

The Virgin Islands Consortium

49 Percent Of Danes Are In Favor Of Denmark Apology To Virgin Islands

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ST. CROIX -- A Danish parliamentary representative told The Consortium on Transfer Day that he and other leaders in Denmark would continue seeking an apology from their homeland to the U.S. Virgin Islands, its former colony for the atrocities of slavery. He also revealed that 49 percent of Danes recently polled were in favor of a formal apology.

Denmark Parliamentarian Nikolaj Villumsen, who agreed that the Prime Minister of Denmark, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, had given a touching speech on Friday that took responsibility for the actions of Denmark when it ruled the territory, said a formal apology was what he was hoping for, adding that he would continue to work with other parliamentarians until the goal is realized.

"I would very much have liked that he had given a formal apology because I think that it is suited," Mr. Villumsen said. "It's clear with all the brutal enslavement of colonial rule, and also the sale without consultation and without securing rights, there should be an official apology from the government."

Denmark sold the then-Danish West Indies to The United States of America on March 31, 1917, for \$25 million in gold bullion. The sale saw one powerful nation handing rule of a people to another powerful nation, without the involvement of said people. Mr. Villumsen said not only would he raise the issue in the Danish Parliament, he would also push for initiatives that go beyond an apology, which he said would help alleviate some of the problems caused by enslavement.

During his speech in St. Croix on Friday, Mr. Rasmussen spoke candidly about his country's past relative to the territory, calling it "shameful."

"Although we share a common past, we have not always shared the same story about that past," he said. The prime minister said when he was a child, there was a popular Danish story about the Danish West Indies that spoke of the USVI as an exotic location with peaceful coexisting. He also mentioned a famous Danish King who had abolished slavery, but said Danish slavery of the USVI continued after it had been abolished, and living conditions only improved on paper.

Mr. Rasmussen was set to unveil a five-year scholarship program at UVI today, a move Mr. Villumsen said was a step in the right direction, but still not enough.

"I think it was a move in the right direction but we need to go further. It's clear that there are problems here that have roots in what Denmark has done, and due to that we need to take further actions -- not the least of which being Virgin Islanders don't enjoy full citizen rights and there is a diplomatic mission for Denmark to take with their counterparts in the United States, and to help give the people of the Virgin Islands self-determination," he said.

As for the Danish poll showing 49 percent support of an apology, Mr. Villumsen said support has been growing, and made known that only 30 percent of Danes were against it. "I think it's a clear message to all politicians that we need to take action and we'll bring that up in parliament," Mr. Villumsen said.

Correction: April 2, 2017

A previous version of this story misspelled the Danish parliament minister's name. It's Nikolaj Villumsen, not Nicolai Billumsen. The story has been updated to reflect the correct information.

Feature Image: Left, Prime Minister of Denmark Lars Løkke Rasmussen, at Fort Christianvaern on Friday. (Credit: Reemy-Reemz Photography)