



Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

Report of the United Nations visiting mission to the British Virgin Islands, 26–27 August 2024

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I. Origin of the mission

1. Since 2019, representatives of the British Virgin Islands have invited the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples to dispatch a visiting mission to the Territory. The invitations were extended during statements delivered at the Special Committee's annual regional seminars, substantive sessions and the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), as well as through communications addressed to the Chair of the Special Committee.

2. During the annual informal dialogue with the 2023 Bureau of the Special Committee, held on 26 January 2024, the representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland indicated that his Government was open to a visiting mission to the British Virgin Islands, the timing of which should not interfere with the delivery of reforms recommended in the report of the Commission of Inquiry (see paras. 10–14). In a letter dated 17 January 2024 addressed to the Chair of the Special Committee, the Premier requested that the visiting mission be conducted prior to the convening of the June session of the Committee. In a letter dated 14 February addressed to the Chair of the Special Committee, the representative of the United Kingdom requested that the mission take place after May 2024, which corresponded to the deadline set for the territorial Government to deliver on governance reforms.

3. On 15 February 2024, the Special Committee approved the dispatch of a visiting mission to the British Virgin Islands at a date to be identified in consultation with the administering Power and the Territory (see [A/AC.109/2024/SR.1](#), paras. 19–20) and requested the Chair, in collaboration with members of the Bureau, to proceed with the preparations for the mission.

4. On 5 April 2024, the Premier addressed to the Chair a communication in which he proposed that the visiting mission take place on 5–6 June or 26–27 June 2024. On 30 April, the Special Envoy of the Premier addressed to the Chair a communication in which he stated that the territorial Government stood ready to accommodate the visiting mission on 15–17 July. On 10 May, the Bureau approved the terms of reference for the mission by means of the silence procedure. On the same day, the Chair conveyed the terms of reference and confirmed 15–17 July as the dates of the mission in letters addressed to the Premier and to the Government of the United Kingdom.

5. At the 3rd meeting of the 2024 session of the Special Committee, the Chair informed the Committee that the dates previously identified for the visiting mission, 15–17 July, would likely be adjusted. At the same meeting, the Premier stated that he looked forward to receiving the visiting mission in late August. Following consultations with the Bureau, the Chair informed the Special Committee, the Premier and the Government of the United Kingdom of the official composition of the delegation of the visiting mission, which would take place on 26–27 August 2024.

II. Mandate of the mission

6. In accordance with the decision taken by the Special Committee on 15 February 2024, and on the basis of relevant consultations, it was agreed that the mission would gather first-hand information on the situation in the British Virgin Islands, focusing on the political developments, including the constitutional review process. In addition, the visiting mission would take stock of the economic, social and environmental situation of the Territory and make recommendations to further the decolonization process of the British Virgin Islands.

III. Composition of the mission

7. Following the decision taken by the Special Committee on 15 February 2024 and subsequent consultations with the Bureau, it was decided that the mission would be composed of representatives of four members of the Committee, namely, Antigua and Barbuda, Iraq, Papua New Guinea and Saint Lucia. The mission members were the Permanent Representative of Saint Lucia and Chair of the Committee, Menissa Rambally; the Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda, Walton Alfonso Webson; the Deputy Permanent Representative of Iraq, Abbas Kadhom Obaid Al-Fatlawi; the Permanent Representative of Papua New Guinea, Fred Sarufa; and the First Secretary of the Permanent Mission of Antigua and Barbuda, Claxton Duberry. The mission was accompanied by one Political Affairs Officer, Hermes Peñaloza, and one Staff Assistant, Simone Kay Aggarao, of the Decolonization Unit of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.

IV. Acknowledgements

8. The Special Committee extends its sincere appreciation to the Government of the United Kingdom, in particular to the Deputy Permanent Representative and his mission, for the constructive cooperation in facilitating the mission. A special tribute is paid to the Government and the people of the British Virgin Islands for the cooperation, excellent support and generous hospitality extended.

V. Background

9. The British Virgin Islands is a Non-Self-Governing Territory administered by the United Kingdom since 1946. Governed by the Virgin Islands Constitution Order 2007, the Territory has a Governor appointed by the British Crown, a Cabinet and a Legislative Assembly. The Order provides for the promotion and respect of the right to self-determination in line with the Charter of the United Nations. Further details are provided in the working papers on the British Virgin Islands prepared by the Secretariat.¹

Commission of Inquiry

10. In January 2021, a Commission of Inquiry was established to investigate potential corruption and abuse of office among officials in the British Virgin Islands. Initially set for six months, the mandate was extended twice, concluding in April 2022. The territorial Government and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) leaders expressed concerns about the lack of consultation in establishing the Commission and feared that it could undermine self-governance and lead to direct colonial rule. They called for respect for the constitutional position and self-governance of the Territory.

11. The April 2022 report by the Commission found that governance in the Territory, with limited exceptions, had been poor, lacking openness, transparency and adherence to the rule of law. The Commission made 49 recommendations to improve governance, including temporarily suspending parts of the Constitution and dissolving the House of Assembly for two years. The remaining recommendations called for further reviews, audits and investigations. CARICOM and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) expressed deep concern and rejected the idea of reinstating direct rule by the Governor.

¹ Available at the Official Documents on Decolonization.

12. In May 2022, the Government of National Unity proposed a framework to implement the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry without suspending the Constitution. The Government of the United Kingdom agreed and enacted an Order in Council giving the Governor powers to take corrective action, including the possibility of temporarily suspending the Constitution, if reforms were not implemented. The recommendations were to be implemented by May 2024, with quarterly reviews conducted by the Governor to assess progress made.

13. In July 2022, CARICOM welcomed the decision by the United Kingdom not to impose direct rule but expressed concern about an Order in Council that could enforce direct rule if needed. After the elections in April 2023, the ruling party formed a new government with the support of an elected member from a different party. In July 2023, CARICOM praised the progress in the reforms and urged the United Kingdom to remove the Order in Council. The territorial Government reiterated its commitment to reform, called for the removal of the Order and announced the establishment of a Constitutional Review Commission. Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Kitts and Nevis and Saint Lucia supported those efforts and the stance of CARICOM.

14. In January 2024, the Governor expressed disappointment with the progress on reforms and suggested that additional powers were needed to ensure that commitments were met. That suggestion was opposed by the elected arm of the Government and OECS. In February, the United Kingdom Minister for Overseas Territories visited the Territory to discuss strategies for accelerating the implementation of reforms. In May, the Governor recommended extending the deadline to 31 August, conducting a final progress assessment after August and keeping the option of additional powers and the Order in Council open.

