



6 April 2023

PRESS STATEMENT
FROM GOVERNOR OF THE BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS
MR JOHN RANKIN CMG

On 13 February I published my second Quarterly Review of progress made under the Framework for Implementation of the Commission of Inquiry Recommendations. This was published here in the BVI and also sent to Lord Goldsmith, the UK Minister for the Overseas Territories. I've now received his response to my Quarterly Review and I am publishing it today for everyone to see.

My report noted that 19 of the 48 Recommendations in the COI Report had been completed and I welcomed such progress as had been made.

But I also noted that much more still needs to be done. The BVI Government's count now is that 20 of the 48 recommendations have been completed. But that is still less than half and behind where we agreed as part of the initial deadlines.

A number of the specific reviews which were commissioned have now been received, for example in relation to Statutory Boards and distribution of Crown Land. The Statutory Boards Review carried out by Jamal Smith was received on 31 December. The Review on Crown Land by David Abednego was received on 13 January. But neither of these reviews have yet been made public, allowing people to read for themselves the direction that it is proposed the reforms will take.

Similarly the Review on Social Assistance conducted by the Social Policy Research Institute in support of UNICEF is yet to be published despite having been received on 18 January. Given the sensitivity of the issues



arising from the Assistance Grants Audit, I expect that members of the public will be interested to see what solutions the experts recommend.

So I believe the reviews need to start being made public now, and unless they are otherwise published shortly, I will take steps to do so. Moreover the reviews are only the start of a process on which further action is required. It is imperative that the Government considers the recommendations in the reviews, consults on them as necessary, and then gets on with delivering the necessary changes.

Other areas of delay include reforms required to curb the unfettered discretion of Ministers. I welcome the fact that there has now been agreement on adopting the Protocol on Appointments to Statutory Boards. But in my view it should have been adopted sooner and again it has not yet been published. I also expressed concern in my Quarterly Review about delays in the processing of applications for Residency and Belongership. There is a huge backlog of old applications, and since 1 June 2022, over one thousand new applications have been made but little if any progress has been made in dealing with them. I am working with the Premier, his office, and the Deputy Governor's Office to find a solution. This will require a significant commitment of time and resources, but this should have happened already. Under the Framework Document the Government made a commitment to prioritise and allocate resources to the agreed reforms.

I should note that I am pleased to have now received the Audit on the 2019 Residency and Belongership Fast Track Programme and I am working through it in consultation with others as appropriate. I look forward to its publication in due course.

Let me now turn to Lord Goldsmith's response to my Quarterly Review. In his letter he notes that during his visit to the Territory in February he was reassured by the Premier and Ministers of the Government of National Unity's commitment to promoting good governance and carrying out reforms. But he also notes that progress on implementing the recommendations in the Framework document has been too slow. He is



concerned that there have been signs of insufficient commitment in some specific areas, that too many areas lag substantially behind, and that much of what has been delivered so far doesn't yet represent sufficient reform to prevent future abuse.

Overall the Minister agrees with my conclusion that serious efforts and clear prioritisation of time and resources are required to pick up the pace to deliver the reform that the people of the BVI want and deserve.

Some adjustments to the deadlines in the Framework Document will be required. The Premier has asked for eleven extensions to deadlines in areas for which he is responsible, and I have asked for two. Minister Goldsmith has consequently asked me, following the upcoming General Election, to agree with the next BVI Government a refreshed timetable for the delivery of the remaining recommendations and reforms in the Framework document. This should include ambitious yet achievable deadlines to ensure that the necessary reforms have taken root no later than May 2024. If that can be achieved that should allow the UK Order in Council to be lifted. Indeed as the Minister makes clear in his letter, the Order can be lifted sooner if implementation can be achieved more quickly. The staff in my Office and I will do all we can to support the implementation work.

Let me conclude by reiterating that I welcome the progress that has been made to date. The current Premier has assured me of his commitment to implementing the COI Recommendations and to achieving the deep reforms that are required. But we have to get on with it and we need to accelerate the reform programme so that the people of the BVI start seeing more real, positive changes.

Once the General Election is over I will sit down with whichever Government is in place to work out a refreshed plan for implementing the commitments in the Framework Document. I remain fully determined to ensuring that such implementation takes place, just as the UK Government



remains committed to taking the necessary actions to ensure that the people of the BVI get the reforms they deserve.