

## Remarks by Premier Wheatley at Contract Signing for Nurse Iris O'Neal Medical Centre Roof Repairs

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A pleasant good day to each and everyone.

Today is an important day for Virgin Gorda as we take a forward step towards restoring reliable, accessible, and dignified healthcare to the island.

Every resident of this Territory - no matter which island they call home - deserves quality healthcare delivered in facilities that are safe, resilient, and worthy of the trust our people place in them. And this is especially so for all our Sister Island residents because of their unique geographic circumstances. That is a principle this Government holds firmly, and it is a commitment we intend to honour.

For quite some time, the roof at the Nurse Iris O'Neal Medical Centre has been a source of disruption and deep frustration. The leaks disrupted services, created uncertainty, and forced the Ministry to activate a field hospital just to ensure continuity of care. That is not the experience we want for the people of Virgin Gorda, and it is certainly not the standard we set for healthcare in The Virgin Islands.

To the people of Virgin Gorda, I apologise for all that you had to endure. We have been very cognisant of the inconvenience you faced and your concerns; none more so than your District Representative and Minister of Health, Honourable Vincent Wheatley. Honourable Wheatley has been relentless in pushing this process forward. He has been your voice at every stage.

From the outset, the Government and the Ministry of Health agreed that patchwork repairs would not cut it. We were not prepared to apply temporary fixes to a problem that demanded a long-term solution. Instead, we made the deliberate decision to pursue a comprehensive repair - one that addresses the root issues and ensures that this facility is protected for years to come. That approach takes more time, more coordination, and more resources, but it is the right approach to give you the facility you deserve.

It is unfortunate that the project experienced delays due to the need for a re-tendering. But today, those hurdles have been surpassed. The contract is awarded, the resources are aligned, and the work can finally begin.

To the contractor and the project supervisors: we expect nothing less than the highest quality workmanship, because the people of Virgin Gorda have been through enough disruptions to their healthcare due to structural failures. Build it strong. Build it right. Build it to last.

And to the community: thank you. Thank you for your patience, your resilience, and your understanding as we navigated the challenges that brought us to this point. Relief is near at hand.

Finally, I extend sincere appreciation to everyone who played a role in advancing this project - the Ministry of Health, the technical teams, the procurement officers, the leadership at BVI Health Services Authority, and the dedicated staff who kept services going despite the obstacles. Your efforts have brought us to a better day.

Let me acknowledge the Recovery and Development Authority, RDA, now named Virgin Islands Development Authority, VIDA, in particular Ms. Shaina Smith who was a Project Manager on this project before and a big part of infrastructural development in healthcare in both Tortola and Virgin Gorda and CEO Mr. Anthony McMaster. Whenever I have the opportunity to sing the praises of the RDA I do so, because our government must become better at executing projects. We're not there yet, but with VIDA we will get there, that's why we made VIDA permanent, because we believe that having a dedicated group of project managers and the other technicians will help us to execute better.

Let us move forward with purpose, unity, and determination, as we continue to develop our beloved Virgin Islands. To the people of Virgin Gorda, we certainly commit ourselves to improving healthcare there and this project is a part of that effort.

To the people of the Sister Islands, we are committed to improving the administering of healthcare services on the Sister Islands and emergency response to Tortola, if necessary,

Thank you.

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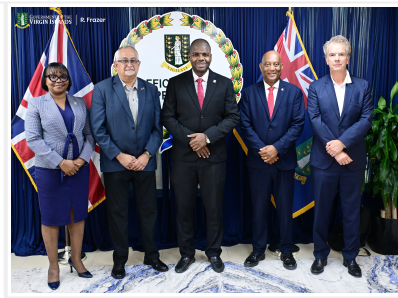
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