Constitutional Review Commission

15. The Commission of Inquiry recommended a review of the Constitution. The Constitutional Review Commission began its work on 18 July 2022 and held public consultations from November 2022 to January 2023. Among the most commented issues were the need for electoral reform, especially the at-large system, and frustration over the lack of participation in decision-making affecting the Territory. The 2022–2023 Constitutional Review Commission report, submitted on 31 January to the House of Assembly, included findings and 57 recommendations. Key recommendations included revising the at-large voting system, introducing local government structures, increasing the independence of constitutional bodies and exploring juryless criminal trials. The Commission also suggested that structural changes, such as term limits for the Premier, be decided by the public through a referendum after an unbiased educational initiative.

16. Recommendation No. 31 outlines key steps towards self-determination for the British Virgin Islands: implement educational initiatives to clarify the concept of self-determination as distinct from independence; emphasize fiscal responsibility and accountability and establish independent governance institutions such as the Integrity Commission and Human Rights Commission; reduce the power of the Governor and mandate consultation with the Premier; plan for self-determination, including by conducting a population study, setting goals for a pre-independence Constitution and potentially establishing a Decolonization Commission; and implement mechanisms, such as a referendum, to assess the wishes of the people in respect of self-determination after a period of unbiased education.

VI. Key messages delivered by the mission

17. Members of the mission made introductory statements explaining the mandate of the Special Committee and the objectives of the mission. It was recalled that this was the second visiting mission to the British Virgin Islands after the landmark inaugural visit in 1976. It was emphasized that the visiting mission did not intend to dictate actions or decisions to the British Virgin Islands. The mission was impartial and did not seek to promote any particular view or approach in the self-determination process, aiming instead to hear the views and perspectives of as many stakeholders as possible. The people of the British Virgin Islands were at the heart of the process, which could only move forward, as they so wished. The Special Committee undertook the visiting mission in accordance with its mandate for the eradication of colonialism, guided by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. In addition, the visiting mission noted that the Committee, a subsidiary of the General Assembly, aimed to eradicate colonialism by 2030, using that aspirational timeline as a target to encourage progress towards that goal. The mission encouraged interlocutors to actively participate in the activities of the Special Committee, including by attending its regular sessions as petitioners to make their voices heard. The report of the mission would be made available to the public.

VII. Meetings of the visiting mission

18. The visiting mission held 10 meetings in Tortola and Virgin Gorda, including with representatives from the territorial Government and the Opposition, civil society organizations and members of academia, on 26 and 27 August 2024 and also paid a courtesy call to the Governor, Daniel Pruce.

A. Meeting with the Premier, ministers and a junior minister

19. The Premier deemed the visiting mission timely as the British Virgin Islands prepared for constitutional talks with the United Kingdom and considered its future political status. It was noted that the Territory had maintained a stable, self-funded economy without external financial assistance since 1978. The growth and development of the Territory were attributed to the resilience and efforts of its people, guided by local political leadership.

20. It was noted that an independent self-governance assessment commissioned by the territorial Government in 2021 showed that significant political advancement had been made, but the final steps had yet to be taken towards decolonization, which was the ultimate goal. To that end, interlocutors emphasized the need for public education, noting a general lack of awareness. The interlocutors discussed the different options, as well as the desire and readiness of the Territory to move forward in the decolonization process. A request was made for the United Nations to consider an awareness and education campaign to address the deficit in terms of understanding the decolonization process and to provide real examples of the various options in order for the people to understand what those looked like. One interlocutor stressed the importance of cultural and historical identity in the context of independence and self-determination.

21. One of the interlocutors shared the view that the establishment of a decolonization commission would be helpful, especially in helping the Territory to develop a decolonization road map and in conducting periodic reviews. It was indicated that the Territory would appreciate the support of the Special Committee and would like to consider another visiting mission in 2030 to assess the status of the

decolonization process, in line with the aspirations for the total eradication of colonialism by 2030.

22. The interlocutors emphasized the responsibility of the United Kingdom to walk with the Territory on the path towards self-determination, especially in the areas of capacity-building and institutional strengthening, even as they shared the expectation that the administering Power would not make it easy for the Territory. The interlocutors sought the support and guidance of the Special Committee and the United Nations in that regard.

23. Interlocutors expressed the view that the United Kingdom had failed to meet its obligations, citing insufficient security resources and ongoing issues such as firearms smuggling and trafficking, drug trafficking and human trafficking. They also highlighted the ability of the United Kingdom to influence the territorial public finances and economy through impositions on the financial services industry and pressure to meet deadlines under the threat of constitutional suspension.

24. The interlocutors spoke of challenges and differences with the United Kingdom, including in terms of culture, values and agenda. One interlocutor considered that the values of the Virgin Islands were valid and stressed their need to be recognized as a people. Another stated that same-sex marriage was being imposed by the administering Power against the will of the people of the Territory and proposed a referendum as a better way to address that issue.

25. Interlocutors held that the Territory, which was reliant on the United Kingdom to ratify conventions, had identified several important programmes that the United Kingdom refused to ratify, deeming them unimportant. The people of the British Virgin Islands had missed out on numerous opportunities for training and capacity-building owing to their status as a Territory.

26. Interlocutors noted that the United Kingdom held significant power to influence the Territory's economy, with Members of Parliament advocating for measures that could severely harm the financial services industry, which was crucial to governmental revenue and the prosperity of the Territory. One interlocutor noted that the United Kingdom had imposed various requirements and an endless series of targets, all subject to review and constantly changing, for the Territory to meet.

27. The interlocutors also discussed challenges in accessing development and climate finance which, according to one of the interlocutors, was hindered by the Territory's status. For example, the British Virgin Islands had not been eligible for international support following the damage caused by Hurricane Maria. The Territory had petitioned the United Nations on that issue, and they were jointly developing a road map for better access to development finance to support the sustainable development of the Territory. The Territory's national sustainable development plan was seen as a significant step but needed to be better incorporated into government planning. Another interlocutor stated that the Disaster Management Act, 2019 had not been assented to because the Governor wanted to retain control even if that did not fall constitutionally under his remit.

28. An interlocutor indicated that the United Kingdom often focused on ticking boxes as opposed to how the people of the islands could grow and progress. The people were limited by the form of democracy they were in and there was a ceiling beyond which they had no power. They often had to defer to more powerful authorities. Acknowledging past mistakes, one interlocutor argued for greater autonomy to safeguard their achievements. Another expressed hope for change with the new Government of the United Kingdom.

29. The interlocutors believed that the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry could help the Territory to accelerate reforms for greater

self-governance. However, the Order in Council in reserve caused friction, with the threat of direct rule looming.

