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THIRD INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

**Caribbean regional seminar on the implementation of the Third International
Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism: accelerating decolonization
through renewed commitment and pragmatic measures**

Saint George's, Grenada

2 to 4 May 2019

STATEMENT BY

DEPUTY PREMIER

MR. WALTER H. ROBAN

(BERMUDA)

CARIBBEAN REGIONAL SEMINAR ON DECOLONISATION
GEORGETOWN, GRENADA
2 – 4 MAY 2019

COMMENTS OF THE DEPUTY PREMIER OF BERMUDA
THE HONOURABLE WALTER H. ROBAN JP MP

Good Afternoon,

I wish to congratulate the Government of Grenada for hosting this august event and this Committee convening in the region. We would also like to congratulate you Madam Chair for the leadership role you are currently holding. We would like to thank the Committee for inviting Bermuda to attend this event in the region. I am not certain if Bermuda has ever officially attended the C24 regional event as it relates to the government of Bermuda. This may be the first opportunity we've taken. I can assure you we welcome the invitation and are proud and happy to be here.

Particularly I am happy to sit next to a fellow Overseas Territory, the British Virgin Islands (BVI), we share common connections in many ways not just through the relationship with the United Kingdom (UK). There are many people who share common links with the BVI in Bermuda so we are always happy to be together in forums like this. We are happy for you bringing us all together once again in the region.

I would like to with the time I have been afforded to speak certainly to topic and its title, "Perspectives of the administering Powers, the Non-Self Governing Territories and other stakeholders: Political developments in the Non-Self Governing Territories in the Caribbean Region."

Let me first say, I stand by and support the comments made by the Premier of the British Virgin Islands in their wholeness. He has covered considerable ground proving that we are sharing the same experiences with the UK that it is almost no need for me to get into the thorough detail he covered and I thank him for that. I will certainly bring a perspective of Bermuda to the meeting which I am sure will be informative to everyone.

Now the UK have taken an interesting position. The Premier did mention Beneficial Ownership and the Bermuda Government has taken a particular position with this. Our constitutional arrangements are much different from the BVI and other Overseas Territories. The position the Bermuda Government has taken is, we understand the UK believes they can legislate over Bermuda from Westminster in this matter. The Bermuda Government position is that such action under our existing constitutional arrangements is untenable and we will resist every effort by the British to do so. We do not believe the existing constitutional arrangements with the UK allows them to legislate over Bermuda. They can request we pass certain legislation but it does not allow them to legislate from the UK onto us.

The Honourable Premier spoke of the Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) Report in quite detailed fashion. We share the same position, as the British Virgin Islands, we find most of the recommendations around Belongers, around other matters an affront and shows frankly that Members of the United Kingdom (UK) Parliament are living in another reality. Perhaps trying to ignite some sort of past when the British Empire exerted much more control over its overseas territories with little recognition of the reports the Honourable Premier mentioned, 'The Partnership for Progress' and the most recent report 'Security Success and Sustainability'. The position taken by the FAC in particular seems to forget those reports and those commitments by the British Government ever existed. So that remains our position around those two. The Premier of Bermuda has made clear statements around these matters and they remain.

We find ourselves in Bermuda confronted with the prospect of the UK exit from the EU and this has, as all the OTs are confronted with, required Bermuda to take more responsibility for its overseas relations particularly with the EU and others. Despite the fact that our constitution clearly states the UK Government has prerogative over Foreign Affairs, Internal Security and our army. We have over the years had to take more responsibility for that. The situation with their exit from the EU has been a lot more apparent to us and caused us to expend additional resources to ensure our relationship with other countries is secure and stable.

We find an environment that despite the UK not attending to our needs but in some ways as the Premier of the BVI described are exerting additional influence on our domestic affairs. This has changed in recent decades. If one goes back a number of decades, the British seemed act consistent with the Partnership for Progress which was outlined in principal originally in 1997. I remember because I was at the meeting when Robin Cook, the late Foreign Secretary, articulated the position of Britain orientating the relationship with the Overseas Territories. I was at the meeting in London when he did that. I remembers first hand what was articulated it was welcomed by the territories at the time and it made a clear path to what Britain was developing and fostering with the OTs. Much has changed since 1997 as we can see, the UK has decided to exert greater responsibility such as with issuance of Overseas Territories Passports which for Bermuda has created considerable problems with many of our citizens travelling around the world and abroad. The British some years ago said they were doing this and in recent years and it has come to fruition and caused a considerable amount of problems. Since the 1970s we have been issuing those passports within our own territory. It may have been the case with BVI and others but now the British Government has taken control over that process and as a result comes considerable inconvenience in many ways. We have been working very hard to resolve with the British, with some progress, but I would say it has not been easy to bring their attention to the real concerns we have had with this area.

