

2020 Public Holidays Review Committee Report

September 29, 2020

The Public Holidays Review Committee was appointed by the Deputy Governor on 7th July, 2020 to recommend the continued future of holidays, in particular Commonwealth Day and St. Ursula's Day.

The Committee held its first meeting on 10th July, 2020 and thought it prudent to review and discuss the recommendations contained in a report which was prepared by a previous committee in 2001 but had not been advanced.

The Committee, having completed their discussions, is asking Stakeholders and the general public to review the proposed recommendations for changes to the Public Holidays list before submission of the final report to Cabinet.

Persons should review the recommendations below and submit all comments **by 7th October, 2020** by email to sherbert@gov.vg or by mail to Public Holidays Review Committee, Office of the Deputy Governor, Burhym Building, DeCastro Street, Wickhams Cay, Tortola.

Background Information on Current Holidays

1. **New Year's Day:** The first day of January.
2. **H. Lavity Stoutt's Birthday:** This holiday is observed on the first Monday in March and commemorates the birthday of the late Hamilton Lavity Stoutt who was born on 7th March, 1929. The Honourable H. L. Stoutt was first elected to the Legislative Council in 1957 and was re-elected every succeeding election until his death in May, 1995, thus serving for a period of 38 years.

During his tenure in the Legislative Council, he served as Minister for Communication & Works; Minister for Education; Minister for Natural Resources & Labour; Minister for Finance; Leader of the Opposition; and he was the first Chief Minister to be appointed in the Virgin Islands in 1967. He served four terms as the Chief Minister for the Territory.

3. **Commonwealth Day:** Observed the second Monday in March, Commonwealth Day is a day to remember and learn about the Commonwealth.
4. **Good Friday:** A religious holiday which commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It falls in March or April according to the ecclesiastical calendar.
5. **Easter Monday:** Easter Monday is the Monday following Easter Sunday. In 1967, the late Honourable Robinson O'Neal, who was at that time the District Representative for Virgin Gorda, lobbied for and gained approval for an Easter festival for the Sister Island.
6. **Whit Monday:** Whit Monday is the Monday after Whitsuntide, which is the ecclesiastical observance of Pentecost (50 days after Easter). Whit Monday is especially significant for the Methodist Church BVI Circuit, which commemorates the day with a parade of representatives from the various churches that make up the circuit and a combined church service. The holiday falls in May/June according to the ecclesiastical calendar.
7. **Sovereign's Birthday:** The birthday of Her Majesty the Queen is celebrated on the second Friday in June. Prior to 2019, when it was changed to Friday by Cabinet, the holiday was observed on the second Saturday in June.
8. **Territory Day:** This holiday originated in 1956 when the Federation of the Leeward Islands created in 1872, was dissolved. With that "de-federation," the Presidency of the Virgin Islands was styled a "colony." The Colony of the Virgin Islands came into

existence on 1st July, 1956, the day appointed for the coming into force of the Leeward Islands (Miscellaneous Provisions) Order in Council, 1956 (Si No. 833) (UK) made under the Leeward Islands Act, 1956. The holiday thus commemorates a significant constitutional development and it was first termed “Colony Day.” During the 1960s the use of the word “colony” fell out of general favour and “Territory” was used instead.

9. **Festival Holidays:** (August Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday) The Festival Holidays are a celebration of the emancipation from slavery in 1834.

10. **St. Ursula’s Day:** This holiday was introduced in 1957 with the first Public Holidays Amendment Act. It commemorates the Roman Catholic Saint after whom, according to legend, Columbus named the whole archipelago of islands (Ursula and 11,000 Virgin followers were, according to legend, slaughtered by the Huns for their faith). The figure in the Territory’s crest also represents St. Ursula and the lamps of the Virgins.

11. **Christmas Day:** A religious holiday which celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ.

12. **Boxing Day:** This holiday is observed on 26th December due the British custom of giving Christmas boxes to tradesman and staff on this day.

Following are the recommendations put forth by the Committee:

Recommendations of the 2001 Report	Recommendations/Comments from Committee Members
<p>Recommendation 1</p> <p>Discretionary holidays should be placed on Mondays, and in particular, the H. Lavity Stoutt birthday should be celebrated on the 1st Monday in March</p>	<p>The observation of holidays on Mondays was implemented; however, the name of the 1st July holiday was not changed from Territory Day to Virgin Islands Day.</p>

<p>and Territory Day (Virgin Islands Day) the first Monday in July. This prevents the week from being broken up arbitrarily and maximises the recreational utility of the holiday.</p>	
<p>Recommendation 2</p> <p>Commonwealth Day, the 2nd Monday in March, should no longer be a public holiday.</p> <p>Instead, a holiday in November should replace it. Commonwealth Day should continue to be observed annually by broadcasts, special educational programme and the like.</p>	<p>Commonwealth Day commemorates the Commonwealth of Nations, which is a union of some countries that used to be part of the British Empire. Besides BVI, Commonwealth Day is observed as a holiday in Gibraltar and Turks and Caicos. It is not currently a holiday in Britain.</p> <p>The Committee agreed with the recommendation that Commonwealth Day should no longer be a holiday but that it should continue to be observed on the 2nd Monday in March. The observance would acknowledge its meaning and how we are connected to it and the rest of the Commonwealth.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3</p> <p>The name Territory Day should be changed to Virgin Islands Day which should be celebrated the first Monday in July.</p> <p>This will be a day to celebrate Virgin Islands identity in the broadest sense</p>	<p>The Committee agreed with the recommendation that the name of the holiday should be changed to Virgin Islands Day.</p> <p>The Committee felt that it should be a day to highlight the history, people and culture</p>