30. One interlocutor spoke of discomfort regarding the possibility of losing the political gains that their foreparents had fought for and of elected officials no longer being in power and in control of their own country. One of the interlocutors stated that, rather than using the Order in Council to coerce the Territory, they wanted the United Kingdom to use dialogue, cooperation and consultation.

31. An interlocutor stated that perhaps it was time to consider a new relationship model and called for the establishment of a modern partnership with the United Kingdom, based on the pillars of sustainable development, climate resilience, economic resilience and self-determination. Another interlocutor shared that the constitutional advances of the Territory went hand in hand with economic advancements and recognized that political independence might result in additional advances that it did not currently have.

32. The interlocutors discussed the benefits and importance of support from the United Nations system and regional partners, including OECS and CARICOM, as the Territory moved forward.

33. The Premier also informed the visiting mission that the Public Service Management Bill, 2024, currently with the Governor, proposed delegating responsibilities to the Deputy Governor which, according to him, was not in accordance with the Constitution.

34. According to the Premier, the Constitutional Review Commission had put forward a Constitution reflecting the views of its members, as well as in consultation with the people. The Commission recognized a lack of education of the population on constitutional issues and noted that public education was necessary.

35. The Premier spoke of the efforts by the Commission of Inquiry to roll back the power of the elected Government and commended the Constitutional Review Commission for not yielding to such efforts, although the Commission could have gone further. For example, the Inquiry Commissioner had also identified the need for a mechanism to transfer powers from the Governor to the devolved elected Government without a constitutional change, which the Constitutional Review Commission did not fully take advantage of.

36. An interlocutor indicated that the terms of reference were clear on the act of devolution of power. However, the interlocutor was of the view that it had been a mistake for the Constitutional Review Commission to refer to devolution as simply delegation of power in its report. Rather, any future transfer of power should be devolved authority.

37. According to the Premier, the report of the Constitutional Review Commission would be debated at the House of Assembly, which would put together a new negotiating team by means of a resolution. The members of the team would have to be clear about what the Territory was negotiating on, and there needed to be full agreement about what the Territory was seeking to achieve. The territorial Government would consult on the terms of reference for the areas in which the team would negotiate.

38. It was noted that the Governor chairing the Cabinet, which the Premier said was not the case in other Territories, had no practical purpose given that the Governor was not eligible to vote. The Premier cautioned that certain actions by a Governor could strain the relationship with the United Kingdom. He noted that the previous Governor, who had served in another Territory without issues, had chosen to exert significant

power in the British Virgin Islands. That move had gone unchallenged by the Constitutional Review Commission.

39. The Premier spoke of the opportunity to remove the Governor as Chair in the 2007 Constitution. However, there was no unity at the time between the political directorates and the Opposition.

40. The Premier explained that the 2007 Constitution was scheduled for revision every 10 years. However, the first review had been delayed owing to the hurricanes in 2017. When the Government was finally prepared to proceed, it had coincided with the Commission of Inquiry. In his report, the Inquiry Commissioner had addressed constitutional development and recommended that the review continue with revised terms of reference. Instead of altering the existing terms, additional terms had simply been added.

41. The Premier stated that the Government had invested heavily in education, building schools that ranged from preschool to high school to community college. The curriculum followed the Caribbean education system. The Government had tried to strengthen civic education, local history and culture in its formal education curriculum but considered that that could be further strengthened. Referring to the public's mistaken assumption of investment by the United Kingdom in education, an interlocutor recalled that the Territory had also been providing funding for scholarships, which the United Kingdom did not provide for secondary education. The United Kingdom offered only highly competitive international scholarships for two master's degrees and one doctoral degree and there was no guarantee that they would be awarded.

42. On infrastructure, it was noted that two thirds of the Territory's budget derived from financial services revenue. The United Kingdom had been putting the financial services industry under pressure through the register of beneficial ownership and by requiring the Territory to meet standards that were beyond global regulations, causing a downturn in revenue. The Territory already had a sharing arrangement on beneficial ownership with law enforcement, and the interlocutor did not see the reason for making the information public. The Premier indicated that the register was an internationally recognized best practice and was verifiable. The United Kingdom, on the other hand, had no capacity to verify the information; hence, that could not be considered best practice.

B. Lunch meeting with the Financial Secretary, Cabinet Secretary and Permanent Secretaries

43. The interlocutors discussed the ineligibility of the British Virgin Islands for development funds. Brexit had ended its access to European Union structural funds, which had not been replaced. While the United Kingdom provided competitive funding for small biodiversity projects that could be applied for by the Government and non-governmental organizations, the territorial Government did not qualify for United Kingdom grants. It was noted that the United Nations was the Territory's primary development partner.

44. The national sustainable development plan of the Territory, developed through wide consultation with government and civil society, and with the support of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, focused on six goals: health and wellness, education, economy, infrastructure, governance and environment. The Sustainable Development Goals had been mapped to the budget and reflected in the medium-term fiscal plan, with ongoing efforts to refine the implementation framework based on specific targets and indicators. Funding came

primarily from government revenue, with additional loan funding anticipated in the future. The blue economy road map, developed with assistance from the United Nations Development Programme, had advanced sustainable tourism, and marine boundaries were negotiated by the United Kingdom.

45. The challenges faced by the health-care system in the Territory were discussed, highlighting the difficulties in obtaining nurses and doctors, compounded by financial limitations, which affected the delivery of health care. While a form of universal health care was provided by the Territory, it was noted that a reform of the National Health Insurance scheme was necessary to ensure sustainability.

46. The British Virgin Islands had been financially self-sufficient since 1978, with a government budget of approximately \$400 million, two thirds of which was funded by financial services revenue. It was noted that the Government had never defaulted on its financial obligations. However, the Protocols for Effective Financial Management (2012), imposed by the United Kingdom, had limited the ability of the Government to spend on development, despite the Territory's relatively low debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratio of around 24 per cent. The British Virgin Islands did not qualify for development or climate finance owing to its high gross national income and status as an overseas territory. The Territory had a comprehensive financial safety net, including national insurance policies with the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility for natural disasters, and various insurance policies for public facilities, infrastructure, statutory bodies, homeowners and businesses. Overall, it was noted that the British Virgin Islands was in a strong financial and economic position for political independence.

47. In response to a question about indicators of readiness for independence, it was noted that a study on the self-governance of the Territory had considered various indicators to evaluate the Territory's readiness for self-determination. Cases in which residual power had been maintained in other Territories were cited, and minimum standards to prevent such an occurrence in the Territory were discussed. That required extensive planning in terms of socioeconomic development, infrastructure and financing, to which there were impediments.

