GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

PRESS RELEASE

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Team VI Welcomed Home Following Historic Chess Olympiad Performance

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The Government of the Virgin Islands has celebrated the return of the Virgin Islands National Chess Team following a historic performance at the 46th Chess Olympiad in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

Members of the team were welcomed home during a ceremony hosted by the Department of Youth Affairs and Sports following more than two weeks abroad representing the Territory at one of the world's premier international chess competitions.

The ceremony celebrated the achievements of the entire delegation, with special recognition given to Shamoy Joseph, Kiara Phillip and Jhon Samuel for reaching the Candidate Master level.

Joseph and 14-year-old Phillip achieved Candidate Master titles following their performances in Samarkand, while Samuel received recognition for the conditional Candidate Master achievement stemming from his performance at the 2022 Chess Olympiad in Chennai, India.

The milestones were among the highlights of Team VI's participation at the 46th Chess Olympiad, where the Territory fielded teams in both the Open and Women's sections and competed against players from across the world. The Olympiad was held in Samarkand from 16 to 27 September and featured 11 rounds of international team competition.

Minister for Education, Youth Affairs and Sports, Honourable Sharie B. de Castro, congratulated the players and described their accomplishments as evidence of the expanding opportunities available to young Virgin Islanders beyond traditional sporting disciplines.

Minister de Castro highlighted the critical thinking, strategy, adaptability and confidence required to compete in chess and said the team's achievements demonstrate the Ministry's vision for developing well-rounded students capable of competing internationally.

The Minister also reflected on the growth of chess within the Territory's education system, recalling the strong interest shown by students when chess was introduced

during Innovation Week several years ago.

With support from Unite BVI, more than 250 chess boards were subsequently placed in schools across the Territory. Minister de Castro said educators began observing the impact that engagement with chess was having on students, including changes in behaviour and academic engagement.

Minister de Castro said, “You don’t have to look outside of the BVI anymore. You could look right here at home and see Candidate Masters doing big things.” She encouraged the young players to continue developing their abilities, adding, “Don’t let people disqualify you based on your age. Keep pushing. Keep striving. Keep building.”

The Minister also reaffirmed the Government’s commitment to supporting the Virgin Islands Chess Federation as it works to expand opportunities for local players, participate in more regional competitions and explore opportunities to host chess tournaments in the Territory.

President of the Virgin Islands Chess Federation, Mr. Maurice Lettsome, expressed pride in the performance of the delegation and the continued growth of chess locally.

Mr. Lettsome noted that Team VI competed against players from countries with significantly larger populations and established chess systems, including access to Grandmasters and other highly ranked players. He said the Federation remains focused on strengthening the sport locally and creating opportunities for young players to develop through greater exposure to competition. He also expressed the Federation’s desire to move beyond participating in the international Olympiad every two years by pursuing more regional competitions and eventually hosting a regional chess tournament in the Virgin Islands.

International Chess Federation Delegate Ms. Sachkia Barnes reflected on the Territory’s history in international chess, noting that the Virgin Islands’ involvement with the International Chess Federation dates back to 1974. She said the Federation’s participation in the 2022 Olympiad in Chennai marked an important point in its renewed development, creating opportunities for a new generation of

Virgin Islands players to gain international experience and build toward greater competitiveness.

Ms. Barnes said the Federation is particularly proud of the youth represented on the current national team and is already looking toward the next Chess Olympiad in Abu Dhabi, with aspirations of helping current Candidate Masters progress to the next level while developing additional national players.

The Federation also acknowledged the organisations and individuals whose support contributed to Team VI's participation in Uzbekistan. These included FIDE, FIDE America, the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports through the sports subsidy, the Georges Reimer Institute of Public Policy, Barry Electrical Services and Arts & Co. Additional support was provided by the BVI Tourist Board, BVI Finance, Tortola Pier Park, BVI Ports Authority, BVI Ideas Fest, Traverse Thorpe Alberga, Crazy Threads, Grace Harrigan and BVI Quick Stitch, among others.

The welcome-home ceremony concluded with recognition of the players, coaches, team officials, parents and supporters who contributed to the delegation's participation and success.

The Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports congratulates the Virgin Islands National Chess Team on its performance at the 46th Chess Olympiad and remains committed to supporting the continued growth of chess and other opportunities that allow young Virgin Islanders to develop their talents and represent the Territory internationally.

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