<p>while recalling its origins in 1956 as the day of separation from the Leeward Islands which set the stage for the “great leap forward” in economic and political development of the 1960’s.</p>	<p>of the Virgin Islands.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4</p> <p>The Sovereign’s Birthday should be observed annually and celebrated on a Saturday in June but its holiday status should be removed.</p>	<p>It was noted that the Sovereign’s Birthday continues to be observed annually; however, it is now celebrated on the second Friday in June. This decision was taken by Cabinet in 2019.</p> <p>The Committee gave consideration to the recommendation and the general consensus was that while the Territory remains an Overseas Territory of the UK, the holiday should be retained.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5</p> <p>Festival Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday: These holidays should remain as public holidays but the name should be changed to Emancipation Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.</p>	<p>The Committee agreed with the recommendation to change the title of the three-day holiday from Festival to Emancipation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The holidays are quite a significant part of the history and culture of the Virgin Islands. • There was concern that the significance of the holidays is being lost especially among the young people. • More needs to be done generally to get

	<p>our young people and the wider public to understand what emancipation meant for the Caribbean and more specifically for the Virgin Islands.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More consideration could be given to how each day is commemorated.
<p>Recommendation 5A</p> <p>The Governor in Council should use powers in section 7 of the Public Holidays Act, (Cap. 199) to permit essential businesses such as pharmacies and food stores to open until 12:00 noon on Emancipation Tuesday and/or Wednesday.</p>	<p>There was agreement that essential businesses should be allowed to open for a limited time on Emancipation Tuesday and Wednesday.</p> <p>It was noted that businesses are opened on holidays. The Committee asked that the legality of whether in fact businesses can open on holidays be examined. If they can, they will support the recommendation.</p> <p>The Committee noted that if we say on the one hand that we want to have holidays but at the same time still want to carry on business as usual, it defeats the point of having a holiday. However, if an exception is being made for the Emancipation Holidays, it should be carefully carved out.</p>
<p>Recommendation 6</p> <p>A holiday called Maritime Heritage Day should replace St. Ursula's Day and be</p>	<p>The Committee agreed with the recommendation to replace St. Ursula's</p>

<p>celebrated on the 3rd Monday in October. St. Ursula's Day could continue to be suitably observed.</p> <p>It was recommended that this holiday should recognise fishermen, sailors and boat builders over the years, promote also the safe use of the sea. On this day the feats of past and present captains could be recalled, as well as sea tragedies, etc. (An alternative suggestion is for a more general Heritage Day.)</p>	<p>Day with a holiday called Maritime Heritage.</p> <p>Members agreed that maritime heritage has been and still is an important part of our history, culture and tourism product. The holiday would highlight various areas of our maritime heritage as proposed, while highlighting the need to preserve and conserve nature's offerings in, under and above the water.</p> <p>The suggestion of a more general Heritage Day was discussed. It was suggested that a more general name would allow for other aspects of our heritage to be incorporated. However, on further discussion it was noted that a more general Heritage Day would be the same as Virgin Islands Day.</p>
<p>Recommendation 7</p> <p>A new holiday should be placed in November, on the second Monday, to be called Heroes' Day.</p> <p>Pride of place would be given to those persons concerned with the 1949 Demonstrations and Restoration of the Legislative Council; other pioneers and outstanding community servants in agriculture, health, business, politics,</p>	<p>It was shared that extensive work had been done on the creation of Heroes' Day by the Ministry of Education and Culture, and there was no need to reinvent the wheel. The report on the work done was to be shared with the Committee.</p> <p>It was proposed that Heroes' Day be held in October and Maritime Heritage Day be held in November.</p>

<p>public administration, the arts and religion would be honoured on this day. National honours could be announced on this day as well as on Virgin Islands Day (This holiday would 'replace' Commonwealth Day).</p>	
<p>Recommendation 8 Boxing Day: This traditional English holiday should be retained as a part of the Christmas Holiday package, and as a day for refreshment after parties and revelling.</p>	<p>Agreed.</p>
<p>Recommendation 10 The Office of the Deputy Governor, and the Ministry of Education and Culture should, in collaboration with the Virgin Islands Studies Unit of the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College and the Department of Information and Public Relations, mount a continuing programme to educate the public about the origin and meaning of the key holidays and to that end propose and/or carry out appropriate projects/activities to celebrate them.</p>	<p>The Office of the Deputy Governor will collaborate with all those Ministries and Departments mentioned to ensure that a proper communication and awareness framework is put in place to publish information on the reasons and purpose for the holidays thereby generating more public engagement and involvement.</p>

PROPOSED REVISED PUBLIC HOLIDAYS SCHEDULE

NEW YEAR'S DAY

1ST JANUARY

H. LAVITY STOUTT'S BIRTHDAY

1ST MONDAY IN MARCH

GOOD FRIDAY

EASTER MONDAY

WHIT MONDAY

SOVERIGN'S BIRTHDAY

2ND FRIDAY IN JUNE

VIRGIN ISLANDS DAY

1ST MONDAY IN JULY

EMANCIPATION MONDAY

1ST MONDAY IN AUGUST

EMANCIPATION TUESDAY

TUESDAY

following Emancipation Monday

EMANCIPATION WEDNESDAY

WEDNESDAY

following Emancipation Tuesday

MARITIME HERITAGE DAY

3RD MONDAY IN OCTOBER

HEROES' DAY

2ND MONDAY IN NOVEMBER

CHRISTMAS DAY

25TH DECEMBER

BOXING DAY

26TH DECEMBER