

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Territory's Leaders Commemorate Transfer Day

Culture / **Published On April 01, 2019 08:08 AM /**

Staff **April 01, 2019**



Virgin Islands leaders to include Governor Albert Bryn and senators who make up the 33rd Legislature, and Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, on Sunday commemorated Transfer Day with an activity at the grounds of the Legislature in Charlotte Amalie. Also in attendance was Danish Consul General in New York Anne Dorte Riggelsen and the 33rd Legislature's Executive Director and Chairwoman of the Transfer Day Centennial Commission, Pamela C. Richards.

Transfer Day is recognized each year on March 31 and marks the day in 1917 that the sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States was formalized. The islands were purchased from Denmark by the U.S. for \$25 million in gold. The 1917 ceremony took place on the Charlotte Amalie Waterfront on the grounds of the Capitol Building. This

year marked the 102nd year of the transformative day, which forever changed the course of history for the territory and its people.

There were remarks from Mr. Bryan, Senate President Gittens, Senate Vice-President Donna Frett-Gregory, Ms. Plaskett, Ms. Dorte Riggelsen and Ms. Richards.

In 2017, the local government held special events territory-wide as part of the centennial commemoration, and Denmark Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen delivered a speech that fully accepted responsibility for actions of his ancestors, making no excuses for the horror so many faced. He also highlighted the bravery of legends like Moses "Buddhoe" Gottlieb, known as General Budhoe, the free black man who led the 1848 slave rebellion on St. Croix.

"The preceding years have not been forgotten — neither in Denmark, nor in the Virgin Islands," he said. The prime minister mentioned the town names such as Christiansted and Frederiksted, as well as the design of the town buildings, stating that they served as reminders of how close the USVI and Denmark were. He also acknowledged the thousands of Danes who visit the territory annually, and said both he and the people of Denmark feel a special bond with Virgin Islanders.

"But 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.

"The true heroes were the men and women who stood up to the injustice," Mr. Rasmussen said, later adding, "I suggest we also look somewhere else in our hearts and minds. I suggest we ask ourselves is there any justification for suppression? Any argument for treating people brutally? And we all know the answer; the answer is no. There's no justification whatsoever for the exploitation of men, women and children that took place in these islands under Danish flags. There's no justification for slavery. It is unforgivable. And it is a dark and disgraceful part of Danish history. So when I search my heart and my mind, there's no doubt that the true heroes of the past are the men and women of the Virgin Islands who defied suppression. They were not given their freedom, they took it back."

Mr. Rasmussen became emotional almost to the point of tears at various points of his address. He continued to praise the pioneers of the uprisings that ultimately led to freedom, including Queen Mary Thomas, Queen Mathilda Macbean and Axeline "Queen Agnes" Salomon, who led a movement that ended with [the famous Fireburn](#).

"We must acknowledge what had happen in the past, and we must acknowledge that what happened in the past has affected where the island is today, because we can't undo the past, what we can do is to improve the future," Mr. Rasmussen said.

The prime minister said with Denmark now acknowledging the atrocities of the past, and with both sides deciding to embrace the future, "Today the people of Denmark and the people of the Virgin Islands share a common historic path, and today we share the same

view of history, and today we share the same heroes. And hopefully we shall also share a bright future.”

He added, "Ladies and gentlemen, this time around we will not hold them back, we will push them forward," the prime minister concluded. He did not apologize for slavery."

On Sunday local leaders delivered speeches that sought to convey the progress the territory has made since coming under U.S. rule, even while pointing out the work still ahead relative to rights as U.S. citizens.

Image Credit: USVI Legislature

© Viconsortium 2026