GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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Premier Wheatley’s Remarks at the MOU/Deed of Contribution Signing Ceremony for HLSCC Student Dormitories

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Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

Today marks an important milestone in the ongoing development of our Virgin Islands. We gather for the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports, the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College (HLSCC), and the Recovery and Development Agency, along with the signing of the Deed of Contribution that will formally initiate the design phase for student dormitories at the HLSCC's Paraquita Bay campus.

This isn't just a routine action. It is a statement of intent. It is a declaration that the Virgin Islands is ready to take another bold stride in strengthening our education system, expanding opportunities for our people, and positioning our Territory for a more diversified and resilient future.

The construction of student dormitories at HLSCC has long been part of the College's Master Plan. Today, we move from vision to action. When completed, these dormitories will transform access to tertiary and post-secondary education in the Virgin Islands. For many years, students from Anegada, Jost Van Dyke, and Virgin Gorda have faced additional hurdles simply because of geography. The lack of on-island accommodation has often meant higher costs, longer commutes, and difficult choices for families. With the construction of these dormitories, we will remove one of the most persistent barriers to higher education for our own people. We will make it easier for Virgin Islanders - no matter on which island they reside - to pursue their studies right here at home, build their skills, and prepare for a bright future.

But the impact of this project extends even further. The dormitories will also welcome students from abroad - students who will see the Virgin Islands not only as a world-class destination, but as a place where they can receive a quality education in a safe, beautiful, and culturally rich environment. In this way, the project supports my Government's commitment to diversifying the economy, including through education tourism. The BVI has all the natural advantages of a premier destination; now we are pairing those advantages with academic offerings that attract learners from across the region and abroad.

This shift is historic and symbolic. Only a few decades ago - and to some extent even today - Virgin Islanders seeking higher education had to leave our shores, often travelling far from home - begging lodging in other islands - to pursue their dreams. With the development of these dormitories, we are turning that story around. We are creating a future where people from other countries will come here to study, to grow, and to contribute to the life of our Territory. That is a powerful symbol of progress, and a testament to the vision of those who built and continue to build our education system.

We are already seeing signs of this transformation. Last year, HLSCC and Ponce Health Sciences University launched a groundbreaking partnership, offering medical studies as part of a Bachelor of Medicine programme right here at Paraquita Bay. That initiative has already attracted international students to our shores, and it demonstrates the kind of high-value, globally relevant programmes that HLSCC is capable of delivering.

At the same time, the College continues to expand its catalogue of long-term and short-term courses - from financial services and maritime studies to culinary arts and other areas that support our economy and our workforce. HLSCC is evolving, innovating, and responding to the needs of a changing world.

I want to take this opportunity to commend the Board of Governors, the management team, the faculty, the staff of HLSCC, and the Minister of Education and her team. Your commitment to excellence, your determination to grow the institution, and your dedication to the vision of the College’s founder - the first Chief Minister of the Virgin Islands, the Honourable H. Lavity Stoutt - are evident in every step you take. This project is a continuation of his legacy: that education is the key to empowerment, opportunity, and national development.

I also extend appreciation to the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports, and to the Recovery and Development Agency for their leadership and partnership. The RDA continues to demonstrate the value of strong project management and transparent processes, and we look forward to the successful completion of the design phase and the advancement of construction.

Today’s signing is a beginning. It is the start of a project that will shape the future of HLSCC, strengthen our education system, and open new pathways for our young people and for students from around the world. It is a step towards a more inclusive, more diversified, and more resilient Virgin Islands.

We look forward with anticipation to the completion of the designs, and to the day when we can stand on this campus and open the doors of the new student dormitories - doors that will open to opportunity, to growth, and to a brighter future for all.

Thank you, and may God continue to bless these Virgin Islands.

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