

Statement By Honourable Vincent Wheatley Minister For Health And Social Development on International Women's Day 2025

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MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2025

8th MARCH 2025

On this International Women's Day, we proudly stand with the global community to celebrate the achievements, resilience, and contributions of women. For 116 years, this day has served as a testament to the progress made and the challenges that remain in the fight for gender equality. This year's UN Women theme, 'For ALL Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment.', reinforces the need for inclusive and transformative action to advance women's rights worldwide.

Over the past three decades, governments, including here in the Virgin Islands, have strengthened legal protections for women and girls, marking significant

strides toward a more just and equitable society. As we reflect on these advancements, we also reaffirm our collective responsibility to accelerate progress and ensure that every woman and girl can fully realise her potential.

Here in the Virgin Islands, we honour the invaluable contributions of women and girls across all sectors, from entrepreneurship, education, and healthcare to public service, law enforcement, and community leadership. Women have been at the forefront of progress, innovation, and nation-building, playing an instrumental role in shaping a brighter social and economic future.

Over the past two years, three women have been elected to the House of Assembly, while nearly 20 women hold key leadership roles in the Public Service, including the Attorney General, Director of Public Prosecutions, Permanent Secretaries, Speaker of the House, and Cabinet Secretary. In addition, we recognise and commend the growing presence of women in leadership roles across the private sector and statutory bodies. This progress is significant, and I salute each of you for the vital role you play in the Virgin Islands. Yet, we must continue to encourage greater participation of women in politics and decision-making at all levels.

Every woman and girl in the Virgin Islands, and across the world, deserves the fundamental right to safety, education, economic opportunity, and healthcare.

These are not privileges; they are non-negotiable foundations of a just and fair society. As a Territory, we must remain committed to ensuring that these rights are protected and upheld for all.

We have made strides towards gender equality, but more work remains. True equality means ensuring that women and men have fair access to leadership roles, business opportunities, and resources. It means breaking down systemic barriers so that women and girls can thrive without limitations. A more equal Virgin Islands is a stronger Virgin Islands, one where the full potential of all its people is realised for the benefit of our entire society.

When women are empowered, entire communities prosper. We see this daily in the Virgin Islands, women leading businesses, shaping policy, advocating for social

change, and building stronger communities. Empowering women and girls through education, mentorship, and support networks is not just an investment in individual success, but in the collective progress of our Territory.

International Women's Day is not just a celebration, it is a call to action. I encourage everyone, men and women alike, to actively contribute to building a society where ALL women and girls can thrive. Let us commit to uplifting, supporting, and advocating for one another in ways that drive meaningful and lasting change.

On this special day, I salute and thank the women of the Virgin Islands for their sterling contributions to our socio-economic development.

Happy International Women's Day to all women and girls in the Virgin Islands and beyond!