



Remarks by

Premier of The Virgin Islands – Honourable Dr. Natalio Wheatley

Friday, 12 December 2025

Good afternoon. Deputy Premier, Hon Julian Fraser, Minister of Communications and Works, Honourable Kye Rymer, Minister responsible for Financial Services and Trade, Honourable Lorna Smith. Senior civil servants.

This is my first press conference since the deeply shocking and sudden passing of my Director of Communications and my beloved friend **Karia Christopher**.

Since we got the crushing news last Friday, we have been in the vice grip of sadness, but I am determined to celebrate the lovely memories she left us with and her beautiful legacy. To celebrate her professionalism, her grace, her compassion, her humour, her audacious commitment to keeping it real. We extend our heartfelt condolences to her husband Rory, her children, Hunter and Dakota, her mother Delrice, her sister Jan, and her extended family. Karia also had a work family and a huge social network, which means that the pain of her passing has been felt by many including the Premier's office and the wider public service. We are deeply appreciative of the kind words expressed by so many. At the appropriate time we will give our tributes and celebrate her for the queen that she was. Until then, we keep the family in our prayers and lean on each other in those moments where the gravity of her absence weighs too heavily. May the soul of our beloved sister rest in peace.

This press conference will focus on the outcomes of the JMC, COP 30, our international climate agenda, financial services and trade, the airport expansion, infrastructural development, and other government matters.

Firstly, let me provide an update on the outcomes of the **2025 Joint Ministerial Council** held in London. As president of UKOTA's political council, I co-chaired the JMC with OT Minister Stephen Doughty, which secured progress for the wider OT family and advanced the Virgin Islands strategic priorities.

Throughout the JMC, our message was consistent: the Virgin Islands is committed to a modern, respectful partnership with the United Kingdom, one that honours our democratic rights, strengthens our institutions, and supports the development priorities of our people. I am pleased to say that this message was heard clearly.

Constitutional reform and governance

We secured agreement to begin formal constitutional negotiations with the UK early in 2026. This is an important milestone. These talks will allow us to advance the recommendations of our own House of Assembly and continue the work of building a stronger, more self-reliant Territory. We will soon be laying on the table of the House of Assembly the Committee of the House's report on Constitutional advancement, which will be sent to the OT Minister. We will appoint a negotiating team thereafter.



A new constitution will be followed by a bilateral compact with the United Kingdom that will guide our cooperation over the course of the next few years.

We continue to celebrate the most robust governance reform programme in the history of the Virgin Islands which provides the foundation of good governance, transparency and trust upon which we negotiate. Yesterday Minister of the Overseas Territories Stephen Doughty announced that the Order in Council will be revoked in March. I pay tribute to the Cabinet and Cabinet office, the speaker and Members of the House of Assembly, my special Envoy, my Chief Advisor, our dedicated public officers in this effort. Your work to ensure that the draft Order in Council is lifted has been outstanding.

Security

Security was a significant aspect of the Joint Ministerial Council and the bilateral engagement with the UK government. We secured additional support from the Home Office on anti-violence and anti-gang programmes being administered in the UK that could assist us on the ground. I made a pledge to work closely with the Governor on implementation of agreed areas of the law enforcement review and we agreed on the provision of additional funding in our 2026 budget to support our law enforcement agencies, including customs and immigration.

Protocols

A significant outcome involves a constructive agreement in principle regarding the current liquidity ratio requirement. The Minister for the Overseas Territories, Stephen Doughty MP, expressed openness to the proposed amendment to the financial protocols that would reduce the mandated liquidity ratio—the minimum reserve of cash and short-term assets—from 25 percent to 20 percent of recurrent revenue.

This consensus marks a pivotal step toward balancing fiscal prudence with the Territory's need for greater budgetary flexibility to fund crucial capital projects and drive economic diversification. The reduction is recognised as reflecting the sustained fiscal maturity and improved financial management capabilities demonstrated by the Overseas Territory governments. We also recognised the need for further investment in law enforcement, and our social resilience and youth development. We are engaged in further discussions to formalise the implementation of this change, reflecting the JMC's commitment to a partnership built on mutual respect and shared responsibility for sustainable development.

Investing in people and services

We met with partners to support reforms that strengthen public services, leadership, and government systems, while creating opportunities for young people. These discussions will translate into new programmes, training, and tools to improve delivery for the public. We also had encouraging and positive engagements with our diaspora, who continue to be strong ambassadors for the Territory.

Overall, this was a week in which the Virgin Islands' interests were strongly defended and clearly advanced. We left London with momentum, clarity, and stronger relationships to support our strategic goals. My government will continue to push for progress on governance reform, economic growth, financial services, infrastructure development, and the long-term prosperity of our people.



Thank you for your continued trust and engagement.

Financial Services, Infrastructure and Climate

The aspects of the JMC relating to the airport development, financial services, and trade will be addressed by the Ministers responsible, Hon. Kye Rymer and Hon. Lorna Smith. The Deputy Premier will also focus on our international climate agenda, but I wish to mention a significant announcement at the JMC, where the Minister of the Overseas Territories Stephen Doughty committed to a Climate support programme that will supplement the already excellent work being done around biodiversity, evident in the BVI Diversity Strategy launched at the JMC. This is welcome news as we seek to advance our interests in the climate space with further engagement in international fora. To assist the Deputy Premier and myself in this area, I introduce a former Deputy Premier and one of the best advocates that we have internationally in Dr. Kedrick Pickering, who has accepted my invitation to serve as Climate Envoy with additional responsibilities in sustainable development. I want to thank Dr. Pickering for the patriotic decision to serve in this capacity and I look forward to working with him to further the Virgin Islands interests at home and abroad.

Lastly, I wish everyone a safe and enjoyable **Christmas season**. For those looking forward to my annual Christmas party, we postponed in respect of our recently departed sister, but we will communicate the new dates shortly. And recently at an Anglican service, the reverend who preached said that we should make the people smile for Christmas. Therefore, I am happy to announce that many public servants will receive some of their **outstanding increment payments** this Christmas with the remainder receiving theirs in early 2026. Also, the Minister of Communications and works will announce another government initiative to make the broader Virgin Islands public smile this Christmas.

Have a wonderful holiday season and may God continue to bless these beautiful Virgin Islands.

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