C. Meeting with the Member of the House of Assembly from the Third Electoral District

48. The interlocutor stated that the British Virgin Islands should seek independence, citing historical and moral reasons, and suggested that a referendum would be the best way to determine the will of the people. Other Caribbean countries that had become independent 60 years earlier were not more progressive than the British Virgin Islands was today, and the Territory did not need the Government of the United Kingdom. The people did everything in the Territory on their own, flourishing with every constitutional advancement. It was noted that the people needed to be educated about their economic independence, which he said had been achieved without the help of the United Kingdom.

49. The interlocutor criticized the Government of the United Kingdom for its general lack of support, in particular during natural disasters, when other Territories received significant financial assistance from their administering Powers. He attributed that disparity to racial discrimination.

50. The interlocutor expressed frustration over the lack of progress towards independence in the past 41 years and suggested a shift in strategy, underscoring the need for a new generation to take over and continue the dialogue. He sought to clarify the process of decolonization under the United Nations and to understand the mandate

and actual effectiveness of the Special Committee, and suggested that a different tactic be explored in order to move decolonization forward.

D. Meeting with the Speaker of the House and members of the Opposition

51. It was noted that the infrastructure and development of the Territory had been achieved through its own hard work and resources, without British assistance. It was also pointed out that while the Territory had had to construct a hospital using its own resources, a jail had been built for the Territory by the United Kingdom. The Territory had been able to make more progress as it was given more constitutional powers and authority. The role of the Opposition in ensuring that new legislation and bills were suitable for the needs of the Territory and in pushing back against measures imposed by the United Kingdom was also emphasized. It was noted that a Public Service Management Bill was being proposed to transfer significant powers to the Deputy Governor, potentially turning ministerial positions into mere figureheads.

52. Regarding the Commission of Inquiry, one interlocutor suggested that the territorial Government could achieve greater progress by taking proactive measures rather than merely following the recommendations. Regarding the Order in Council, interlocutors considered that the United Kingdom was exploiting governance issues to undermine the Territory's hard-won advancements. It was also noted that other countries with similar governance problems were not threatened with takeover, arguing that the mistakes of the Territory were unfairly magnified compared with those of the United Kingdom. The Territory needed total self-government and was pondering the next logical step before independence, notwithstanding the seeming forces against it.

53. One of the interlocutors elaborated on the complex relationship between the British Virgin Islands and the United Kingdom, noting a lack of identity alignment with the United Kingdom and the perceived neglect and hands-off approach by the United Kingdom in assisting the Territory. In that regard, the interlocutor saw no benefit to being British.

54. On self-determination, the interlocutor emphasized the need for a referendum to gauge public opinion on self-determination, pointing out that the 2023 election would have been an opportune time. The interlocutor said that the United Kingdom had never taken responsibility for its negligence over the years in trying to assist the Territory in getting where it needed to be and criticized the current leadership for the lack of public education and genuine public engagement on the matter. The interlocutor was of the view that the term "self-determination" was thrown around by politicians when under pressure or scrutiny in order to rally the population and indicated a tainted perception of the Government following the Commission of Inquiry. The interlocutors discussed the role of the media in educating the public.

55. Another interlocutor attributed the current situation of the Territory to a lack of planning, indicated a need to bring in technical expertise, not necessarily from the United Kingdom but from the Caribbean, and asked that the goalpost not be shifted once they were close to achieving it. There was a disconnect between leadership and the population owing to lack of education. The interlocutor stated that in order to establish a modern partnership, the leadership, with the support of the United Nations, OECS, CARICOM, and all their regional and international partners, must begin those conversations.

56. It was noted that the next step was for the Government and the Opposition to work together to develop an action plan to engage the public on what needed to be

done and to assess how many of the recommendations of the Constitutional Review Commission could be implemented. Self-determination was something they wanted to achieve within the next five years, although one interlocutor stated that the population did not share that view given that it could not see beyond the Commission of Inquiry. Also raised was the disconnect between the older generation and the younger generation, who were not interested in history. It was suggested that the Government and the Opposition collaborate on a plan of action to educate the public and move towards self-determination.

E. Meeting with statutory boards and constitutionally established bodies

57. In response to an interlocutor, the visiting mission clarified that the language in the resolution with respect to the British Virgin Islands being used as financial centres by administering Powers was common to similar resolutions. The representatives of the Territory had expressed reservations and requested its removal, which the Committee would consider at its next session, in line with its case-by-case approach.

58. The recent global portrayal of the British Virgin Islands was lamented, noting that a nation built by honest, hardworking people using their own resources was misrepresented. Concerns were voiced about the effectiveness of the Special Committee, with its impact being questioned owing to the United Kingdom's dismissive attitude and discouragement of the Territory's participation in Special Committee meetings.

59. The British Virgin Islands faced challenges, including issues of maturity and sabotage, on its path to its desired future. Questions were raised about how a colonial power could guide the Territory towards democracy. It was suggested that a local framework for discussions on self-determination be created.

60. The need for the British Virgin Islands to understand its relationship with the United Kingdom and clarify its own goals was emphasized. It was noted that the Virgin Islands must know what it wanted for itself before engaging further with the Special Committee. The leadership was criticized for lacking a clear vision, and a focus on the needs of the Territory rather than individual ambitions was urged.

61. The future political status of the British Virgin Islands must start with a blueprint established through open, transparent and inclusive dialogue by the people of the Territory. The development of its highly regarded legal system was highlighted. A relationship based on mutual respect for all was advocated, and the duty to empower and improve people's lives was emphasized.

62. The need to leave a positive legacy for future generations was highlighted. While the current status as a Non-Self-Governing Territory had been effective, it was necessary to advance towards self-determination and beneficial decision-making. The importance of public education in raising awareness and facilitating informed decision-making was also highlighted.

63. It was noted that people were suffering from Stockholm Syndrome, and a call was made for everyone to speak louder and more frequently about decolonization. The need to build a stronger moral force to support that cause was emphasized.

64. It was also important to resolve uncertainty about the future direction of the Territory. Many people were unsure of the desired path. Few Caribbean countries that had achieved independence could serve as models. The decisions made today affected not only the current generation, but also their children, grandchildren and future generations.

65. The desired direction could not be determined until existing problems were resolved, but there had not been sufficient engagement in the process. Placing the blame or responsibility on a single entity was inappropriate.

66. It was reiterated that the most important task was public education which, although identified as the responsibility of the administering Power, should not be undertaken by the United Kingdom.

67. It was noted that the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry seemed very heavy-handed, sparking much debate about its legality. To move forward deliberately and thoughtfully, active engagement in discussions and conversations was critical.

