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BVI Implements All Commission of Inquiry Recommendations, Awaits UK Decision on Direct Rule Suspension

Premier Wheatley confirmed that the government has enacted 48 reforms from the 2022 COI Report. A decision on lifting the UK's stayed Order in Council—which could suspend the BVI constitution—is expected by the end of June.

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Roadtown Tortola, BVI. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM.

The recommendations of the 2022 Commission of Inquiry Report have all been implemented by the government of the British Virgin Islands, says BVI Premier Dr. Natalio Wheatley.

Last week, the premier officially presented parliament with the government's COI Self-Assessment Report. The 99-page document details how the government, over the past three years, has implemented 48 of the recommendations stemming from Sir Gary Hickinbottom's [scathing analysis of governance issues](#) in the territory.

Since then, Wheatley said in his introductory message, public officers have “developed and implemented the structures, processes, and procedures necessary for the reforms while simultaneously managing daily operations of the public service.”

He vowed that the arduous exercise was but one step in an ongoing reform process, as a plan was recently approved by Cabinet to continue the effort by publishing a commentary “on the conclusions, findings, and reasoning of the COI Report” that will hopefully guide future strategy. The commentary, due later this year, Wheatley believes, “will also contribute to repairing the reputation of the [British] Virgin Islands and restoring equity of its global brand.”

In his comments on the self-assessment report, Deputy Governor David Archer Jr. also praised public service employees for their “commendable commitment and urgency in executing the COI recommendations.” He too called for the process to continue into the future, saying that “there must be a fundamental shift in the ethos of the Public Service – one that embraces continuous improvement and transformation.”

That shift will occur through the execution of the Government Reform Transition plan, envisioned as a bridge to “broader and ongoing governance reform,” according to the self-assessment report. The need to continue the reform process is clear, as two of the COI report's recommendations have not been addressed.

The first, to implement judge-only trials, requires a constitutional amendment, while the second, revising criminal procedure rules, is the responsibility of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court.

Beyond that, establishing a mechanism for continuous improvement in governance systems enables “a more collaborative and modern partnership with the United Kingdom...recognizing the Virgin Islands’ right to self-determination,” the report concludes.

The UK government has also received, along with the self-assessment report, the required reviews from the Governor, the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, and the public. These were needed, the premier said, to consider lifting the stayed Order in Council that imposes direct rule on the territory.

The decision on removing the threat to partially suspend the BVI constitution is expected by the end of June, Wheatley said.