GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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The National Wreath Laying Ceremony in Honour of H. Lavity Stoutt is Observed

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Address by Premier and Minister of Finance

Honourable Doctor Natalio D. Wheatley

on the occasion of

The National Wreath Laying Ceremony

in Honour of H. Lavity Stoutt

themed A Legacy in Motion – The Generation Yet Unborn

9 March, 2026

Members of the House of Assembly, members of the Stoutt family, clergy, students, and my fellow Virgin Islanders - good morning.

We gather today with full hearts, in gratitude and in remembrance of a man whose life changed the course of our history.

Today, we honour the late and great H. Lavity Stoutt - a son of Long Bay, a servant of the people, a visionary leader, and a man whose love for these Virgin Islands was as steady and enduring as the tides that shaped his childhood.

Today's proceedings is not merely a ceremony. This is a moment of national reflection – a moment to pause and acknowledge the shoulders on which we stand.

And this year, under the theme, *"A Legacy in Motion – The Generation Yet Unborn,"* we are reminded that the story of H. Lavity Stoutt is not a story frozen in time. It is a living force - still shaping us, still guiding us, still calling us to rise.

When we speak of H. Lavity Stoutt, we speak of a man who knew hardship, who knew limitation, and who refused to let either define him. He grew up in a time when opportunity was scarce. He knew what it meant to want an education and be denied it. He knew what it meant to dream beyond the circumstances of the day.

But instead of bitterness, he chose purpose.

Instead of resentment, he chose service.

Instead of accepting the world as it was, he committed himself to building the world as it should be.

His faith anchored him. His family strengthened him. And his love for the people of these islands propelled him.

When H. Lavity Stoutt entered public life in 1957, he did not come with privilege or pedigree. He came with conviction. He believed that every child - no matter their last name, no matter their village, no matter their circumstance - deserved a chance to learn, to grow, and to rise. And so, he fought for secondary education for all. He fought for scholarships. He fought for access to university. He fought for dignity in learning.

H. Lavity Stoutt built schools not just as buildings, but as bridges - bridges to opportunity, bridges to self-determination, bridges to a future that our people had long been denied. And when he championed the creation of a community college – which is today named in his honour, he did so because he understood something profound: that education is the heartbeat of a nation.

Today, thousands of Virgin Islanders walk through doors he opened. They carry degrees he made possible. They stand in professions he prepared them for. They live lives that were once out of reach. Today, the college he founded is the only accredited two-year college in the region and has started the process towards awarding four-year degrees. Where Lavity was once chided and instructed to send people to the University of the Virgin Islands, we are now on the way to a university in The Virgin Islands.

That is legacy. That is motion. That is nation building.

But H. Lavity Stoutt’s vision did not stop at education. He strengthened our infrastructure. He expanded our ports. He modernised our public service. He laid the groundwork for the financial services industry that sustains us today.

H. Lavity Stoutt believed that the Virgin Islands and its people could stand tall among nations - not because of size, but because of strength of character, clarity of purpose, and unity of people. And he worked tirelessly to make that belief a reality.

This year's theme calls us to look beyond the past and into the future. *"A Legacy in Motion – The Generation Yet Unborn."* It is a reminder that the work of nation building is never complete. It is a reminder that the decisions we make today will shape the lives of children who have not yet entered this world. It is a reminder that we are custodians - not owners - of this Territory's destiny.

H. Lavity Stoutt lived with that understanding. He planted seeds he knew he would never see fully grown. He built institutions he knew would outlive him. He fought battles not for himself, but for those who would come after.

And so the question before us today is not simply, *What did he do?* The question is, *What will we do with what he left us?*

We must protect the institutions he built. We must strengthen the education system he championed. We must lead with the integrity he modelled. We must ensure that the generation yet unborn inherits a Territory that is stronger, fairer, and more united than the one we inherited. These are the responsibilities that fall to us. These are the duties we must embrace.

As Premier, I stand here humbled by the foundation laid by this remarkable man – H. Lavity Stoutt. I stand here aware that we are beneficiaries of sacrifices we did not make. And I stand here committed to ensuring that his legacy continues - not as memory alone, but as movement.

We must continue to invest in our young people. We must continue to build resilient infrastructure. We must continue to strengthen our economy. We must continue to nurture a society where every Virgin Islander - born or Belonger - has the opportunity to thrive.

This is how we honour H. Lavity Stoutt. This is how we keep his legacy alive. This is how we prepare the way for the generation yet unborn.

The wreaths we lay today symbolise our gratitude for a life of extraordinary service. But let them also symbolise our promise to continue the work he began, to uphold the values he lived by, and to build a Virgin Islands worthy of his vision. Wreaths are circles, and today is a full circle moment as you will see through the programme, the generation he never met, the generation who never knew him, has come today to honour him in various ways.

May the memory of H. Lavity Stoutt continue to inspire us. May his example continue to guide us. and may God bless these Virgin Islands.

Gallery







Additional Documents or Media

- premier_national_wreath_laying_ceremony_h_lavity_stoutt.pdf