F. Stakeholders meetings in Tortola and Virgin Gorda

68. The visiting mission toured Virgin Gorda to observe firsthand the impacts of climate change and to assess the ongoing recovery and infrastructure rebuilding efforts following the 2017 hurricanes, as well as the recent torrential rains and landslides.

69. The visiting mission conducted meetings with various stakeholders in Tortola and Virgin Gorda, with some participants joining virtually from Anegada and Jost Van Dyke. Stakeholders included individual citizens and representatives from youth, civil society and faith-based organizations. The key points raised by the participants are summarized in paragraphs 70 to 96 below.

1. Meeting in Tortola

70. It was highlighted that the 2007 Constitution reflected the desire of the people for self-governance. Embarking on the final leg of the journey to self-determination was viewed as the culmination of historical efforts, including the plantation rebellions, the Great March of 1949 and the implementation of the 2007 Constitution. The classification as a Non-Self-Governing Territory was seen as misaligned with the history and values of the British Virgin Islands.

71. The need for the Territory to control its own destiny and achieve self-determination was emphasized, and it was pointed out that the British Virgin Islands had the right to make independent decisions. Stakeholders distrusted the ability of the United Kingdom to support that goal and questioned the feasibility of relying on former colonial rulers for true liberation.

72. A new constitutional framework and relationship with the United Kingdom was needed. The British Virgin Islands must take the lead in defining their constitutional relationship and structure. Despite having the talent and ability, the Territory had not yet risen to that challenge. Although labelled as a partnership, the current relationship between the Territory and the United Kingdom fundamentally was not one.

73. It was argued that it was impossible to discuss a modern partnership when certain topics were off-limits, and stakeholders questioned why the terms had to be dictated by the United Kingdom. The relationship was compared to a marriage in which one partner dominated. They emphasized the need for the people of the British Virgin Islands to determine their own future and direction in the years to come.

74. The decision on decolonization should be approached with a prayerful heart and biblical wisdom, given that it was both a political and spiritual issue. The aim of that holistic approach was to ensure that the Territory became stronger, safer and sovereign, with governance systems reflecting Christian values. The relationship between the British Virgin Islands and the United Kingdom was likened to a parent-child dynamic, with the United Kingdom being urged to support the Territory's self-

determination. Eleven foundational elements for a successful transition to independence were identified: constitutional reform, economic diversification, institutional strengthening, education and capacity- building, defence and security, international relations, social cohesion, national identity, environmental sustainability, a robust legal framework, and support from the international community.

75. The strained relationship between the British Virgin Islands and the United Kingdom was likened to an abusive relationship. It was argued that an abusive relationship could not be exited through negotiation; the British Virgin Islands thus had to leave the relationship. Stakeholders emphasized the need for the United Nations to provide tangible financial and educational support to the Territories, raising the matter of the effectiveness of the Special Committee and the symbolic nature of its dialogue with the visiting mission.

76. The British Virgin Islands was urged to recognize its identity as a land of resilient and educated people who were capable of self-determination. It was stressed that no outside entity, including the United Kingdom, should dictate their actions. Stakeholders warned against entering unequal relationships and pointed out that while 2030 was seen as a motivator, progress should be made at the Territory's own pace.

77. It was noted that seniors in districts 1 and 2 were concerned about the strained relationship with the United Kingdom. Documents such as the white papers of 1999 and 2012 claimed that there was a partnership but subtly retracted local constitutional powers. The report of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons *Global Britain and the British Overseas Territories: Resetting the relationship* was seen as imposing standards on the British Virgin Islands, including regarding same-sex marriage, which indicated a lack of true partnership. Seniors believed that there was a deliberate agenda to avoid decolonization obligations under Article 73 of the Charter of the United Nations and that it was time for the British Virgin Islands to determine its own destiny.

78. The people of the British Virgin Islands believed that they could achieve anything if they put their minds to it, having charted their own course since financial aid ceased in 1978. They considered that the values of the United Kingdom did not align with theirs, leading to imposition rather than leadership, as had been seen with same-sex marriage. The importance of education, for fear of uncertainty rather than words, was emphasized.

79. The British Virgin Islands saw no substantial benefits from its relationship with the United Kingdom and aspired to achieve self-determination. Stakeholders advocated for a thoughtful approach, including the development of a proper plan and constitution before moving forward.

80. The progress of the British Virgin Islands was tied to its political decisions and resilience, as had been shown after the 2017 hurricanes. Public education on decolonization was needed, especially for young people, who were unaware of the concept of self-determination. Notwithstanding the scaremongering and contentment with the status quo, it was crucial to take control of the Territory's destiny.

81. Two young participants found the meeting eye-opening, revealing the need for broader thinking and highlighting the lack of education on decolonization, especially among young people. Stakeholders stressed the importance of engaging young people in discussions about self-governance, which could lead to a personal shift from scepticism to openness towards independence. Concerns were raised about how decolonization initiatives would affect young people, especially with respect to education and aspirations to study abroad. Emphasizing the empowerment of young people to lead and realize their visions was seen as crucial to avoiding negative impacts on their future prospects.

82. The belief that the British Virgin Islands should begin to move towards greater self-determination was expressed by one young participant, who acknowledged that the current lack of resources was hindering such progress. The question of what an independent British Virgin Islands might look like was also raised.

83. Whereas the business sector had experienced growth, a closed mentality in public service had hindered new ideas and evolution. Lack of discussion and collaboration, along with the unfamiliarity of public officials with the Constitution, complicated conversations about self-determination. The pain of seeing that young people were unaware of their rights was also raised. A better understanding of Non-Self-Governing Territories and the importance of decolonization was urged.

84. Stakeholders acknowledged the contributions and progress made under the governance of the United Kingdom, while noting the potential for further advancement. They emphasized the need for action over discussion, advocating for the identity of the British Virgin Islands to be embraced and urging that the “British” in the Territory’s name or title be dropped.

85. Stakeholders expressed gratitude towards the United Nations for having found it necessary to visit and listen to their views. However, the insufficient time allocated for such an important visit was also underscored by the participants, in particular those from Virgin Gorda.

86. While self-determination was desired, there was a question as to how to pursue that goal against a country that had withdrawn from the Special Political and Decolonization Committee in 1986. It was important to maintain the identity of the British Virgin Islands in any future relationship. Concerns were raised about the best path to self-determination, namely, a transitional period, free association or direct independence.

87. The British Virgin Islands was said to lack confidence, not resources. The Territory was moving forward but needed to develop the same confidence that other Caribbean countries had showed when pursuing independence.

