GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

PRESS RELEASE

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Immigration, Trade and Labour Departments Reaffirm Zero Tolerance for Crime

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MFSEDDT presents at Virgin Islands Anti-Crime Summit

The Ministry of Financial Services, Economic Development and Digital Transformation (MFSEDDT) reaffirmed its commitment to safeguarding the Virgin Islands through strengthened systems, inter-agency collaboration, and zero tolerance for criminal activity, during its presentation at the inaugural Virgin Islands Anti-Crime Summit.

Delivering the Ministry's opening remarks, Permanent Secretary, Mrs. Natalie Fahie-Smith, stated, "This gathering reflects our shared commitment to confronting and dismantling the criminal activities that threaten the integrity of our institutions, the safety of our people and the fairness of our economy. Whether it is human trafficking, labour exploitation, smuggling or illicit trade, these crimes do not operate in isolation and neither must we."

Permanent Secretary Fahie-Smith further noted that the Ministry's approach is rooted in "partnership, prevention and action," aimed at closing systemic gaps and reinforcing a culture of transparency and accountability across all sectors.

Contributions from Heads of Department

Acting Chief Immigration Officer, Mrs. Nadia Demming-Hodge, addressed migration-related crime, citing irregular migration, fraudulent documentation, and the exploitation of legal entry systems as primary concerns. Mrs. Demming-Hodge highlighted that the Department's current strategic response is centred on regional collaboration, advanced passenger screening, targeted enforcement, and technology integration. She stated, "Our border management system is integrated with the e-visa portal and the Labour Management System, which has increased our capability to combat illegal work permit applications. Enhancements to passenger name recognition will further strengthen security through improved risk assessments and fraud detection."

Deputy Director of Trade, Dr. Lincoln Bobb, spoke on criminal activity within the trade and business licensing framework. Dr. Bobb outlined offences including operating without a licence, providing false information, obstructing trade inspectors, operating reserved businesses without Belonger status, and money

laundering. Dr. Bobb issued a reminder to the Virgin Islands business community, saying, “Operating a business without a licence can result in fines up to $5,000 and imprisonment of up to two years.” Dr. Bobb further emphasised the Department’s prevention strategies, stating, “We want to bring about public awareness. We have gone to every district so far to tell people what trade is about and to get their feedback.”

Acting Labour Commissioner, Mr. Mervin Hastings, addressed unlawful practices within the labour sector, identifying human trafficking, workplace abuse, fraud, extortion, and exploitation as key challenges. Mr. Hastings drew attention to the prevalence of employer misconduct in relation to work-permit renewals, describing financial extortion of workers as a “huge problem in the BVI.” Mr. Hastings further stated, “We find that a lot of people break the law because they don’t know the law. So we are trying to get out into the communities and partner with stakeholders so that we can better educate people about the labour laws in the Virgin Islands.”

Ministry’s Pledge

Permanent Secretary, Natalie Fahie-Smith delivered the Ministry’s Pledge on behalf of all its departments, stating, “We pledge zero tolerance for corruption, trafficking, smuggling and all forms of illegal activity. We commit to upholding integrity, enforcing the law and protecting our systems from abuse. We will work with partners and the public to ensure that migration, labour and trade are safe, fair and transparent.”

The Ministry of Financial Services, Economic Development and Digital Transformation remains resolute in its mission to protect the Virgin Islands’ institutions, workforce and economy, while strengthening collaboration with regional and international partners to combat crime in all its forms.

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About:

The Ministry of Financial Services, Economic Development and Digital Transformation plays a central role in safeguarding the Virgin Islands from criminal activity across immigration, labour, and trade. Through its departments, the Ministry works to combat illegal migration, fraudulent documentation, labour exploitation, and unlawful business practices. By strengthening inter-agency collaboration, enforcing strict penalties, advancing technology-driven border and labour management systems, and promoting public education, the Ministry is committed to ensuring transparency, accountability, and resilience. The Ministry continues to work with local, regional and international partners to protect the economy and maintain a safe and fair society for all residents of the Virgin Islands. For more information, please contact the Ministry of Financial Services, Economic Development and Digital Transformation at mfslt@gov.vg or 284-468-2096.

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