



14 April 2023

**STATEMENT FROM GOVERNOR**  
**ON THE AUDIT OF THE RESIDENCY AND BELONGER STATUS**  
**FAST TRACK PROGRAMME**  
**MR JOHN RANKIN CMG**

Good day to everyone in the Virgin Islands.

After consultation with the Premier and further to discussions yesterday in Cabinet, I wish to inform you that I intend to exercise my power under Section 85 of the Constitution to recall the House of Assembly.

The need for this to happen has arisen from the findings of the Audit Report on the Fast Track Residency and Belongership Programme carried out during 2019 and early 2020 by the then Government.

People will be able to read the Audit Report and its Addendum for themselves when they are laid in the House of Assembly. But in short, the Audit finds, following advice from the Attorney General, that 688 persons were granted Belonger status at the time who did not meet a particular aspect of the applicable legal requirements.

For most of those, the specific error was that they were granted their Residency and Belongership certificates simultaneously, whereas on a proper reading of the law they should have held their certificate of residency for 12 months before their application for Belonger status was made.

Let me emphasise, this was not the fault of the individuals concerned, most of whom have lived in the BVI and contributed to the community here for from more than 20 years and have legitimately operated in the belief that their status granted is valid.



The immediate concern however, and the reason for recalling the House of Assembly as a matter of emergency, is the upcoming General Election with many of these 688 persons being registered to vote. If the error that occurred in 2019 is not remedied, the right of these persons to vote could be put into question and challenges could be made to the election results.

As Governor, I have an overriding concern to ensure that the elections in BVI are free and fair and not open to challenge on the basis that persons not entitled to vote have voted.

Accordingly, I believe it is important that the House of Assembly and the wider public be made aware of this matter and that the House of Assembly be invited to consider the best way of resolving it taking account of the fact that an error was made through no fault of the individuals concerned.

I look forward to a free and fair election in which all registered voters can participate on Advance Polling Day on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> April and Polling Day on Monday 24<sup>th</sup> April.

Thank you.