GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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Statement by Minister for Communications and Works Honourable Kye M. Rymer- Cyril B. Romney Tortola Pier Park Tenth Anniversary Celebration

Release Date: 17 February, 2026

Ten years ago today, on February 16, 2016, this waterfront area was transformed. On that day, it wasn't just that a pier opened, it was a new chapter for the Virgin Islands. Standing here a decade later, we can see that chapter has been one of progress and prosperity.

Now, as we celebrate, I think it's important that we tell the full story, because this facility's history teaches us something valuable about who we are as a people.

The vision for a modern cruise pier did not belong to any single government. It was built over time, by leaders who understood that when it comes to building our country, the work must continue regardless of who holds the mantle.

Let me take you back.

The original cruise pier was first opened in 1994 by the late, great Chief Minister Honourable H. Lavity Stoutt, a man whose name is synonymous with nation-building. Later, under the government of Honourable Ralph T. O'Neal, OBE, further upgrades were made to keep pace with the growing industry.

And then came this opening on February 16, 2016, by the then Premier Dr. D. Orlando Smith's administration.

The Minister responsible for Ports at the time, Honourable Mark Vanterpool, rightly noted that this project was built on the foundation laid by those who came before.

And a few years later, in 2019, we came together again to rename this facility in honour of the man who pioneered cruise tourism in this territory, the late Honourable Cyril B. Romney. A former Chief Minister, and businessman. His name on this facility should remind us that our cruise tourism industry was built by Virgin Islanders, for Virgin Islanders.

So, you see, this park is a monument to the Virgin Islands, to our ability to dream across generations.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the many hands that built this place and the many leaders who stepped in to keep the ports functioning. Their work laid the foundation upon which we continue to build.

Today, we are in capable hands. To Mr. Vance Lewis, CEO of this park, and to Mr. Dean Fahie, Acting Director of the BVI Ports Authority, I thank you for your steady leadership. You carry forward the vision of those who came before, and you do so with professionalism and dedication.

Today, the Cyril B. Romney Tortola Pier Park stands as the crown jewel within the BVI Ports Authority portfolio. It is the gateway through which the majority of our cruise passengers pass each year, with 2025 being a record-breaking year of over 875,000 passengers.

Yes, this pier handles ships up to 180,000 Gross Registered Tonnes, what we call GRT, with efficiency and class, allowing us to host up to two cruise ships at a time. But this facility is more than a dock. It is a five-acre landside development, a unique outdoor commercial centre featuring 11 buildings, 18 kiosks, and dozens of retail stores, restaurants, and service centres.

Here is what makes this place special: when you walk along these walkways, laid with 107,000 bricks by hand, you are walking through a space built by Virgin Islanders.

You will find shops selling local gifts and international brands. You will find restaurants serving our local cuisine. You will find businesses run by people who saw an opportunity and seized it. This mix matters because it ensures that when visitors come ashore, the money they spend flows directly into our local economy. These are our neighbours, our family members, our fellow Virgin Islanders creating jobs and building wealth.

What this facility represents, and why successive governments have continued to invest in our cruise infrastructure, is because cruise tourism is not just about numbers on a spreadsheet. It is about livelihoods. It is about opportunity, and it is about introducing the world to the beauty of these islands so that they return again and again as overnight guests.

The taxi drivers who line up on cruise days. The tour operators who take visitors around the territory. The restaurant staff, the retail associates, the security personnel, the janitorial team, hundreds of workers depend on this facility for their livelihood.

Government, for investing in this project, and the people who also invested, ordinary Virgin Islanders who had faith in their country, have been receiving their dividends year after year.

We remain committed to supporting the cruise sector because we understand its multiplier effect throughout our economy, because when cruise arrivals grow, and the numbers grew by nearly 14 percent in 2025 alone, many sectors benefit. Many families benefit.

So where do we go from here?

The next decade is about sustainability, modernisation, and resilience. We are looking at how we integrate green technology into our port operations. We are examining ways to reduce our environmental footprint while increasing our economic output.

In that spirit, today I announce that I have asked the Chairman of the Board to consider implementing an environmental levy for cruise passengers visiting our shores. This is not a new concept, it is being charged in other jurisdictions across the Caribbean, and we should be no different. The revenue from such a fee would be dedicated specifically to the preservation of our environment, the very beauty that brings visitors here in the first place. I look forward to working with the Board and all stakeholders to explore how we can make this a reality.

We must also ensure that this facility continues to evolve with the cruise industry. While we cannot accommodate the largest vessels today, we must keep our options open for the future, always balancing growth with the character and carrying capacity of our islands.

We must continue to support the businesses here, our tenants who have weathered storms, real storms, literally, and economic storms, to keep this park vibrant and welcoming.

In closing, I want to thank the Cyril B. Romney Tortola Pier Park staff, past and present, leaders who steered this project through various stages. To the Board members past and present who provided oversight, and again, to the Romney family: thank you for sharing your patriarch's legacy with us. His statue stands here as a reminder that one person's vision can shape an entire industry.

To the people of the Virgin Islands, look around you. Be proud. This is our park. These are our businesses. This is our economy at work.

As we mark this 10th anniversary, let us commit to the next ten years with the same determination, the same vision, and the same unity that built this place.

Happy Anniversary to the Cyril B. Romney Tortola Pier Park.

God bless you all, and God bless these beautiful Virgin Islands.

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