GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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Statement by Premier Wheatley: Anti-Summit, Baroness Hodge, UN Meeting, Order-in-Council, Constitutional Review

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Statement by Premier and Minister of Finance of the Virgin Islands

Honourable Dr. Natalio D. Wheatley

At Live Press Conference

3 October 2025

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, members of the media. Thank you for joining us today.

I wish to recognise the Cabinet Secretary, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Financial Services, and other senior officials in attendance. Welcome to the Press Conference for October 2025. Today, I will address several vital matters concerning our Virgin Islands. Anti-Crime Summit

Anti-Crime Summit

Ladies and gentlemen, after weeks of careful planning, and in my capacity as Premier and a member of the National Security Council, I was honoured to witness the successful launch of the Virgin Islands' first Anti-Crime Summit, held at the Multi-Purpose Sports Complex under the theme: "Our Virgin Islands: Safe Communities, Prosperous Territory."

The three-day Summit was initiated by the National Security Council at my urging, as part of a collective, unified approach to tackling crime in our Territory. From the beginning, we were clear: this Summit was never intended to provide every solution in three days. Instead, it marked the start of a sustained national conversation on crime and public safety.

Our primary objectives were to explore and agree on strategies to prevent, reduce, and combat crime; to issue a call to action across our entire community; and to gather input from all stakeholders to shape a comprehensive National Crime Reduction and Prevention Strategy.

I commend the Planning Committee for their outstanding efforts and recognise the strong partnership between the Cabinet Office and the Premier's Office in driving this initiative. The interdepartmental support, from the Royal Virgin Islands Police Force, the Ministry of Health and Social Development, the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs, and Sports, His Majesty's Prison, and the Social Development Department, ensured that discussions were targeted, practical, and impactful.

The Planning Committee will convene early next week for a debriefing session, after which a full report will be submitted to the National Security Council.

I extend sincere thanks to all participants, government officials, NGOs, faith leaders, our youth, and the wider community. I also wish to recognise the meaningful public engagement on the Government's Facebook page, which provided valuable perspectives that will be considered as we move forward.

But now, the real work begins.

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The Government has engaged Officium Training Limited, a professional consultancy with expertise in law enforcement, mediation, community policing, and crime analysis. Their team is already transforming our discussions into action as they assist in the development of the National Crime Reduction and Prevention Strategy.

Let me assure you: the Summit was not the end of the conversation. It marked the beginning of a long-term, united effort to make our Virgin Islands a safer and more prosperous place for all.

Visit of Baroness Hodge

Last week, we had the honour of welcoming the Rt Hon. Baroness Margaret Hodge DBE, the UK Government's Anti-Corruption Champion, to the Virgin Islands. Her visit centred on discussions around our role as a premier international finance centre and the progress we continue to make in combating economic crime.

We held constructive talks and hosted a series of productive meetings attended by Government representatives, Members of the House of Assembly, regulators, and

private sector stakeholders. I was particularly pleased that Baroness Hodge had the opportunity to engage with young professionals and students preparing for careers in the financial services industry.

Throughout these discussions, my colleagues and I reaffirmed our shared commitment to transparency, accountability, and combating illicit finance. We also highlighted the substantial reforms that have already been implemented in the Virgin Islands to strengthen our financial services framework.

These reforms include robust measures to combat money laundering, counterterrorist financing, and counter-proliferation financing, alongside more vigorous enforcement of sanctions and enhanced regulatory oversight.

We look forward to building on these conversations with Baroness Hodge, our partners in the UK Government, and the wider international community as we continue this important journey of reform and cooperation.

United Nations Fourth Committee

From October 6th to 8th, I will travel to New York to attend the meetings of the UN Fourth Committee, convened as part of the 80th Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

The Committee will consider the draft resolution on the progress of decolonisation in the Virgin Islands, along with the other 16 Non-Self-Governing Territories on the UN’s list.

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As Premier, I am obligated to provide the United Nations with an update on the Virgin Islands’ decolonisation process, and I will deliver an official statement to the Committee, which will be broadcast live via UN WebTV.

While in New York, I will also pursue follow-up discussions regarding technical assistance from the UN to support an education programme on self-determination

here in the Virgin Islands. This initiative is in line with recommendations from the UN C-24 visiting mission to our Territory.

Additionally, I will meet with His Excellency Ambassador James Kariuki, the UK Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

Lifting of the Order in Council

You would be aware that on 22 September 2025, Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, Rt. Hon. Yvette Cooper, acting on the advice of the Minister for the Overseas Territories, Stephen Doughty, has decided to revoke the draft Order in Council that if invoked would have suspended the Constitution of the Virgin Islands. This comes a bit over three years after the agreement between the Government of the Virgin Islands and the Government of the United Kingdom to implement the fortyeight recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry under a democratic structure.