2. Meeting in Virgin Gorda

88. Some participants referred to an evident neglect and a lack of equitable distribution of power and resources throughout the Territory, especially in view of the contribution of Virgin Gorda to the Territory. They mentioned specific issues, such as a clinic that had had to be relocated because of a broken generator, which had taken a year to repair. Notwithstanding some positive developments, there was widespread frustration and a desire for change. They questioned the financial support from the United Kingdom, especially given that the high GDP per capita disqualified the Territory from grants. The relationship between the United Kingdom and the British Virgin Islands was seen as dysfunctional, with inadequate public education on that relationship. Information was often gathered through online surveys rather than direct public engagement, and members of the House Assembly, outside of the Cabinet, rarely had a say.

89. Participants emphasized the need to invite and hear more voices, noting that based on voter turnout, one third of the population determined the way forward. Serious internal issues needed to be fixed before decolonization could be considered, and there were doubts about the robustness of the economy. The impact on youth education, access to British passports and scholarships was also highlighted.

90. The main concern was the need for education on what independence would entail, including potential changes to the currency and the impact on privileges associated with the United States dollar. People were worried primarily about what would change. While great leaders had made the British Virgin Islands an envy of the

Caribbean, many areas still needed improvement. Other Caribbean islands had surpassed the British Virgin Islands in terms of independence, but it was believed that the British Virgin Islands could also achieve that goal.

91. Understanding the relationship with the United Kingdom was crucial. The Commission of Inquiry and constitutional review had highlighted significant gaps in accountability and a lack of knowledge about the Constitution, raising questions about who was responsible for ensuring that people were well-informed for good governance. Concerns about the future relationship, discussions on the beneficiaries of the blue economy and a decline in interest in British passports were also noted.

92. Participants expressed concerns about their current status as dependants of the United Kingdom. They highlighted situations such as the aftermath of Hurricane Irma, where instead of receiving immediate support similar to that provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in the United States of America, the population had been offered loans to rebuild.

93. The need for equality was emphasized, and it was noted that individuals who had not been born in the British Virgin Islands did not enjoy the same benefits, such as pension eligibility after 30 years of service. Such inequality could not be sustained if the British Virgin Islands was to progress, and if those issues were not addressed, they would continue to affect others in the future.

94. The benefits of the relationship with the United Kingdom were questioned, and it was noted that while tourism was vital, most revenue derived from financial services, with London as a major competitor. For decolonization to be meaningful, structures supporting economic growth must be developed. It was important to give consideration to how people in the Territory treated each other because better treatment from others could not be expected if they did not treat themselves well.

95. Decolonization in the British Virgin Islands was expected to be unique owing to the people and composition of the Islands. Although the House of Assembly had expanded from 9 to 14 members with a view to improving representation, the expansion might have reduced the representation of sister islands. Basic needs such as running water were still unmet; there was no clear plan or strategy for progress and public education was insufficient. No strength, weakness, opportunity and threat analysis or tourism strategy was in place. Financial services supported the Government, while tourism supported the people. Politics needed to be removed from the decolonization process.

96. It was noted that one of the challenges faced by non-profit organizations was access to international funding. The denial of access to critical funding was exemplified by a 2005 policy decision made by the UK Overseas Territory Conservation Forum owing to the British Virgin Islands' status as an overseas territory.

G. Meeting with the Attorney General

97. The Attorney General expressed confidence in the legal institutions of the British Virgin Islands, highlighting their solid approach and sound philosophy in fulfilling their societal roles, while acknowledging limitations in resources. She emphasized that self-determination should originate from the people of the Virgin Islands and stressed the importance of the Territory deciding its own path and future, which was influenced by its relationship with the United Kingdom.

98. The current constitutional arrangements granted the British Virgin Islands access to the international community. As a member of such organizations as the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force, CARICOM and OECS, the Territory had gained insight into the requirements and expectations, such as ensuring that the

obligations of the United Kingdom were met and fulfilling certain responsibilities as a Territory.

99. The limitations of self-determination included the need for a clear understanding of its implications and the relationship with the United Kingdom. Under the current Constitution, responsibilities were divided between the territorial Government and the United Kingdom, leading to governance challenges. Those challenges stemmed from a lack of candid conversations and cooperation between the British Virgin Islands and the United Kingdom and required open minds and a determination to work in the best interests of the people. Governance issues also arose from difficulties in prioritizing the interests of the people over those of the United Kingdom or political interests.

100. One particular challenge was the lack of clarity about the so-called in-country programme. In reply to a question on whether the in-country programme was a British Government programme or a Territorial government initiative, she noted that there were projects in which the Government of the United Kingdom collaborated with the local population, such as environmental initiatives funded periodically by the British Government. One such project was the Darwin Initiative. The territorial Government needed to fully understand what the Government of the United Kingdom was doing on behalf of the people.

101. Regarding the functional relationship with the United Kingdom, it was noted that the Governor could, for example, interact directly with the Attorney General. The process for appointing members of the Judicial and Legal Services Commission was also discussed. It was noted that the power to raise constitutional violations was not limited to specific individuals or groups. The conflict between the Governor and the governed in the British Virgin Islands manifested in various ways, reflecting historical, cultural and power dynamics.

102. In response to a question about the preparedness of the British Virgin Islands to assume more responsibilities from the United Kingdom, she stated that the Territory had demonstrated progress and had the capacity to handle additional duties. The literacy rate was high, and residents had access to a free public school system and government-funded tertiary education. In the area of international affairs, for example, existing relationships with the United States Virgin Islands and Caribbean institutions showcased that capability. Readiness nevertheless remained a concern. Part of that readiness depended on the nature of the relationship between the United Kingdom and the British Virgin Islands, an area in which significant improvement was needed. The dynamics of that relationship influenced readiness, and both equality and mutual respect were essential for effective governance. One member of the visiting mission noted that readiness and capability were subjective and open to discussion.

103. Regarding the legislative process, she said that legislation originated from the Cabinet, which formulated policies on the basis of identified needs and objectives. The Attorney General's chambers played a crucial role in drafting legislation and ensuring its alignment with the Constitution. The Governor's assent was required for legislation to become law. Historically, there had often been insufficient consultation with the public. For instance, in the past year, a significant amount of legislation had been pushed through the House to address the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry.

104. The Attorney General noted uncertainty about what would happen after the deadline for implementing the recommendations of the Commission in either of the two possible scenarios. She emphasized that despite the concept of collective responsibility, power dynamics could not be ignored.

H. Meeting with members of the Constitutional Review Commission

105. The Chair of the Constitutional Review Commission explained that the Commission was composed of individuals with diverse backgrounds and that its terms of reference had been refined after the Commission of Inquiry had made its recommendations. The 2007 Constitution, which was to be reviewed after 10 years, could not be reviewed owing to the hurricanes of 2017. The responsibilities of the Chair included directing the activities of the Commission, ensuring the completion of the report and seeing the process through to its conclusion. While the report, which reflected extensive consultations with the population, had been presented to the House of Assembly, the process was not complete and was at a standstill owing to the ongoing implementation of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry.

