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**FORTH INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM**

**Pacific regional seminar on the implementation of the Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism: advancement of the Non-Self-Governing Territories through the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and beyond**

**Castries, Saint Lucia**

**11 to 13 May 2022**

**STATEMENT BY**

**MR. BENITO WHEATLEY**

**(BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS)**



**UNITED NATIONS PACIFIC REGIONAL SEMINAR ON DECOLONIZATION  
CASTRIES, SAINT LUCIA  
11<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2022**

**SPECIAL ENVOY OF THE PREMIER MR. BENITO WHEATLEY**

**STATEMENT ON THE SITUATION IN THE BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS**

Her Excellency Ambassador Keisha McGuire, Chair of the Special Committee on Decolonization

Her Excellency Ambassador Menissa Rambally, Saint Lucia Permanent Representative to the United Nations

Excellencies

Distinguished delegates

Ladies and gentleman

Good afternoon.

I would like to begin by thanking the Special Committee on Decolonization for this opportunity to provide an update on the situation in the British Virgin Islands. I am attending this Pacific regional seminar on behalf of the Territory's newly appointed Premier and Minister of Finance, Dr. Hon. Natalio D. Wheatley, who heads the recently formed National Unity Government. Unfortunately, he is unable to join us today due to other pressing matters, as you can imagine. However, he wishes us well in our deliberations and thanks the Special Committee for its ongoing support to the Territory.

Excellencies and distinguished delegates, the past 14 days have been a rollercoaster ride for the people of the British Virgin Islands. We were shocked by the arrest of former Premier and Minister of Finance Hon. Andrew Fahie on 28<sup>th</sup> April in Miami, Florida in the United States. We are highly disappointed and embarrassed by his actions and the very disturbing things he has been involved in that were revealed in the affidavit filed in the United States (US) courts. We condemn his behaviour and believe the US court system should be left to take its course.

Excellencies, on the day after the arrest, His Excellency the Governor Mr. John J. Rankin, CMG decided to publish the Commission of Inquiry report on the Territory that was originally scheduled to be released in June. Governor Rankin's rationale was that it was important to make clear that the arrest and Commission

of Inquiry were not linked. However, the effect of releasing the report so quickly after former Premier Fahie was detained, threw an already reeling society into a tailspin. It also strengthened calls for direct rule to be imposed on the people of the British Virgin Islands, as recommended by Sir Gary Hickinbottom in the report. This in turn has increased pressure on the UK Government to take that undesirable course of action.

United Kingdom (UK) Minister for the Overseas Territories, Rt. Hon. Amanda Milling, MP, visited the Territory from 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> May where she, along with Governor Rankin, met the representatives of the ruling and opposition parties, as well as a cross-section of stakeholders in society to discuss the findings and recommendations of the report.

The political discussions were frank and open, but cordial and constructive. Minister Milling expressed her deep concern about the governance issues highlighted in the report, which cut across several Administrations. The then Acting Premier, Dr. Hon. Natalio Wheatley and Members of the Opposition parties acknowledged that there are areas of governance that need to be improved, but that they opposed direct rule as the means by which to do so. Alternatively, they proposed that the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry report and other reforms be implemented under continued democratic governance with modifications to certain existing arrangements.

This position is not only that of the political directorate, it is also the sentiment of the majority of the population who cherish democracy and do not want to see the constitutional progress made over the past 70 years reversed. Many of you would have seen news coverage of the protest and demonstrations on 2<sup>nd</sup> May in the capital Road Town. I also understand that there are more protests taking place today. Not only is the sentiment against direct rule strong in the British Virgin Islands, but the strength of feeling is across the Caribbean where Governments and their people genuinely want to see the UK break with its past and to stand up as a champion of freedom and democracy in the Commonwealth and around the world, including places such as Ukraine. The British Virgin Islands should be no exception.

Importantly, before Minister Milling left the Territory, she advised that no decision had been made on whether direct rule would be imposed on the people of the British Virgin Islands, and would await a proposal from the then Acting Premier and Opposition party representatives on their proposed alternative to direct rule.

Since her departure, events on the ground have moved very quickly. On 5<sup>th</sup> May, the House of Assembly held a successful vote of no confidence in the then Premier and Minister of Finance Andrew Fahie. This was very important as we begin the process of rebuilding the reputation of the British Virgin Islands that should not be judged by the actions of one man.

On the same day that Premier Fahie was stripped of his position, Governor Rankin swore in a new National Unity Government led by Premier Wheatley and comprised of the major political parties in the Territory. The National Unity Government has pledged to work in the best interest of the people of the British Virgin Islands and to serve with honesty and integrity. This has been welcomed by the public who want to see their new Government strengthen the institutions and systems of government and demonstrate a change in how the public's business is handled.

Toward this end, the National Unity Government has committed to undertaking reforms, including implementation of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry report, albeit under continued democratic governance, and in partnership with the UK and in close cooperation with Governor Rankin. The Government believes this is the most desirable approach, especially since the Governor is constitutionally responsible for the Public Service, security, and administration of the courts, while the elected Government is constitutionally responsible for managing the rest of Government.

I am pleased to report that yesterday, Premier Wheatley submitted a proposal to Minister Milling on behalf of the National Unity Government that sets out the Government's approach to reform and presents a framework for implementation of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry report under continued democratic governance.

We sincerely hope that the UK Government will accept the proposal and will be willing to partner with the National Unity Government to help the British Virgin Islands become the model democracy that its people desire in which there is opportunity for all. It is also the UK's obligation under Article 73 of the UN Charter to help the people of the Territory develop their free political institutions. We would welcome this.

On behalf of Premier Wheatley, I would like to thank the UN Special Committee on Decolonization for their interests in our current circumstances. I also want to thank CARICOM, OECS, the Caribbean Territories, University of the West Indies, the Government of Saint Lucia and Governments across the region for their expressions of support and offers of assistance to help us strengthen our institutions and systems of Government.

Madam Chair, as I close, permit me to congratulate you, the Bureau, and wider committee for the important work that you continue to do to assist the Non-Self-Governing Territories in moving closer to achieving a full measure of self-government. The British Virgin Islands will remain engaged with the committee on the available options sanctioned by the UN. I ask that a recent self-governance assessment of the Territory completed by independent governance expert Dr. Carlyle Corbin is placed on the record of this regional seminar.

The UN has been an excellent partner of the British Virgin Islands and we look forward to continuing our good cooperation with the respective UN bodies and agencies with whom we are engaged on sustainable development and other matters.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Government and people of Saint Lucia who are hosting this regional seminar. The hospitality and arrangements have been excellent thus far and I look forward to my remaining days here.

I thank you for your attention.