

British VI Spends \$12 Million in Fight Against Covid-19, Premier Fahie Announces Additional Actions to Blunt Deadly Disease

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Tortola, British Virgin Islands – BVI Premier Andrew Fahie said his government is implementing enhanced measures to ensure that no one in the British Virgin Islands contracts the deadly COVID-19.

As of Tuesday evening, the BVI had not recorded any case of the virus. However, government continues to put measures in place to prepare for any eventuality.

Mr. Fahie hosted a press conference Tuesday evening, along with Leader of the Opposition in the Virgin Islands House of Assembly, Marlon Penn, to demonstrate a collective effort crossing political party lines.

“In politics, the opposition and government will have differences in opinions and methodology, but one thing is sure is that we all have in mind what’s best for the British Virgin Islands...we are all members of Team BVI and we are all in this together,” he said.

Mr. Fahie said both groups have pledged to work together to make sure that whatever needs to be done is done to fight against COVID-19.

He said he toured the facilities of the National Emergency Operations Center NEOC today and can report that the facility has proactive measures in place in terms of resources.

Government earlier announced the allocation of \$2 million toward food security measures across the islands during this crisis.

“We first allocated just under \$3 million from the Contingency Fund to be proactive,” the BVI leader stated. Some of these funds were used to invest in equipment to test for the coronavirus on island, so that the results can be known in a couple hours and then be verified through CARPHA in Trinidad and Tobago; hazmat suits; and the retrofitting of the hospital to include an isolation unit.

Mr. Fahie announced that to date, the HEOC has spent some \$12 million toward the fight against COVID-19.

In addition, he said government is ensuring that the frontline border control units, police and customs, are provided with the necessary resources to make sure the BVI’s borders are protected and everyone stays safe.

Premier Fahie warned persons from doing anything illegal, saying border control will be “moving in very strong because we cannot afford for one bad element to creep in to destroy us all.”

BVI closed its borders to all travelers effective this past Sunday at 11:59pm. However, special permission is granted to visitors who want to leave the territory and cargo, freight and courier services continue to be allowed to enter.

Responding to concerns that there are BVI Islanders abroad who would have wanted to return home in the midst of this crisis, the premier said: “I understand their cry, we allowed for certain things, but the cut off time is now. Traveling increases the probability of being contaminated and we want our people to be safe. This virus doesn’t respect nationality. We put ourselves in danger and we don’t want to be faced with who will live and who will die because we keep flexing the rules.”

All public gatherings have been reduced to 20 and businesses have been limited to operating only between 6am and 8pm.

There has been backlash from certain segments of the public because of a number of the measures put in place by the government. But Mr. Fahie reiterated that these are step by step preventative measures rather than closing down the entire territory and must be taken in an effort to keep the coronavirus from these shores.

He reminded persons that if they do not abide by these measures, they are endangering the lives of their own family members and the rest of the population. He pointed out that persons who ignore these measures will be dealt with.

The BVI leader noted that the territory is not in a state of emergency, rather using the existing laws of the land to impose certain restrictions like reduced business hours and quarantine measures. He said the House of Assembly will meet on Friday to strengthen the powers of health agencies to enforce the laws and penalties for violators.

He explained that a state of emergency for the British Overseas Territories would mean that the authorities would have lost total control with persons not adhering to the laws of the land. Mr. Fahie said the closest the BVI got to that state was after hurricane Irma in September 2017 and he urged residents to be “mature enough to police ourselves and avoid total chaos...we will try our best not to get to that level because if we get there, that might be worst than COVID-19.”

In terms of the negative impact these measures are having on the livelihood and sustainability of residents, the BVI leader announced that persons who have become unemployed can register at the Department of Labor and persons on the public water distribution network are eligible to have water delivered to them. Early pensions were also distributed today by the Social Security Board.

Premier Fahie said additional measures will be announced later this week as it relates to the financial services sector, which is the major revenue earner for the British Virgin Islands. A coronavirus financial task force has already been established.

“I want you to know that despite the dilemma, the BVI is still open for business,” he declared.

In his statement, Opposition Leader Marlon Penn agreed that the best results can only come if everyone is united in the goal and approach to protect the health, safety and well being of the territory’s people and the sustainability and success of the local industry.