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SECOND INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

**Caribbean regional seminar on the implementation of the Second International Decade
for the Eradication of Colonialism: challenges and opportunities in the process of
decolonization in today's world**

**Frigate Bay, Saint Kitts and Nevis
12 to 14 May 2009**

STATEMENT

BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF

THE BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

Decolonization Talks in St Kitts and Nevis

British Virgin Islands

Brief Remarks

I bring you greetings from my Premier the Honourable Ralph O'Neal, OBE, and all the people of the British Virgin Islands.

I wish to state quite clearly that not one man, not one woman, not even one child in the British Virgin Islands wants the British Virgin Islands to be a colony/Territory of any Administering Power.

However, the dominant view seems to be that independence should be pursued only when the British Virgin Islands can be sustained economically: Our great emphasis is on economics.

This issue of independence has not been put before the people of the British Virgin Islands at any of the general elections or at any referendum and it is commonly felt not to be a burning issue at this time.

For the avoidance of doubt, I wish to state that I personally do not support Independence for the British Virgin Islands at this time nor in the foreseeable future.

Further, our people are appreciative of some of the benefits that we have received from the UK Government especially in recent times. For example:

- (a) Our people are pleased to receive a United Kingdom passport.
- (b) Our people are also pleased that the United Kingdom Government has allowed our students to study in Britain at a cost similar to United Kingdom students.

But there are irritations and dissatisfiers that can be easily addressed and corrected if the promised partnership between the United Kingdom and British Virgin Islands is to have its expected and normal meaning.

Constitutional Change

Our Constitution was changed to allow for the introduction of four at large Territorial seats but there were no guidelines issued as to how this system would work in practice. This system has been left by the United Kingdom in the realm of unworkability and is quite disruptive to Governance in the British Virgin Islands. The question is often asked by our constituents: What is an At-Large member? How does it work with a district system?

Another example where there is unworkability in the Governance of the British Virgin Islands is where the Governor is in charge of the Civil Service in relation to appointment, dismissal, promotion and discipline, despite some devolution recently, but the local political arm is responsible for paying salaries and little else in this regard.

But what happens when you have an unsupportive and difficult Governor determined to do what he wants without listening to reason, or the advice of the Political arm of Government.

The result is that the Civil Service will sense this division and would ignore the legitimate instructions of the political arm and do just what it likes. This situation makes Governance by the Political arm almost unmanageable.

Our constitution demands that when certain Senior appointments are made, such appointment should be made in consultation with the Premier, but, according to the Premier, he is invariably told weeks and months afterwards, if at all, to the full embarrassment of the whole Government. Again, this situation can be easily remedied and should be, as it undermines the authority of the Political arm of Government and negatively affects good governance.

Another example of needless irritation and friction is the situation where there is no representation in the House of Assembly for the Police, the Civil Service and the courts. This matter was discussed and acted upon in Bermuda and we believe that the remedy used there can be extended to the British Virgin Islands to good effect.

Conclusion

There are many areas that are ripe for reform in the relationship between the British Virgin Islands and the United Kingdom which would still allow the United Kingdom to carry out its responsibilities as a Governing Power. We are anxious to have a good working relationship with the United Kingdom, our Administering Power