

STATEMENT

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Honourable Lorna G. Smith, Obe Statement During Special Announcement

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As the Premier has rightly said, we face turbulent times. We must therefore rise above personal and political differences and stand together for the good of our people and the future of the Virgin Islands. These days demand unity, responsibility, and unwavering commitment to service.

Now, more than ever, those of us in elected roles must pull together to protect and strengthen our beloved Virgin Islands. This cannot be about individual ambition or political maneuvering; it is about duty, about ensuring that the next generation inherits a Territory that is not just surviving but thriving.

At the Premier's invitation, I recently joined the BVI delegation on a mission to Asia. There, I engaged with longtime friends and associates who have worked with our country over many years. While we remain optimistic about the future of our key economic sectors, there is no denying the concerns and challenges. How we respond in this critical moment will determine our continued positive standing...not only in Asia but on the global stage.

I firmly believe that given my experience and longstanding relationships, I can make a meaningful contribution to that response. And I believe I can best serve our country in the role as outlined by the Premier.

Throughout my career, I have been driven by a singular mission: to secure a brighter future for the Virgin Islands and its people. That future is only possible if we build a resilient economy, one that provides opportunities for all Virgin Islanders. The growth and development of our business sector, particularly financial services, is central to that vision.

One of my core focuses in this role will be ensuring that more Virgin Islanders see themselves in this industry, not as bystanders, but as active participants and beneficiaries. We already have remarkable professionals in senior positions, but we need more. We must create clear pathways for our people to access and thrive in this sector.

Even in my time away from Government, I have remained committed to this mission. Recently, I initiated a Financial Services Bootcamp designed to broaden awareness of the financial services sector and the vital role we play in the global economy. This initiative will not only equip Virgin Islanders with knowledge about the industry but also empower them to take advantage of employment and business opportunities.

Our future success will depend on innovation, robust regulation, workforce development, and continued diversification, particularly in emerging areas such as FinTech. But financial services alone cannot carry us forward. We must also strengthen and expand other industries, attract new investment - including in climate resilience and sustainability - and build an economy that is diverse, dynamic, and prepared for the future.

At the heart of it all, government must support businesses, foster entrepreneurship, and create an environment where investors see the Virgin Islands as a place of opportunity. Initiatives like Roots to Resilience, which I founded, are a testament to this vision. The more we invest in making our communities vibrant, welcoming, and economically strong, the more we attract those who wish to invest in us. And I extend an open invitation: when you see groups out on weekends painting fences or working to beautify our communities, join us! Together, we can build something greater.

I accept this role not out of personal ambition, but out of duty. The present economic climate and global uncertainty demand that we put aside our differences for a greater good. My entire professional career has been in service to the people of the Virgin Islands. That commitment has never wavered, and it will not waver now.

I am grateful to the Premier for this opportunity. Regardless of any past differences, I believe we share the common goal of seeing our country prosper. This is our collective responsibility, and I stand ready to do my part.

Now is the time for leadership, unity, and service above self. Together, let us secure the future of the Virgin Islands.

Thank you.