The lifting of the Order in Council marks a significant milestone in our journey towards self-determination. Not only did we protect the hard-earned constitutional gains of our ancestors when we secured the right to undertake the reform, but we placed ourselves in a position to advance their aspiration for us to continue to be the masters of our destiny. They built this Territory with courage, vision, and fortitude, and we have an obligation to continue the journey of self-determination they started which is well documented in our history. Despite our concerns about how the COI was initiated and how investigations were conducted, it is unequivocal that the outcomes it produced are in the best interest of the Virgin Islands and have placed us in a stronger position to negotiate a Constitution that provides for greater self-governance based on having a strengthened level of accountability, transparency and trust in the conduct of the people’s business.

As the revocation process for the Order in Council proceeds through the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Privy Council, and the United Kingdom Parliament in the coming months, we remain steadfast in the implementation of the policies, legislation, and processes through our Governance Reform Transition Programme. This is our iron-clad commitment to continued and ongoing governance reform that will ensure that the changes to our governance are positively manifested in the

lives of the people of the Virgin Islands. As Premier, I assure the public that my Government and I remain committed to good governance and leading this Territory with honesty, integrity, and democratic accountability.

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I firstly want to express my thanks to God for granting us the strength and resilience to forge ahead under incredibly challenging circumstances which required us to implement the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry (COI) whilst at the same time delivering public services to the people of the Virgin Islands. I thank my colleagues in the Cabinet and the House of Assembly, senior public officers, and the Governor and his team for their tireless work in implementing the forty-eight recommendations. I am also grateful to my internal team for their support that was also instrumental.

Delivering on the commitment to implement the COI recommendations to get the Order in Council lifted was indeed a collective effort and a demonstration of what can be done when we all work together.

I also want to thank CARICOM, OECS, United Nations, Caribbean Overseas Territories Caucus, the United States Virgin Islands, and all our international partners who have stood by our side these past three years.

I thank the Foreign Secretary for accepting the recommendation to lift the Order. I also thank OT Minister Stephen Doughty, as well as the previous OT Ministers involved, for embracing a collaborative approach which allowed us to implement the reforms under continued democratic governance as we strive to build a model democracy as we advance to greater self-determination.

Constitutional Committee Report Debate

You would have seen and heard the debates of the Constitutional Review Committee Report (the Report) over the past few weeks and heard the playbacks on the radio. This is all part of the critically important process of getting to a new Constitution. The public had the opportunity to give input to the Report; the

Commissioners considered their input and produced the Report which was wide and far-reaching in its scope. Members of the House of Assembly each reacted to the Report and shared their varied positions during the House of Assembly debates where each member made valuable contributions. This is democracy at work.

Members of the House of Assembly will now go into Committee and discuss their input, and we will arrive at a position that reflects the collective views of the elected members and publish a House of Assembly Report. We will share that document with the public to gain their final input before going to London to negotiate a new Constitution which I hope will be provided as soon as possible. In the meantime, I hope to appoint a negotiating committee by the end of the year. This is the team that will receive the public's input on the House of Assembly Report that will be the basis of our negotiating strategy. So that is the process we will follow. Full public engagement, full transparency.

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Let me wrap up by providing a bit of context for where we are in the journey of the Virgin Islands. We have endured a lot as a Territory over the period of 2017 to 2024.

I call it the seven years of famine, including the catastrophic destruction of the Territory by two category 5 hurricanes, the crippling impact of the global pandemic, the collapse of our governance structures that led to the Commission of Inquiry, the continuous assault on our primary revenue source, financial services and the social pressures this has inflicted on our society. Through the grace of God and the resilient spirit of our ancestors instilled in us, we came out stronger and more appreciative of our blessings.

Today we can look back at all that has happened to us as a people and see that it has all worked together for our good. We now sit in a place where we can embrace the future with confidence, preparation and a belief that the past seven years have prepared us for the greater good. The last two weeks of activities have told us we are on the right path to a brighter and stronger future for the people of the Virgin Islands.

Here is what it told us:

1. The lifting of the Order in Council tells us that our governance is ready for the future aspiration of the people of the Virgin Islands.

2. The United Nations Fourth Committee Meeting tells us that we are ready to continue the journey of self-determination started by our ancestors.

3. The visit of Baroness Hodge tells us that we can confront the challenges we face in financial services and any external challenges our development and overcome.

4. The Constitutional Review Report debates tell us that we have a clear vision and path for the future Constitution of the Virgin Islands that aligns with our human right to self-determination. 5. The Anti-Crime Summit tells us that we have taken ownership of the ills that have befallen our society due to rapid development and are prepared to tackle them.

All things are working together for our good. The key is to believe! Today, I declare to the people of the Virgin Islands that I believe! And you should as well.

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Additional Documents or Media

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