It is also not absolutely clear that beyond the exit of the UK from EU, if it actually happens, what will be the relationship we will have with the UK or what role they are going to play with the future relationship with the EU. Certain assurances have been given by the UK government that as far as they are concerned the current existing situation or arrangements will not change. If one puts their eyes and observations to the process of Brexit, I am not sure we can trust those assurances at this point since we don't even know where that is going. So from our perspective, the relationship with the UK remains wrought with uncertainty.

Just last week, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon who is the Minister responsible for the Overseas Territories visited Bermuda for the first time. He did give an assurance that the relationship with Bermuda is fine, his good relationship with the Premier David Burt and things are working reasonably well. Perhaps that is how the British see it at this point but the issues of Beneficial Ownership, our difference of view with the British Government remain. The proposals that have been outlined in the FAC report around voting rights, Belongers and around other issues remain which we take great exception to and have made statements making it clear that is the case. The uncertainty around Brexit or formally referred to as the UK withdrawal from Europe does continue to present a level of uncertainty for us and the constant questions we have to get answered from the UK Government. We believe there is presently uncertainty to the long term relationship with Overseas Territories. So that it sums up and in our view colours the long-term relationship with Bermuda and perhaps the other OTs.

No where does Bermuda go from here with all that being said?

I will reiterate the position Bermuda takes around our relationship with the administrative power.

1)The Bermuda Government will not accept as I believe Mr. Clegg outlined earlier " decolonisation by decline or default". Bermuda will not accept that as a process we are going to imprisoned to. Bermuda will have full control over the relationship with the UK going forward and how any of those changes impact our interest..

2) Our position around Beneficial Ownership remains unchanged and we have made our position very clear, as late as last week, to the Minister responsible for the Overseas Territories. Bermuda will make its own steps around Beneficial Ownership when this becomes the Global Standard. It is not the global standard at the moment, it is a standard being imposed by one particular country when most countries are not required to follow it. So, we will not accept until such time as it becomes the global standard as other areas concerning the management of transparency and anti money laundering have become. When that becomes the global standard Bermuda will follow with the appropriate changes. Until such time, it is not going to happen.

3)Recent events pertaining to Beneficial Ownership, I say again, Economic Substance and Anti-Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing (AML/CFATF) prove that the goal post of us as Non-Self-Governing Territories is constantly going to change. No matter what we do we cannot be assured that what we have done to address the issues will remain the norm. This is what we have experienced and discovered with the administering power.

4)Lastly, if Bermuda at some point and I can state certainly that the governing party, the Progressive Labour Party in Bermuda, which is the Government of Bermuda, supports Independence and full sovereignty for Bermuda. After a process where the public are properly engaged through a mechanism of some sort or mandate that this is will of the people following and exhaustive education campaign and a thorough engagement; we will be prepared to make that step. We have been a supporter from the start of the existence of my party and remain supportive for full sovereignty for Bermuda.

So, if Bermuda does at some point take this step it is our hope that the Committee for 24 will be of availability to us for advise, for assistance and to guide us to make sure that our small 21 square mile island territory makes the proper decisions, puts in place the proper processes and takes the appropriate steps so that we can be a positive member of the Family of Nations across the world. We look forward to getting that assistance when, at the appropriate time, the Bermudian people decide they desire to become fully sovereign and meet the goal of the Committee of 24 has outlined for the elimination of Colonialism across the globe.

With that Madam Chair thank you for the opportunity to have made this presentation and look forward to Bermuda continuing to play a more fulsome role with the work of the Committee. As I said in the beginning, I am not certain we have been fully engaged as a government but the current Bermuda Government is desirous by my attendance today to this conference in Grenada, to be more full participant of the work of the Committee. Thank you.

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