



**Statement to House of Parliament
UK's Decision on British Virgin Islands
By Hon. G. Wayne Panton, JP, MP
9 June 2022**

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday I was invited by the Rt. Hon. Amanda Milling, UK Minister of State with responsibility for the Overseas Territories, to join a call with other Overseas Territory Heads of Government for an update on the UK's decision in relation to the recommendations of the British Virgin Islands Commission of Inquiry.

Prior to a decision being made by the UK, Mr. Speaker, Minister Milling consulted widely. Immediately after the publication of the BVI Commission of Inquiry Report, she traveled to the British Virgin Islands on 1 May and held a series of discussions with the then acting Premier Dr. the Honourable Natalio

Wheatley and other stakeholders in the territory including representatives from all political parties, public servants, business leaders as well as civic and community leaders.

Upon concluding her visit to the British Virgin Islands, Minister Milling issued a statement noting, *“This isn’t a question of whether something should be done. It is a question of what is done. Action is needed now to: strengthen the foundations of the Territory; deliver a better public service; maintain a strong and resilient economy; and create better opportunities for the people of the BVI.”*
-end of quote.

Mr. Speaker, this statement along with the gravity of the recommendations of the BVI Commission of Inquiry Report left little doubt that action would be taken. However, Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that the Government of the British Virgin Islands, took a number of unprecedented steps following Minister Milling’s return to the UK.

On Thursday 5th May, the BVI House of Assembly voted to revoke Andrew Fahie’s premiership after his arrest on 29th April in Florida on drug trafficking and money laundering charges. What followed next Mr. Speaker was the three

major political parties in the British Virgin Islands joining together to form a “National Unity Government” under newly sworn-in Premier, Dr. the Hon. Natalio Wheatley.

Premier Wheatley immediately made a number of changes to the composition of the Cabinet and on behalf of the national unity government, publicly committed to reform. In a brief address after being sworn in, Premier Wheatley stated, *“Our top priority is the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry report within a framework of democratic governance, and in close cooperation with the governor and United Kingdom, our partners.”* -end of quote.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday it was announced and reiterated during my call with Minister Milling, that the UK has decided to maintain the operation of the BVI constitution, thereby continuing representative democracy through the Government of National Unity. To be clear the decision at this time is to not, I repeat not, partially suspend the BVI’s constitution.

This decision reflects a commitment to democracy and maintaining the dignity of the people of the British Virgin Islands by allowing the Government of

National Unity to pursue the implementation of the governance recommendations made by the Commission of Inquiry Report.

Mr. Speaker, the Government led by Premier Wheatley has again publicly indicated they are fully committed to governance improvements and in some cases, improvements beyond what was recommended by the Report of the Commission of Inquiry.

While I have not had the opportunity to speak directly to Premier Wheatley about this decision, I have communicated a message that the Cayman Islands stands ready to assist his Government in achieving their governance objectives, and we welcome his Government's public commitment to reform.

On behalf of the Cayman Islands Government, Mr. Speaker, I have passed on to Minister Milling our thanks for the positive, constructive and carefully considered approach taken by the UK during this process.

Mr. Speaker in closing, we extend to the government and people of our sister Overseas Territory the British Virgin Islands our support and sincere best wishes as they embark on a difficult but necessary journey.

We also take this opportunity to remind ourselves that we must remain ever vigilant, take nothing for granted and renew our own commitment to the highest standards of governance and probity in public life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.