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FOURTH INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

**Pacific regional seminar on the implementation of the Fourth International Decade for the
Eradication of Colonialism: pathways to a sustainable future – advancing socioeconomic
and cultural development of the Non-Self-Governing Territories**

**Dili, Timor-Leste
21 to 23 May 2025**

**STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF
BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS**



C-24 PACIFIC REGIONAL SEMINAR ON DECOLONIZATION
21st-23rd May 2025
Intervention by Mr. Benito Wheatley, Special Envoy of the Premier
British Virgin Islands

Excellencies

Distinguished Participants

Ladies and Gentleman

A pleasant good afternoon.

Excellencies, I would like to begin by thanking our gracious hosts, the Government and people of Timor-Leste, for their warm hospitality and the excellent arrangements made for our stay here in this beautiful country. Thank you also to the Government of Indonesia for helping to facilitate smooth transit from Bali to Dili.

Madam Chair, I want to commend you, the Special Committee, and the Secretariat for the organisation of this timely Pacific regional seminar.

SELF-DETERMINATION

The participation of the British Virgin Islands (BVI) in this exercise, and the other elements of the United Nations (UN) decolonization framework, is for the explicit purpose of garnering international support for our self-determination.

Our goal is to become a truly free people and society.

We do not want power to be exercised over us in perpetuity by London. The inequitable nature of the relationship is disruptive and places our financial services sector and wider economy at risk.

We do not want a British Governor sitting in our Cabinet looking over the shoulder of our Premier and his Ministers, to monitor every decision that they make.

This is a huge indignity to us as a proud people whose hard work has made the Government financially self-sufficient. We have received no financial transfers from the United Kingdom (UK) to fund our budget since 1978.

Let me be clear, the BVI does not subscribe to the concept of colonialism by consent, which we see as an effort by some to normalise colonialism in its current form and present it as a modern partnership that the subjected peoples should accept.

What the BVI wants is to be sovereign and free. Free of the remaining vestiges of colonialism. Our self-determination will not be complete until we achieve a full measure of self-government.

C-24 VISITING MISSION TO THE BVI

Excellencies, I am very pleased to report that the BVI continues to take meaningful steps toward full political freedom.

The C-24 visiting mission in 2024 was a game changer for us.

For the first time in the lifetime of many of our people, there was a serious discussion on our political future. All local stakeholders were able to freely express their views.

Their perspectives and sentiments are clearly captured in the report of the visiting mission published in late January.

The findings are clear. The BVI is ready for a change of political status.

Among other things, the report recommends full internal self-government and a timetable for independence as two preliminary steps.

It also recommends a Territory-wide education programme on achieving a full measure of self-government, as requested by local stakeholders.

Excellencies, the BVI's duly elected Government welcomes the findings and recommendations of the visiting mission report.

In line with the report's recommendations, the Government has officially requested UN assistance with delivering an education programme.

Importantly, the Government is also in the process of preparing for constitutional negotiations with the UK Government in which we will be requesting a pre-independence constitution in line with the visiting mission recommendation for full internal self-government.

Excellencies, I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the Government and people of the BVI, to thank the Special Committee for the visiting mission that was done professionally and impartially. It has provided hope and every effort must be made to facilitate such requests by other Non-Self-Governing Territories (NSGTs).

Madam Chair, you and the delegation of Ambassadors who conducted the visiting mission to the BVI will hold forever hold a special place in the hearts of the grateful people of the islands.

Special thanks also goes to the Members of the C-24, the C-24 Bureau, CARICOM, and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), who secured the visiting mission and have provided sustained support.

GOVERNANCE REFORM AND ORDER IN COUNCIL

Excellencies, I wish to just say a few words about governance reform in the BVI.

The BVI Government has completed the most comprehensive legislative overhaul in the history of our islands, led by the duly elected Government.

We have considerably strengthened our legislative framework that will serve as a foundation for our greater self-determination.

The legislative overhaul also satisfies the completion of the governance reform programme agreed between the BVI and UK in 2022.

It is now left in the hands of the UK to lift the Order in Council that remains in place that can suspend our constitution and impose direct colonial rule.

I will repeat what I have said at every regional seminar since 2022. The Order in Council is an unnecessary, undemocratic, and blunt colonial instrument that has no place in modern democracy.

The BVI wishes for it to be lifted. There is no longer any excuse for holding it over our heads like the sword of Damocles.

We hope the UK will do the right thing and not seek to maintain the Order as leverage over us on unrelated issues.

BVI-UK RELATIONS

Excellencies, we had genuinely hoped that the tone of the relationship with the UK would change with a new ruling party in Government. However, this is proving challenging.

We continue to see unjustified UK attacks on the reputation of the BVI directly by UK parliamentarians who are doing everything in their power to smear the jurisdiction's reputation as an international finance centre (IFC) and damage our integrity internationally.

The UK Government is also pressing the BVI to make regulatory changes to our financial services sector that go far beyond the international standards we currently follow along with the majority of the world's jurisdictions.

These changes would have an adverse impact on the revenue generated by the financial services industry that funds two-thirds of the government budget, which pays for teachers, doctors, nurses, policeman and other public servants that serve the public.

Why seek to weaken the BVI's financial self-sufficiency and our ability to provide for ourselves? Why pressure us to do things that would make us financially dependent?

We are very well aware that we are not well liked or trusted by certain elements of the UK Government and UK Parliament. These elements are not interested in the UK having an equitable relationship with the BVI, because they believe colonialism gives the UK the levers needed to control the Territory through undemocratic means.

Excellencies, this is the naked truth. Time will tell which elements will win out in London's internal struggle with its colonial impulses.

We remain open to a positive relationship with the UK, but as it stands now, the relationship remains on an unsustainable course.

Regardless, the BVI will continue its march toward self-determination.

CLOSING

In closing, Madam Chair, I would like to congratulate Timor-Leste on the 23rd anniversary of their independence and thank them for being a source of inspiration to the BVI and the remaining NSGTs.

I thank you.