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viNGN Hopeful That “Diaspora Link” Will Propel the USVI to National Telecommunication Relevance

CEO Stephan Adams banks on new initiative to transform USVI into a global telecommunications hub and secure viNGN's future

Technology / **Published On April 18, 2024 06:15 AM /**

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The Diaspora Link project aims to lay submarine fiber optic cables from the U.S. East Coast to the USVI, and on to Nigeria (Lagos pictured above), and Ghana. By. GETTY IMAGES

The success of [Diaspora Link](#) via draft legislation first introduced in the House Energy & Commerce Committee by Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett may be the only thing that can keep the Virgin Islands Next Generation Network afloat, said viNGN CEO Stephan Adams on Tuesday.

Speaking before the Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance, Mr. Adams told lawmakers that “viNGN will be uncompetitive in the next 5 years.” The semi-autonomous entity currently faces stiff competition from companies who have traditionally been its customers, and Mr. Adams made it clear that “we do not have the deep pockets ability to compete.”

However, Diaspora Link could be a new revenue stream and a beacon of hope amid calls to lower prices. The initiative, a brainchild of Mr. Adams and his team, involves running submarine fiber optic cables to connect the east coast of the U.S. mainland to the USVI, and subsequently to Nigeria and Ghana in Africa. The draft legislation – H.R. 3385 – received unanimous Congressional support in 2023. According to Congresswoman Plaskett, Diaspora Link will further establish the USVI as “a global telecommunications hub.”

Because there is currently no direct telecommunications link between continental Africa and the USA, Mr. Adams anticipates the data centers and independent power plant established in the territory as a component of Diaspora Link will draw in new revenue, making viNGN more sustainable. It would allow viNGN to bring “new value to the territory that doesn't exist today that we did not have to pay for.” He explained to Senator Samuel Carrion that the implementation of Diaspora Link would also create job opportunities in the territory.

If H.R. 3385 successfully navigates the legislative process and receives President Joe Biden’s signature, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration will commence a year-long feasibility study on building the necessary infrastructure. Mr. Adams believes the results of the study will be affirmative, leaving it “up to Congress to figure out how to fund the results of the study.” As the author of the white paper that triggered the drafting of the initial legislation, Mr. Adams has volunteered himself to be the “custodian” of Diaspora Link in the territory.

The initiative's success “through a Congress that does nothing at [this] point speaks to the importance of Diaspora Link to national security,” opined Mr. Adams. He told committee members that the proposal makes the territory “relevant to the United States of America.” Based on his analysis that “the broadband market is a race to the bottom and we can't keep pace,” several legislators expressed hope that Diaspora Link would materialize.

“We need to stay on top of this ... and pray that the feasibility study comes back feasible,” said Sen. Donna Frett-Gregory. “I know, everything takes time. Sometimes I feel like time is forever.” She wondered, though, how viNGN would be able to continue as a going concern if the Diaspora Link effort fails, cautioning Mr. Adams that robust contingency plans need to be developed.