

BVI Premier Leads Panel on Cultural Restoration and Climate Resilience in the Caribbean

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The Government of the Virgin Islands played a leading role this weekend at *Postcards from the Frontline | Seeds to Sovereignty: Cultural Restoration, Climate Resilience & Indigenous Design*, a regional forum exploring how Indigenous knowledge, culture, and creativity can inform sustainable futures across the Caribbean.

The panel, held on Saturday, August 23, brought together regional leaders, artists, policymakers, and cultural practitioners for a forward-looking discussion on the intersection of climate justice, tourism, education, and Indigenous ecological practices. This discussion was part of *The Big Conversation*, a series of panels under the Carifesta XV umbrella. Other sessions in the series featured Prime Minister of Barbados, Hon. Mia Mottley, and Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Hon. Ralph Gonsalves.

Leading the Virgin Islands delegation, Premier Dr. Natalio Wheatley reaffirmed the Government's commitment to advancing cultural heritage and climate action as interconnected pillars of Caribbean sovereignty. In his remarks, the Premier stated, "*Climate resilience is not just about infrastructure; it is about identity, history, and honouring the wisdom of those who have lived in harmony with these islands for generations.*"

Joining the Premier was Mr. Joseph Smith-Abbott, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sustainable Development, recognised for his expertise in environmental stewardship, heritage conservation, and sustainable development. Mr. Smith-Abbott shared practical strategies for integrating Indigenous ecological practices into policy and planning, emphasising community-driven solutions and intergenerational knowledge-sharing.

The discussion was moderated by Mrs. Karia Christopher, Director of Communications for the Government of the Virgin Islands, who guided a dynamic conversation on ecological stewardship, climate resilience and Caribbean sovereignty, underscoring the role of arts and storytelling in shaping social change.

Panellists also included Barbadian cultural practitioner Clish Gittens, who contributed compelling narratives on ancestral knowledge and Indigenous

resilience.

"This panel was not simply a conversation; it was a call to action," said Smith-Abbott. "It challenged us to rethink innovation, not as something new, but as a return to ancestral wisdom that has sustained our people for centuries."

The Premier's participation reflects the Virgin Islands' growing regional sustainability and cultural policy leadership. The event signals a renewed commitment to safeguarding heritage, amplifying Indigenous voices, and strengthening the Caribbean's collective resilience.

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