GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

PRESS RELEASE

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Premier Addresses House of Lords Constitution Committee

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Premier of The Virgin Islands, Honourable Dr Natalio D. Wheatley, appeared before the United Kingdom House of Lords Constitution Committee on Wednesday, 11th February to give evidence as part of its review of the 2023 UK–Overseas Territories Joint Declaration. The document is a framework for a "modern partnership" based on shared democratic values, human rights, and the rule of law between the UK and its Overseas Territories.

The inquiry focused on the mechanisms for engagement between the UK and the Overseas Territories, and on the extent to which those mechanisms are effective in supporting partnership, accountability and good governance.

Premier Wheatley joined other Overseas Territories representatives in outlining shared priorities for strengthening engagement and ensuring that constitutional arrangements continue to support stable, democratic governance.

In his statement to the Committee, the Premier praised the Joint Declaration for helping to guide the modern, progressive partnership between the United Kingdom and Overseas Territories, while noting that its continued success depends on consistent implementation across all areas of joint responsibility.

Premier Wheatley also joined calls for the current UK White Paper on the Overseas Territories to be updated to reflect recent global events and constitutional developments within the Overseas Territories, which he considered to be an essential step to ensuring that the principles of the Declaration are more fully reflected in policy and practice.

The Premier’s statement also highlighted The Virgin Islands’ vulnerability to the physical impacts of climate change, referencing the devastating effects of the 2017 hurricanes and noting that the Territory continues to encounter barriers in accessing climate financing, including both the UN’s “Adaption Fund” and “Loss and Damage Fund for Developing Countries”.

The Premier went on to stress the importance of ensuring that Overseas Territories are not disadvantaged within such international climate financing mechanisms and are able to access the resources necessary to mitigate the impact of future extreme weather events.

Security issues facing The Virgin Islands formed another key part of the discussion, with the Premier noting that The Virgin Islands' geographic position between North and South America means it has a particularly vital role to play in the fight against transnational crime networks. He consequently called for improved collaboration with the United Kingdom to help reduce vulnerabilities and put in place security frameworks that can successfully combat illicit cross-border activity, safeguard communities and uphold law and order.

Looking ahead, the Premier reiterated The Virgin Islands' commitment to further developing a mutually respectful partnership with the United Kingdom while emphasising that the next phase of the relationship must focus on implementation and ensuring that commitments made in the Joint Declaration are swiftly translated into measurable progress.

Commenting following his appearance before the Committee, Honourable Dr Natalio D. Wheatley said, "I was honoured to give evidence to the House of Lords Constitution Committee as part of its important review of the UK-Overseas Territories Joint Declaration. I welcomed the opportunity to contribute to this vital constitutional discussion and to place The Virgin Islands' perspective formally on record."

He added: "The Committee's work plays an essential role in strengthening understanding of the constitutional relationship between the United Kingdom and the Overseas Territories. I am grateful for the constructive engagement shown by Members and for the opportunity to discuss how we can continue to build a modern, respectful and effective partnership based on mutual responsibility and shared democratic values."

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Notes to editors:

- The Constitution Committee is a cross-party committee of the House of Lords. Its role is to examine the constitutional implications of public legislation and to conduct inquiries into matters of constitutional policy: Constitution Committee - Summary - Committees - UK Parliament
- The Premier attended the session alongside Honourable Charles Washington Misick, OBE, Premier of the Turks and Caicos Islands; Honourable Kim Wilkerson, Attorney General of Bermuda; Blondel Cluff CBE, Overseas Representative and Special Adviser to the Premier of the Government of Anguilla; and Kei-Retta Farrell, U.K. Representative to the Government of Montserrat.
- The current UK White Paper on the Overseas Territories was published in 2012.
- The Joint Ministerial Council (JMC) provides a formal mechanism for engagement between the U.K. and the Overseas Territories.

About:

The Government of The Virgin Islands is committed to promoting good governance and the sustainable development of the Territory with a view to ensuring a well-informed, prosperous, cohesive and stable society. The Premier’s Office serves as the focal point for coordinating cross-sectoral policies and programmes and promoting the sustainable development of The Virgin Islands to ensure a well-informed, prosperous, cohesive and stable society.

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