GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

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Agreements Signed to Advance Design of HLSCC Student Dormitories

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The Government of the Virgin Islands has taken a significant step toward expanding tertiary education infrastructure with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding and Deed of Contribution to facilitate the design of student dormitories at the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College (HLSCC).

The agreements were signed between the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports, HLSCC, and the Virgin Islands Recovery and Development Agency during a ceremony held on April 14 at the College's Learning Resource Centre.

The signing formally initiates the design phase for the proposed dormitory development at the Paraquita Bay campus, a project aimed at strengthening access to tertiary education and supporting the continued expansion of the College.

Minister for Education, Youth Affairs and Sports, Honourable Sharie B. de Castro, explained that the project represents a transformative step for the future of education in the Virgin Islands.

"Through this partnership and the signing of this Memorandum of Understanding and Deed of Contribution, we are not simply designing buildings. We are designing opportunity," the Minister said.

She added that the dormitories will help ensure that geography is no longer a barrier to accessing tertiary education in the Virgin Islands. "We are creating a home for learning, one that will welcome not only students here on Tortola, but students from our sister islands, ensuring that geography is no longer a barrier to access," the Minister said.

HLSCC remains the only internationally accredited college within the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, a distinction the Minister emphasised as both a point of pride and responsibility. "That distinction carries weight. It carries responsibility. And it carries enormous possibility," Honourable de Castro stated.

Building on that foundation, she noted that the College is now actively pursuing four year degree granting status, which would allow for the introduction of bachelor's programmes for the first time in its history. She explained that the

development of student dormitories is a critical component of this progression, supporting the College's transition to a more comprehensive and competitive tertiary institution.

Premier and Minister of Finance, Honourable Dr Natalio Wheatley, described the agreements as a strategic investment in the Territory's human capital, noting that the project strengthens the foundation for long-term educational and national development.

Chair of the HLSCC Board of Governors, Dr Sauda Smith, characterised the initiative as a pivotal step in the College's continued growth, highlighting its importance in expanding institutional capacity and enhancing the student experience.

President of HLSCC, Dr Richard Georges, noted that the development advances a key element of the College's master plan, moving the institution closer to a more integrated and dynamic campus environment that supports both academic and student life.

Director of Programme Strategy at the RDA, Ms Kinisha Forbes, highlighted the Agency's ongoing collaboration with the Ministry of Education in delivering critical infrastructure across the Territory.

Since 2018, the RDA has supported more than $26 million in education infrastructure improvements, including projects at the Bregado Flax Educational Centre in Virgin Gorda, the Jost Van Dyke Multi-Purpose Educational Facility, Elmore Stoutt High School, and the Eslyn Henley Richez Learning Centre.

Under the agreements signed, the RDA will oversee procurement and project management for the design phase, working closely with the Ministry of Education and HLSCC.

The next phase of the project will involve the engagement of a design consultant and stakeholder consultations to inform the architectural plans for the proposed dormitory facilities.

The development forms part of the Government's broader efforts to strengthen tertiary education infrastructure and position HLSCC as a leading institution for

higher learning in the region.

For Additional Information Contact:

Ms. Angelique Lettsome
Information Officer I
Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports
Telephone: 1-284-468-9448
Email: anlettsome@gov.vg