106. The Commission was awaiting the completion of the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry before moving forward with the next phase of the constitutional review process. United Kingdom officials had indicated that there would be no discussion of the constitutional review process until the process of implementing the Commission's recommendations was complete. The Commission's report was to be debated in the House of Assembly, after which a negotiating team would be appointed. It was noted that while the political position of the new Government in the United Kingdom was not yet known, the power imbalance in the background was one where there was no partnership because the United Kingdom had and would always have the last word.

107. During the discussion, special attention was given to the section of the Commission's report entitled "Next steps on the road to self-determination". The Commission found that challenges in understanding self-determination had led to confusion and differing opinions among the public. It observed that many individuals who quoted General Assembly resolution [1541 \(XV\)](#) had likely not read it, leading to a misunderstanding that the right to self-determination applied to a people in the singular and not to the peoples in the plural. Many people with valuable insights remained silent, feeling intimidated if they were not perceived as advocating for independence. Public debate was often distorted, with some promoting the idea that no referendum was needed for independence, while neglecting the importance of mechanisms to gather the collective views of the people. It was crucial to reach a point where people were well-informed and felt comfortable discussing self-determination.

108. The Commission placed a strong emphasis on impartial education to clarify concepts such as self-determination and independence, which were mistakenly understood by individuals in the same way. Education, highlighted as a key area for improving understanding and decision-making, did not need to be managed by another commission but should involve an annual effort to engage the public. It was noted that the involvement of all civil society actors could be effective if they were provided with the necessary information. The Government could consider hiring an expert to write a textbook on self-determination for educational purposes. Recognizing the importance of education in addressing intergenerational disconnect was also crucial.

109. The Commission recommended establishing a permanent Constitutional Review Commission, in the form of a Decolonization Commission, which would be a smaller, multi-member body of competent and non-political commissioners. The establishment of a permanent Commission was one of the best ways to provide ongoing, fair and unbiased constitutional education, although other options could also be explored, as discussed in the Commission's report. The Commission also noted repeated calls for civics to be taught as a stand-alone course in schools and

recommended that the territorial Government develop educational initiatives in the future, with the Cabinet Office as a potential entity to oversee them.

110. The establishment of a permanent commission would facilitate the continuous updating and refreshing of the Constitution, which was preferable to a wholesale replacement every 10 or 15 years. In the absence of a permanent commission, the Cabinet Office could perform that task, but it currently lacked the capacity to do so.

111. Another recommendation was to give independent institutions greater autonomy and financial and administrative independence and to establish commissions such as the Integrity Commission, the Office of the Contractor General and the Human Rights Commission, which was provided for in the 2007 Constitution but had never been established.

112. During the discussion, interlocutors also addressed the three options for self-determination, noting that the British constitutional arrangement did not accommodate all of them. They also explored why the so-called fourth option introduced in the annex to General Assembly resolution 2625 (XXV) of 1970 had not been mentioned. In responding to a question, one interlocutor suggested that the fourth option had evolved into a means to legitimize the status quo, which was essentially a form of colonization.

113. Speaking in his personal capacity, a member of the Commission expressed frustration at the persistence of slavery-like dynamics in society and advocated educating people about the options available, being good stewards of their resources, both human and otherwise and, especially, embracing their rich heritage. He emphasized the importance of not waiting for perfection to make progress on self-determination. Another member emphasized the need for serious accountability, the importance of addressing the generational divide, and the preservation of cultural heritage. He also noted the tendency in the Territory to discard what had been established and to invent new ideas without recognizing the value of what already existed.

114. The Commission of Inquiry had had a profound impact on daily life, resulting in greater inefficiency in public services, increased bureaucracy and more rigid procedures in governmental operations.

I. Meeting with the Minister for Education, Youth Affairs and Sports

115. The Minister for Education, Youth Affairs and Sports emphasized the need to improve the education system by embedding history in the curriculum to help children and society better understand and conceptualize history, government structures and civic areas. While acknowledging the current strength in the teaching of history, she highlighted the lack of education about government structures, the Constitution and civic issues, which were critical to fostering meaningful understanding and engagement. A reform of the British Virgin Islands and civics curriculum had been initiated to address those gaps from the ground up.

116. The Minister's approach to policymaking involved crucial consultations engaging educators in honest and frank conversations to create a mandate with broad support and buy-in. One of the biggest challenges to effectiveness was not a lack of passion, purpose or will, but rather the current construct of public service and the systemic inefficiencies that hindered the fulfilment of the mandate. It was hoped that the legislation on public service management currently being discussed in the House of Assembly would be forward-thinking, cementing relationships and enhancing government efficiency and effectiveness. The primary goal was to continue expanding the vision set forth by the first Chief Minister of the Territory, Hamilton Lavity Stouff,.

who believed that education was the foundation for achieving one's goals, a principle that the Territory had unfortunately strayed away from. To make progress on the agenda to reimagine education, efforts must focus on shifting from knowledge and intent to skills, critical thinking, problem-solving and innovation.

117. The Commission of Inquiry, while extremely challenging, had helped the Territory to address systemic challenges that had hindered ministers from doing the work they had been elected to do and put structures in place. The interlocutor expressed disappointment that the Territory had had to reach a point where the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry was necessary in order to effect change. The British Virgin Islands was still seeking to understand the transition, and it was necessary to figure out how to inform people of the changes.

118. She noted that the use of terms such as "country" or "nation" could cause confusion. When such terms were used, the person was always reminded that they actually referred to a territory. Embracing those terms required a certain audacity and confidence, and people should not be questioned for using them.

119. The overall percentage of the budget allocated to the Ministry had continued to decrease. The Ministry had been actively engaging with the private sector and had created a groundbreaking donations policy to enhance three priority areas, namely, infrastructure, professional development and training resources.

120. The Minister had also reached out to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and attended a general meeting in November 2023, which had led to fruitful strategic conversations. The Ministry was set to receive science and robotics kits by November 2024. The Minister had also submitted six specific proposals to UNESCO. Regarding support from the United Kingdom, students from the British Virgin Islands were entitled to the same tuition fees as United Kingdom nationals. A previous restriction had been lifted, allowing students to obtain loans in England to fund their education. However, while students could apply for scholarships, there was no guarantee that they would receive one. In fact, the majority of external scholarships awarded in the past were from Canada and other countries, not the United Kingdom. The Minister indicated that she had felt marginalized during a recent meeting of education ministers in the United Kingdom, as she had been left in an observer's room with no real interaction or understanding of the process. That highlighted the lack of meaningful engagement with the United Kingdom and larger organizations.

