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BVI Closes Borders to All Travelers Effective Midnight

Coronavirus / **Published On March 22, 2020 07:30 PM /**

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Tortola, British Virgin Islands – No one gets in and out the British Virgin Islands as of 11:59pm today Sunday March 22, 2020, it was announced by Premier Andrew A. Fahie via local radio this afternoon.

This is in an effort to keep the territory free from the COVID-19, which is spreading in pandemic proportions globally.

“All airports and seaports are closed to inbound and outgoing passengers until Monday 6th April, except as preauthorized and (this position) will be re-evaluated after that,” he said. However, internal travel between the four main islands of Anegada, Tortola, Virgin Gorda and Jost Van Dyke, will continue.

The move to close the BVI's borders is one that some say is coming somewhat late, while others are decrying the suddenness of the move, given that there are persons, including students, overseas with flights already booked to return home in light of the threat and classes being moved online.

The notice said all ports will be closed to incoming travelers, including nationals, belongers, work permit holders and residents, for 14 days, except as preauthorized. The port will however remain open for courier, cargo and freight craft or vessels and international crew members on incoming vessels will be required to remain within the port facility and comply with all public health measures in effect.

In addition, non essential gatherings of 20 persons or more are prohibited with effect from Monday 23 March until Friday 17 April in the first instance.

All businesses and services and all recreational facilities have also been ordered to close by 8pm and remain closed until 6am daily with effect from Sunday 22 March at 11:59pm until Friday 17 April, in accordance with Section 15 of the Public Health Ordinance (Cap.194), in the first instance.

"Each one of these measures that have been taken today, added to what have been taken before, is solely in an effort to ensure that we protect our people and try to prevent the virus from reaching our shores," Mr. Fahie said.

He said in the eventuality that the worst case happens, all efforts will be made to contain and control it as much as possible.

The BVI leader urged everyone to abide by these warnings and the measures in place to safeguard these borders and he again appealed to everyone to be respectful and practice social distancing, in addition to the regular washing of hands and other measures.

"It is not to put you in captivity, but it is to release you from what is plaguing the entire world," he declared. "I really am sympathetic to anyone that is caught outside...I myself have two daughters away."

The BVI has not recorded any case of COVID-19 to date.

The BVI has the ability to test locally, but will have to send samples to Trinidad and Tobago for confirmation.

To date, as announced today by Health Minister Carvin Malone, 12 persons were tested and deemed negative. Previous figures indicated 15.

He said 3 were tested in Trinidad and Tobago by the end of February, 9 preliminary tests were done here and verified by Trinidad and Tobago with the results to be known this week and 15 samples for persons under investigation were sent to Trinidad and Tobago on March 21.

Government has made available \$12 million to get all of the resources necessary to fight this pandemic and another 5,000 test kits have been ordered, the Health Minister revealed. He said they will buy the equipment needed, such as testing kits and respirators, but he hopes they won't have to use them.

"The only way we will need none of this is to keep our people safe," he declared. "Quarantine is critical...the 14 day period must be observed to lessen the infection of others."

Education Minister Dr. Natalio Wheatley, in his statement, pointed out that the schools house some of most vulnerable population, our children and that is why the decision was made to close for 14 days. He noted that teachers have prepared work for the students for the duration of the closure.

Easter break will end on April 19.

As Minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs, Dr. Wheatley thanked the churches for abiding by the rules and moving now to online services.

He also announced that government has decided to inject \$2 million into the fisheries and agriculture sector to accelerate previous plans for the Rapid Response Food Production Programme.

Minister for Transportation, Works and Utilities Kye Rhymer announced that the Water and Sewerage Department will suspend all charges for water consumers for 30 days in the first instance and where water is not available, it will be delivered.

Minister for Workforce Development Vincent Wheatley said it is his job to make sure employees are safe and can continue to earn a living and that businesses can remain viable.

He encouraged employers to institute remote, shift or staggered work hours during this time without penalizing staff.