GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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Statement by Premier and Minister of Finance Honourable Natalio D. Wheatley on the Revocation of the 2022 Order in Council

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13 March, 2026

My fellow Virgin Islanders,

Today is a day that will long be remembered in the annals of Virgin Islands history. Today is the day that what has been known as the Order in Council is lifted. And our hopes, dreams, and aspirations are lifted along with it.

As you would be aware, in June 2022, following the publication of the report of the Commission of Inquiry (COI) and the acceptance by the Government of the United Kingdom (UK) of a framework put forward by the Government of the Virgin Islands for addressing the 52 recommendations of the COI report, the UK government made and laid in the UK Parliament *The Virgin Islands Constitution (Interim Amendment) Order 2022*.

The Order was held in reserve while the Government of the Virgin Islands developed and implemented the reforms recommended by the COI. The UK Government reserved the prerogative to implement the Order, should it not be satisfied with the approach and progress of the Territorial Government in implementing the reforms. If enforced, the Order would have suspended significant portions of the Virgin Islands Constitution Order 2007, essentially taking away the self-government of these Virgin Islands, which is one of the most hard-fought achievements of our fore-parents.

In response to this threat to democracy, the Government of National Unity was formed. Leaders from different political backgrounds, with different philosophies and different histories, put aside personal and political differences for one purpose: to protect the Virgin Islands from direct rule and to preserve our democracy.

That unity was not symbolic. It was essential. It was one of the main reasons the UK agreed to allow the Virgin Islands to continue governing itself while reforms were implemented. To those who served in the Government of National Unity, your willingness to stand together in a moment of national crisis helped safeguard the democratic rights of our people. History will remember that.

My people, we have always been honest about the journey that brought us here. The COI revealed areas where our institutions needed strengthening. There were systems that needed tightening, processes that needed modernising, and practices that needed reform. We do not shy away from that truth.

But we refused to allow that chapter to define us as a people. Because the story of the Virgin Islands is not a story of failure. It is a story of resilience. A story of

determination. A story of a people who rise to every challenge placed before them. And rise we did.

The reform programme – and process - was immense. It demanded time, energy, and resources on a scale that few fully appreciate. It required discipline, sacrifice, and unwavering commitment. And at the heart of that effort were our public officers - men and women who worked long hours, under intense pressure, to strengthen the systems of government and uphold the integrity of this Territory.

In September of 2024, I reported to OT Minister Stephen Doughty that we had substantially implemented the 48 key recommendations of the COI. He agreed that we had made sufficient progress and agreed to conditions under which the Order would be lifted. This included a final Report from the Governor, a survey of the people of the Virgin Islands, review of selected areas by the FCDO team and a Self-Assessment Report by the Government of the Virgin Islands.

In May, 2025, I submitted the Self-Assessment Report of the Government of the Virgin Islands to the OT Minister for the consideration of the Foreign Secretary, alon g with the other required submissions.

On 22 September 2025, Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, Rt. Hon. Yvette Cooper, acting on the advice of the Minister for the Overseas Territories, Stephen

Doughty, decided to revoke the draft Order in Council that if invoked would suspend the Constitution of the Virgin Islands. This came a bit over three years after the agreement between the
Government of the Virgin Islands and the Government of the United Kingdom to implement the forty-eight recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry under a democratic structure.

On 10 February, 2026, the *Virgin Islands Constitution (Interim Amendment) (Revocation) Order 2026*, was laid in the UK Parliament, having been approved by the Privy Council a few days earlier. This Revocation Order revokes the 2022 Order, effective today – 13 March, 2026.

This is a defining moment in the story of our beloved Virgin Islands. The Order in Council that hung over our democracy since 2022 is now lifted. Today we turn a page in our history. Today, we stand together as a people - stronger, wiser, and more united.

This is not merely a procedural development. This is a national achievement. This is a national victory. And it belongs to every single one of you – from Anegada to Jost Van Dyke; from Virgin Gorda to Tortola.

For nearly four years, the Virgin Islands lived under the shadow of a constitutional threat - an Order that, if activated, would have taken away the democratic rights that generations of Virgin Islanders fought to build and protect. It hung over us like a sword, a constant reminder of how fragile progress can be, and how quickly political advancement can be interrupted.