121. Regarding the Minister's point about the perceived corruption that elected officials faced upon taking office, one participant stated that the United Kingdom deliberately sought to damage the reputation of the British Virgin Islands through negative rhetoric and press releases. Officials had made harsh recommendations and threats without democratic legitimacy, believed to be aimed at justifying an international takeover and responding to the Territory's participation in international forums such as the Special Political and Decolonization Committee, OECS and CARICOM. Efforts had been made to lodge complaints and seek fair treatment. Recent discussions with officials had showed a greater willingness to listen and understand the Territory's perspective, and it had been emphasized that the United Kingdom needed to move from threats to providing assistance and support to the British Virgin Islands for positive change.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

122. After a 48-year hiatus, the second visiting mission to the British Virgin Islands was warmly received, fostering exceptional dialogue among the mission, the territorial Government, the people and the administering Power. The Territory remains peaceful and stable owing to its resilient people. Continued efforts by the administering Power, the territorial Government and the Special Committee are vital for maintaining that stability.

123. The mission identified three common and recurring themes: the need to improve education on decolonization and self-determination so that the population can make informed decisions about the future of the Territory; the need to preserve its identity and cultural richness and values; and the existing human capacity and resilience that have enabled the Territory to overcome difficulties, ending reliance on grant aid, and to build a vibrant society and ensure continued progress in all aspects.

124. The strong and vibrant determination of the people of the Territory in respect of their future political status remains unquestionable and undiminished. However, more work is needed within communities and among the people, their political leaders and the administering Power to build mutual trust and confidence. The principle of self-determination, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and relevant resolutions, is fundamental in enabling the Territory to choose its path and governance.

125. The important role of all stakeholders, in particular young people and women, and also in the context of the intergenerational gap, in the development of a road map for self-determination for the Territory must be better accounted for in an inclusive, broad-based, transparent and accountable process. The administering Power and the territorial Government are encouraged to ensure that the voices of young people and women, as well as other stakeholders, are better represented in the decision-making process on the future political status of the Territory.

126. The mission takes note of the strong progress made on the constitutional review process, including the implementation of the recommendation made by the Commission of Inquiry, and further notes the importance of effective mutual dialogue between the administering Power and the territorial Government to ensure that the outcomes benefit all the people of the Territory and do not sow discord between and among them.

127. The mission recognizes the calls made by the people of the Territory for enhanced education on the options available to them regarding the future political status of the Territory. The administering Power should actively support the Territory in its journey towards self-determination, with particular emphasis on the political education programmes, capacity-building and institutional strengthening. The decolonization process in the Territory would benefit from clarity from the administering Power regarding its position on the options available to the British Virgin Islands and other Territories in relation to self-determination.

128. Given the importance of the decolonization agenda in the Special Committee and the General Assembly, the importance of ensuring that a visiting mission has sufficient time to interact with the people and authorities, as well as other relevant stakeholders, to determine the real situation in the Territory, supported by an appropriate level of resources from the Assembly, cannot be overemphasized. The visiting mission to the British Virgin Islands is a case in point on that seminal issue.

129. Interlocutors noted that the Territory had been self-financing since 1978, positioning it more strongly than many OECS territories that had gained independence earlier and indicating a clear path towards independence. However, concerns were expressed about the pressure of the Government of the United

Kingdom on the financial offshoring industry, a key part of the economy, in particular regarding accountability.

130. The visiting mission, which took place while the Territory was awaiting the actions by the United Kingdom following the implementation deadline for the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry, noted negative views on the Commission, which was seen as a colonial burden, especially with the Governor chairing local Cabinet meetings. However, some interlocutors acknowledged that the Commission had propelled some improvements in public administration. Concerns were raised about the influence of the United Kingdom over the Territory's economy, governance and social issues, including the imposition of standards regarding same-sex marriage and the threat of direct rule, which had caused friction.

131. The visiting mission noted a growing consensus among British Virgin Islands citizens on independence, although the process and timetable remain unclear. That aspiration is challenging and requires high political awareness, cultural understanding and collective responsibility. The achievement of independence involves many actors, including the people, local government, the United Kingdom and the United Nations, and demands strong political and economic capacities, resource sustainability, infrastructure and internal consensus. Cooperation with the United Kingdom and the United Nations is essential. The mission also recommends learning from the experiences and best practices of other countries and Territories that have undergone similar processes.

132. The British Virgin Islands needs to take the following steps to achieve independence: (a) build national institutions, including security and economic management systems; (b) develop infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals and basic services; (c) promote sustainability through sustainable energy and disaster preparedness; (d) engage in international cooperation for technical assistance and best practices; (e) enhance communication to strengthen social ties and unity, and improve government cooperation; (f) implement long-term plans for infrastructure, security and economic development, with regular progress assessments; and (g) allow a transition period, with a Special Committee visiting mission being conducted before the end of the period to ensure that requirements are met and assess areas for improvement.

133. Within the framework of the Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, key steps need to be defined for the British Virgin Islands to advance in its path to self-determination. The recommended path to independence includes the following:

(a) Education programme. Implement a national education programme on the quest for independence, supported by the administering Power and facilitated by the United Nations;

(b) Independence timetable. Establish a timetable for independence. Midway through this period, the Territory should be granted some form of self-governance, decided by the administering Power and the people of the Territory;

(c) Discussions with the administering Power. Engage in talks with the Government of the United Kingdom, potentially involving a United Nations-appointed arbitrator if needed and agreed upon, to outline steps towards self-governance and independence;

(d) Consideration of a referendum. Assess the need for a referendum on independence. If a referendum is called for, ensure that a robust education programme is implemented by the United Nations as an independent agent in the process.

Annex**Itinerary and activities of the visiting mission**

<i>Date</i>	<i>Activities</i>
25 August 2024	Arrival in Road Town (Tortola) from New York
26 August 2024	Courtesy call on the Governor Meeting with the Premier, ministers and a junior minister Lunch meeting with the Financial Secretary, Cabinet Secretary and Permanent Secretaries Meeting with the Member of the House of Assembly from the Third Electoral District Meeting with the Speaker of the House and members of the Opposition Meeting with statutory boards and constitutionally established bodies Stakeholders meeting in Tortola
27 August 2024	Meeting with the Attorney General Meeting with members of the Constitutional Review Commission Meeting with the Minister for Education, Youth Affairs and Sports Visit to Virgin Gorda (recovery efforts) Stakeholders meeting in Virgin Gorda Closing meeting with the Premier
28 August 2024	Departure from Road Town (Tortola) to New York