

STATEMENT

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Remarks by Attorney General of the Virgin Islands Honourable Dawn J. Smith at the Launch of the Redesigned Virgin Islands Laws Online Website

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Good morning,

Why are we here today? I am going to tell you.

Ignorance of the law is no excuse. Most or all of us have heard that phrase. It means that even if we don't know what the law is, we can be fined, imprisoned, or otherwise held responsible or punished if we break it.

Unfortunately, finding the laws of the Virgin Islands or all the pieces of the laws of the Virgin Islands has not always been easy to do.

Today, we are here to help change that.

We are launching the redesigned laws.gov.vg platform, and we are also providing an update on the Accessibility of Laws Project.

In 2021, Cabinet endorsed a plan for the Accessibility of Laws Project, which includes a full revision of the laws of the Virgin Islands, digitising them, and making them available online free of cost. For context, I should say that the last full revision of the laws of the Virgin Islands, what we commonly referred to as the “Red Books” was completed in 1991, some 34 years ago.

It is a big project, so we have broken it into three preliminary phases.

In Phase one, we established laws.gov.vg, where we made available all available interim revisions to date and all the laws passed since 1 January 2020. We then published Interim Revised Edition of 94 laws, as at 1 January 2023.

In Phase Two, we focused on three main areas:

Firstly, the redesign of the laws.gov.vg platform, with full tech search, modern navigation, hyperlinks between related legislation, access to United Kingdom legislation applicable to the Virgin Islands, a new index of repealed legislation, and a frequently asked questions section to assist every user.

Secondly, we developed in-house a redesigned Consolidated Index. This index, which will also be available on the platform, provides an index of all laws in the Virgin Islands. Users will be able to use the index to track laws, chronologically, see

amendments overtime, and know with confidence what is currently in force.

Thirdly, we are preparing two additional Interim Revised Editions, as at 1 January 2024—one for financial services legislation, which will cover 94 laws, and one general revised edition covering over 200 laws.

The redesigned platform was developed collaboratively by the Attorney General's Chambers and the Department of Information Technology, and will replace the previous site.

I must emphasise that laws.gov.vg is for everyone: it's for lawyers, yes, and judges, too, and perhaps more importantly, it is for public officers, students, researchers, the business sector, investors, and of course, what we call in the legal world, the man and the woman on the street. It is for a Virgin Islands that must be able to see the law, read the law, search the law, and understand it.

We are also developing a Law Revision Manual to institutionalised continuity and to facilitate the training of new personnel in Law Revision. We are also moving towards annual Law Revision as a standard practice in the Virgin Islands.

There is a lot that happens behind the scenes in a project of this nature, and I expressed my sincere thanks to the Government of the Virgin Islands for its steady support, including sustained funding for the project.

I am exceedingly grateful to my team here at Chambers, including the Law Revision consultant, Ms. Michelle Daley. I expressed special thanks to the Department of Information Technology—yes, folks, DoIT, Did It, and all public officers and technical teams who have contributed to this important reform.

Finally, we cannot celebrate a milestone such as this without recognising the Regional Law Revision Center in Anguilla, who provides technical support and training, regionally and worldwide, in Law Revision.

To close, let me say again. We should be able to quickly find the law that affects us. When the law is accessible and easy to use and understand, it supports fairness, it strengthens understanding, and it reinforces public confidence in our institutions and in the rule of law.

I now declare the Redesigned Virgin Islands Laws Online officially launched.

Thank you.

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Additional Documents or Media

- [remarks by attorney general of the virgin islands dawn j smith at the launch of the rede](#)
- [Hon. Dawn J. Smith, Attorney General](#)