GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

PRESS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health Launches Gender and Human Rights Sessions at HM Prison

Release Date: 6 May, 2026



The Ministry of Health and Social Development, in collaboration with His Majesty's Prison, has commenced a series of Gender and Human Rights sessions aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of fundamental rights and responsibilities among inmates.

The first session, titled *"Your Rights. Your Strength: Knowing and Understanding Human Rights,"* engaged eleven male inmates in a highly interactive and participatory learning experience. The session focused on building foundational knowledge of human rights and emphasising their relevance in everyday life.

Participants explored key topics including what human rights are and why they matter, as well as the different types of rights. Discussions highlighted examples such as economic rights, including the right to gainful employment and to own and operate a business, as well as the right to cultural expression and moral beliefs.

The session also introduced participants to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)*, adopted on 10 December 1948, which serves as the foundation of the International Bill of Human Rights. Facilitators further examined related frameworks, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Additionally, excerpts from the Virgin Islands Constitution Order 2007 were discussed, with particular focus on Section 17, which addresses the protection of the rights of prisoners to humane treatment. Participants were also familiarised with the Nelson Mandela Rules, which outline the minimum standards for the treatment of incarcerated individuals. Many participants indicated prior knowledge of these standards, contributing to meaningful discussion.

Superintendent of Prison, Jay Kendall, underscored the importance of the initiative, stating, "These sessions are critical in fostering awareness, respect, and personal development among inmates. Understanding human rights not only empowers individuals but also contributes to a more respectful and rehabilitative environment within the institution."

Ministerial Special Advisor on Gender Affairs, Miss Patricia Hackett, highlighted the broader impact of the programme, noting, "Human rights education is a powerful

tool for transformation. By equipping individuals with knowledge and understanding, we are helping to build a culture of accountability, respect, and dignity that extends beyond these walls.”

The session concluded with a verbal evaluation, where participants described the experience as interesting and informative. Several noted that they were unaware that the Human Rights framework originated in 1948 and expressed surprise at the breadth of rights, particularly economic rights. Participants also commended the facilitator’s engaging approach and expressed enthusiasm for upcoming sessions.

The Ministry of Health and Social Development remains committed to promoting education, empowerment, and social development across all sectors of society, including within the prison system.

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Additional Documents or Media

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