But today, through our hard work and dedication, that threat is no more. Today, the Virgin Islands stands tall. Our Constitution stands firm. Our democracy remains intact. And we, the people of these Virgin Islands, stand vindicated in our belief that we are capable of governing ourselves.

I firstly want to express my thanks to God for granting us the strength and resilience to forge ahead under incredibly challenging circumstances which required us to implement the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry (COI) whilst at the same time delivering public services to the people of the Virgin

Islands. I thank my colleagues in the Cabinet and the House of Assembly, senior public officers, and the Governor and his team for their tireless work in implementing the forty-eight recommendations. I am also grateful to my internal team for their support that was also instrumental.

Delivering on the commitment to implement the COI recommendations to get the Order in Council lifted was indeed a collective effort and a demonstration of what c an be done when we all work together.

I also want to thank CARICOM, OECS, United Nations, Caribbean Overseas Territories Caucus, the United States Virgin Islands, and all our international partne rs who have stood by our side these past three years.

I thank the Foreign Secretary for accepting the recommendation to lift the Order. I also thank OT Minister Stephen Doughty, as well as the previous OT Ministers involved, for embracing a collaborative approach which allowed us to implement the reforms under continued democratic governance as we strive to build a model democracy as we advance to greater self-determination.

And while we celebrate this moment, we recognize that the revocation of the Order in Council is not the end of the journey; it is the beginning of a new chapter. We must proceed with vigilance. We must continue to strengthen our institutions. We must continue to uphold high standards in public life. We must continue to modernise our systems and processes. And we must continue to build on the work of the last four years.

We remain steadfast in the implementation of the policies, legislation, and processes
implemented during the COI through our Governance Reform Transition Programm e. This is our iron-clad commitment to continued and ongoing governance reform that will ensure that the changes to our governance are positively manifested in the lives of the people of the Virgin Islands. As Premier, I assure the public that my Government and I remain committed to good governance and leading this Territory with honesty, integrity, and democratic accountability.

My fellow Virgin Islanders, the success we have achieved today rested upon our willingness to embrace unity—to put aside division and focus on what binds us, not what separates us. We have proven that when we stand together, we can overcome any challenge. When we work together, we can protect our democracy. When we believe in ourselves, there is no limit to what we can achieve.

Our success depended upon our willingness to see reform not as an imposed obligation – but an opportunity to build a better Virgin Islands: to build a more transparent government; to create a more efficient public service; to strengthen public trust; And an opportunity to shape a future that reflects the best of who we are. Let us seize those opportunities together.

Today, as we celebrate. Today, as we give thanks. Today, as we honour the journey that brought us here. Let us carry that same spirit of progress, resilience, and unity. Let us continue to build a Virgin Islands that is strong, stable, and prosperous. A Virgin Islands where every child can dream boldly. A Virgin Islands where every citizen feels valued. And a Virgin Islands where our democracy is not only preserved but strengthened.

Today, I want every Virgin Islander - young and old, here and abroad - to feel a renewed sense of confidence in who we are. Yes, we are a small Territory. But we are a talented Territory. A capable Territory. A Territory filled with people who have built world-class industries, world-class institutions, and world-class success stories. We have produced leaders, thinkers, innovators, entrepreneurs, and public servants who have shaped not only our islands, but the region and the world. There is nothing we cannot achieve together.

Therefore, let us lift our sights higher and further. Let us march us to Constitutional advancement, embracing the lessons of the past nearly four years.

Let us lift our hands in praise of our God, whose timing is perfect. The crisis that others meant for evil, He meant for good, and the completion of the implementation of the recommendations and the lifting of the Order in Council will lead to further advancement for our people.

Let us lift our voices and shout Glory to God!

May we never doubt our ability to rise to challenges. May we never doubt our capacity to govern ourselves. May we never doubt the strength, intelligence, and resilience of the Virgin Islands people.

! May God bless each and every one of you. May God bless our public officers. May God bless our democracy. And as we continue to build, may God continue to bless these beautiful Virgin Islands.

Thank you.

Additional Documents or Media

- premier_speech_on_the_lifting_of_the_order_in_council_12032026.pdf