GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE VINCENT O. WHEATLEY MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT WORLD OBESITY DAY

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Fellow Virgin Islanders, residents and visitors. I am Vincent O. Wheatley, Minister for Health and Social Development.

On the 4th of March, The Virgin Islands joins the global community in observing World Obesity Day under the theme, *“8 Billion Reasons to Act on Obesity.”* While this is a global call to action, it is also a very personal one for us here at home.

Obesity is one of the most serious public health challenges facing The Virgin Islands today. It is driving the increase in chronic non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and stroke. These conditions are affecting our families, placing strain on our healthcare system and impacting our productivity and economic stability as a Territory.

This is not simply a health issue. It is a quality-of-life issue. It affects how long and how well we live. It affects our ability to work and provide for our families, and our ability to provide a solid healthy foundation to maximise the health and future of our children.

We must also acknowledge that obesity does not happen in isolation. It is shaped by our lifestyles, our food choices, our physical activity levels, and even our culture. Over time, we have drifted from many of the traditional practices that once kept us active and nourished by fresh, local foods. Today, we are seeing the consequences of those shifts.

The Ministry of Health and Social Development is taking decisive action to address this issue through several key initiatives.

We have introduced the **Virgin Islands Eat Well Guide**, a practical, culturally relevant resource designed to help residents make healthier food choices using foods that are familiar and accessible to us.

We are strengthening our **Food and Nutrition Surveillance Programme**, which allows us to better understand the eating habits and health trends of our population so that our policies and interventions are guided by evidence.

We are also advancing **school feeding guidelines** to ensure that our children have access to healthier meals in the school environment, and we are conducting

nutrition assessments among our elderly population to better support healthy ageing.

Additionally, the BVI Health Services Authority has launched the **Red Loud Campaign** targeted at combating kidney disease, diabetes, and hypertension by encouraging early screening, promoting healthier lifestyle choices, and providing the community with vital health education.

These actions reflect government's commitment, but meaningful change requires the partnership and participation of the entire community.

Real and lasting change begins at home. I encourage every resident to take simple, practical steps to protect their health:

- Choose fresher, local foods;
- Reduce sugary drinks and highly processed foods;
- Be physically active every day, even if it starts with a simple walk;
- If you choose to indulge, do so in moderation; and
- Use the Eat Well Guide to help plan balanced meals for your family.

I also encourage our churches, schools, workplaces, and community groups to continue creating environments that support healthy living.

This World Obesity Day, let us recognise that while there may be eight billion reasons to act globally, our most important reasons are right here in The Virgin Islands — our children, our families, and our future.

Together, through informed choices and collective action, we can reduce obesity and build a stronger, healthier Virgin Islands.

I invite each of you to take that first step **today**.

For Additional Information Contact:

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