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Talks Progress on Enhanced USVI-CARICOM Cooperation

USVI and CARICOM move towards an agreement to address common challenges and promote development. The MOU will focus on energy, agriculture, tourism, technology, and labor management, to strengthen ties and enhancing economic opportunities

Caribbean / **Published On August 08, 2024 04:40 PM /**

Staff Consortium **August 08, 2024**

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CARICOM headquarters in Georgetown, Guyana.

Negotiations continue to advance on a Technical Cooperation Agreement between the U.S. Virgin Islands and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), aiming to enhance their previous functional cooperation, the Bryan administration announced Thursday.

The partnership is set to be formalized through a forthcoming Memorandum of Understanding, promising substantial benefits for both the USVI and the wider Caribbean region, according to the administration.

The development follows a meeting on July 15, attended by Governor Albert Bryan Jr.; Teri Helenese, director of State-Federal Relations and Washington Representative for the USVI; Elizabeth Solomon, CARICOM's assistant secretary-general for foreign and community relations, and her professional team.

According to the release, Mr. Bryan expressed optimism about the potential of this enhanced relationship and regional cooperation to address shared challenges. He highlighted the USVI's unique position within the Caribbean community and its readiness to embrace the official status of Technical Cooperation. "To that end, we look forward to the Memorandum of Understanding and working collaboratively and in solidarity within CARICOM," he remarked.

The governor underscored the USVI's commitment to several key development strategies within the enhanced partnership with CARICOM. Addressing the energy crisis is a top priority, with a focus on sustainable solutions, cost reduction, and building resilient infrastructure through collaboration.

Promoting a blue economy is another crucial goal, aiming for the sustainable use of ocean resources to drive economic growth while preserving the ecosystem. Agriculture also stands as a vital sector, with the territory seeking to enhance food security and agricultural trade by leveraging CARICOM's expertise. This includes promoting sustainable farming practices and creating economic opportunities.

Expanding the tourism industry, particularly in the medical, sports, and overnight stay sectors, will strengthen regional connections and boost economic benefits. Additionally, investing in technology will spur innovation, upgrade digital infrastructure, and foster a knowledge-based economy, the administration said. The USVI also plans to enhance intraregional trade through direct air and sea links, citizen upskilling, and the development of e-commerce.

Leveraging the Regional Migration Policy to facilitate regional employment exchange and ensure job security, along with promoting education at the University of the Virgin Islands, are also key objectives. Implementing a labor management information system will efficiently track and allocate labor resources, supporting resilient labor markets.

Ms. Helenese, who is leading the CARICOM initiative on behalf of Governor Bryan, acknowledged the preference for associate membership with the intergovernmental organization. However, she noted the challenges posed by the USVI's status as a U.S. territory, which requires specific authorizations from the White House.

Nevertheless, Ms. Helenese views the cooperation model as a crucial stepping-stone to associate membership, reflecting the dynamic political environment. She highlighted that associate members like Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, and the Turks and Caicos Islands—all British Overseas Territories—have signaled their intention to advance to full membership within the regional bloc.

Highlighting the importance of regional dialogue and collaboration, Ms. Helenese, a native of St. Croix, stated that the CARICOM relationship would encompass various areas of mutual interest.

Acknowledging the USVI's acute labor shortage within an expanding service industry, Ms. Helenese suggested that this challenge could be effectively addressed through cooperation,

particularly by linking it to disaster recovery and the Visa Waiver Program. This approach would facilitate the employment of Caribbean nationals, thereby mitigating the current workforce crisis. Any chances for a visa waiver program, however, is [currently in limbo](#).

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