GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE VINCENT O. WHEATLEY MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE FIFTH SITTING OF THE THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTH HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY WEDNESDAY, 21ST OCTOBER, 2026 National Cervical Cancer Elimination Strategy Consultancy

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Madam Speaker, I rise today to inform this Honourable House of an important initiative recently undertaken by the Ministry of Health and Social Development, in collaboration with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), to advance cervical cancer prevention and control in The Virgin Islands.

Earlier this year, the Ministry hosted a technical consultancy and national stakeholder consultation to support the development of The Virgin Islands' National Cervical Cancer Elimination Strategy.

This consultancy forms part of the Territory's ongoing commitment to strengthening women's health services and aligning national programmes with the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Strategy to Accelerate the Elimination of Cervical Cancer as a Public Health Problem.

Madam Speaker, cervical cancer is one of the few cancers that can be effectively prevented through a combination of Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination,

routine screening, early diagnosis, and timely treatment. The World Health Organization has established the ambitious "90-70-90" targets for 2030; which means:

- 90 percent of girls fully vaccinated against HPV by age 15;
- 70 percent of women screened using a high-performance test by ages 35 and 45; and
- 90 percent of women identified with cervical disease receiving appropriate treatment.

I am pleased to report that The Virgin Islands has already achieved significant success in one of these key areas. Our national HPV vaccination programme has consistently attained vaccination coverage of more than 90 percent among the target population of girls for at least two consecutive years. This achievement reflects the dedication of our healthcare professionals, the confidence of parents and guardians in our immunisation programme, and the Government's sustained investment in preventive healthcare.

Madam Speaker, this accomplishment has also received regional recognition. During Vaccination Week in the Americas 2026, PAHO highlighted The Virgin Islands as a best-practice example in the Americas for HPV vaccination, recognising the Territory's success in achieving and sustaining high vaccination coverage. This recognition places The Virgin Islands among the leading performers in the region and demonstrated what can be achieved through strong public health leadership, effective programme delivery and community trust in evidence-based healthcare programmes.

As I noted during Vaccination Week, which was celebrated from 25 April to 2 May, HPV vaccination **is** cancer prevention! It is one of the most important long-term investments we can make in the health and well-being of our people, protecting future generations from cervical cancer and other HPV-related diseases. While we take pride in this achievement, we recognise that vaccination alone will not eliminate cervical cancer. Our continued progress will require strengthening screening, diagnosis, treatment services, follow-up care, surveillance and health system coordination. This consultancy has therefore assisted the Ministry in

assessing the current landscape, identifying gaps and opportunities, and laying the foundation for a comprehensive, evidence-based strategy that will guide the Territory's efforts towards the elimination of cervical cancer as a public health problem.

As part of the consultancy, the PAHO technical team visited selected primary healthcare facilities and the National Laboratory at the Dr. D. Orlando Smith Hospital to gain a better understanding of existing services and capacities. A multi-sectoral stakeholder consultation was also convened, bringing together representatives from the Ministry of Health and Social Development, the BVI Health Services Authority, healthcare providers, civil society organisations, policymakers, professional associations, and other key stakeholders.

Madam Speaker, I am especially pleased to report that the consultation was very well supported. The high level of participation demonstrated a shared commitment to improving women's health and ensuring that the National Cervical Cancer Elimination Strategy is informed by local expertise, practical experience, and a collaborative, whole-of-society approach. The insights and recommendations generated during the consultation will play a critical role in shaping the Strategy and establishing clear priorities for strengthening prevention, screening, diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up services across the Territory.

Madam Speaker, this initiative represents another important step in strengthening our health system and ensuring that women and girls in The Virgin Islands have access to high-quality preventive, diagnostic, and treatment services. It is fully aligned with the Government's commitment to improving health outcomes, reducing the burden of non-communicable diseases, and promoting equitable access to quality healthcare for all.

The Ministry of Health and Social Development looks forward to continuing its close collaboration with PAHO and our national partners in developing and implementing a National Cervical Cancer Elimination Strategy. This strategy will guide our efforts in the years ahead and bring The Virgin Islands closer to the global goal of eliminating cervical cancer as a public health problem.

Madam Speaker, the achievements of our HPV vaccination programme demonstrate what can be accomplished when Government, healthcare professionals, parents, educators, and communities work together towards a common objective. Having successfully established a strong foundation in prevention, we must now build upon that success by strengthening screening, diagnosis, treatment and follow-up services so that no woman is left behind in our efforts to eliminate cervical cancer. The development of this Strategy marks an important milestone in that journey and reflects our commitment to protecting the health and well-being of present and future generations.

Madam Speaker, I thank this Honourable House for its continued support of initiatives that strengthen our healthcare system and improve the quality of life of the people of The Virgin Islands.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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