
Statement by Premier, Honourable Dr. Natalio D Wheatley, on the Completion and Submission of the Government of the Virgin Islands Self-Assessment Report on the Implementation of the Recommendations of the 2022 British Virgin Islands Commission of Inquiry

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09 May 2025

A pleasant good afternoon to the members of the Press Corps and the people of the Virgin Islands.

Permit me to recognize and welcome the members of my Government present today, as well as the Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Myron Walwyn, Deputy Governor, David Archer, Attorney General, Hon. Dawn Smith, Cabinet Secretary,

Ms. Sandra Ward, and other Senior Public Officers.

I am pleased to welcome everyone to this press conference, to provide you with an update on the completion and submission of the **Government of the Virgin Islands Self-Assessment Report on the Commission of Inquiry (COI)**.

1. You will recall that the Minister for the Overseas Territories visited the Virgin Islands on 4 – 6 November 2024 and requested a Self-Assessment Report from the Government. This Report, along with the Governor's Final Review, an FCDO review of specific recommendations, and submissions from the public, would be assessed to determine whether the Order in Council to partially suspend the Constitution of the Virgin Islands would be lifted.
2. You would have heard the Governor's press conference this morning where he presented his Final Review of the Implementation of the Commission of Inquiry Recommendations. I thank Governor Pruce for what I believe is a balanced report in which we are aligned for the most part.
3. In terms of the final pieces of legislation to enter into force, the Passport (Amendment) Act, 2024 and the Public Assistance (Amendment) Act, 2024 will come into force on 30th June 2025. These two pieces of legislation, along with Crown Land Management Act, 2024 which is in force, are very significant pieces of legislation as they have very significant impacts on the public due to the major changes we enacted. Both Acts require Regulations that will be adopted by Cabinet shortly.
4. We recognize also that education is a critical part of successfully implementing these two pieces of legislation. We have prepared special brochures that explain the changes in plain language. These are available at the respective offices where the services are administered and downloadable from the Governance Reform section of the Government's main website.
5. You would be aware that there are two recommendations that require external actions, namely Judge-only trials which require a Constitutional amendment and Criminal Procedure Rules which require the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court to make the amendment. Outside those items I just mentioned, we have completed the 48 recommendations in accordance with the Framework Agreement.

6. We are mindful that the recommendations implemented are only as useful as the positive impact they have on the people they intend to help. In this regard, we proactively proposed a Governance Reform Transition Plan (GRTP) at the end of 2024 and have been working in collaboration with the Governor and his team to ensure it provided a bridge between the implementation of the COI recommendations and ongoing governance reform. This Plan was formally approved by Cabinet on 30 April 2025.
7. Our GRTP plan sets out the details of how we will implement the 10 policies and 17 pieces of legislation within the ranks of the public service and educate the people of the Virgin Islands on the impacts of changes and how they can make use of the changes. You have seen various media and press information on the actions we are taking to implement the recommendations and the various public education activities. We are 100% committed to ongoing reforms as doing so strengthens our self-government mandate in our Constitution.
8. It is a little over three years ago that the COI Report was published in the Virgin Islands on 29 April 2022. History will mark that date as the beginning of a transformational journey of governance change for the Virgin Islands. Today, I can announce with a strong sense of Virgin Islands pride that the significant milestone of submitting Government of the Virgin Islands Self-Assessment Report on the Implementation of the Recommendations of the COI Report. This Report was approved by Cabinet on 30th April and tabled in the HOA on 6 May. It was sent to the OT Minister yesterday, 8 May, when it was shared with the public along with a statement I made in HOA yesterday.
9. The Government's Report, along with the Governor's Final Review, review of specific recommendations by FCDO officials and submissions from the public are all now with the OT Minister for his consideration, with a view to making a recommendation on whether to lift the Order in Council now that the Framework Agreement has been completed.
10. The journey of the last three years has not been an easy one. We were on the brink of erasing over seven decades of gains in self-governance with the threat of direct rule which we averted through diplomacy, responsible decision-making and putting the people of the Virgin Islands first.

11. History will show that the Government and people of the Virgin Islands seized the opportunity to advance in preparation for greater self-governance. As with all pivotal moments in history, there are those who stepped forward to overcome the challenge. Some of them are here in this room this afternoon. Some are also not present.
12. As we close this chapter on our governance reform journey, I would like to express my profound appreciation to the public officers for the herculean task of implementing these recommendations under very challenging conditions. I must also thank my colleagues in the Cabinet and the House of Assembly for their tireless efforts to ensure we enacted the measures in the best interest of the people of the Virgin Islands. I thank the reviewers for producing excellent reports to provide insights and information to make the recommendations relevant to the Virgin Islands. I must give special thanks to my Special Envoy for time timely and strategic intervention to support me and the Government at the beginning and throughout this process.
13. I must give special recognition to the Permanent Secretaries, the Financial Secretary, the Cabinet Secretary, the Attorney General and their respective teams who did the heavy lifting over the past three years to get us through this process. I wish to also recognize the team of the COI Implementation Unit and the Governance Reform Delivery Manager for being the constant and driving force to keep the implementation on track.
14. I also wish to thank His Excellency the Governor and his team and the United Kingdom Government for the collaboration in implementing the recommendations. And last but most importantly. I wish to thank the people of the Virgin Islands for their patience and understanding over the past three years as we divided our attention between public service delivery and COI implementation, sometimes at the expense of important commitments.
15. We have done the work, now let us look forward to brighter days for our beloved Virgin Islands.

Thank you!