strength of our institutions, and the protection of our environment.

We are building resilience in our tourism sector by diversifying and strengthening our offerings. Tourism remains one of the pillars of our economy, and we are investing in its future. This includes major initiatives such as the planned expansion of the runway at the Terrance B. Lettsome International Airport - an investment that will open new markets, improve connectivity, and enhance our competitiveness as a premier destination.

I hope, Madam Speaker, that Sir Lindsay will have the opportunity to engage with some of our highly talented financial services professionals. In financial services, the Virgin Islands continues to demonstrate global leadership.

As of November 2025, the Territory was rated Compliant or Largely Compliant with all 40 Financial Action Task Force Recommendations - an achievement confirmed by the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force. This means that the Virgin Islands is technically compliant with every one of the FATF's global standards. We are now focused on strengthening the effectiveness of our measures, ensuring that our regulatory framework remains robust, credible, and internationally respected.

Madam Speaker, if I may make one suggestion to Sir Lindsay, through you, it is that as he travels through our islands, meets our people, and experience our culture, it is important that he bears in mind that everything he sees is rooted in the resilience of the Virgin Islands and its people. We have endured much recently - two back-to-back Category 5 hurricanes in 2017, and the global pandemic of 2021–2022. Yet we remain standing. We remain hopeful. We remain determined to build a stronger, more sustainable future.

The causes of the Overseas Territories, crown dependencies and vulnerable small island states are worthy, and the support received from Sir Lindsay is much

appreciated.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Government and people of the Virgin Islands, I extend our sincere appreciation to The Right Honourable Sir Lindsay Hoyle for accepting our invitation to visit our Territory. We wish him a meaningful and enjoyable stay, and we affirm that he will always be welcome in these Virgin Islands.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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