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# Protests Erupt in BVI as Citizens Galvanize Against UK Takeover

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**Protests have erupted in the BVI following a Commission of Inquiry report that recommended a two-year takeover of the territory by the United Kingdom to root out corruption.**

One day after UK Overseas Minister Amanda Milling arrived in the British Virgin Islands on Sunday to discuss which recommendations outlined in the Commission of Inquiry report should be implemented, protests erupted, with hundreds gathering outside the official residence of Governor John Rankin in Tortola on Monday to signal their opposition to the imposition of direct rule by the UK for two years — perhaps the most consequential of Commissioner Sir Gary Hickinbottom's recommendations.

A similar move took place in the Turks and Caicos Islands in 2009, after a corruption scandal enveloped former Premier Michael Misick and several members of his Cabinet of Ministers.

This suggestion has been decried by many in the BVI as a return to colonialism, much as it was in the TCI. With the Caribbean already a repository of negative sentiment towards the British crown and the UK generally following two roundly-criticized visits by members of the Royal Family, the protests in the BVI serve to ramp up the critical rhetoric against Britain, accusing the UK government of running roughshod over democracy in its overseas territory.

Protest Organizer Bishop John Ivan Cline of the New Life Baptist Church told local reporters that the demonstration was meant to send a message to authorities in the UK that the population would not stand for the removal of self-governance after 70 years and will not tolerate being denied the opportunity of having a democratically elected government. “We want the opportunity to go back to the polls and elect a democratic government to rule over us,” Bishop Cline said. “But this colonialist mindset that you will tell us what to do is wrong, unjust, and we will not stand for it”.

In his report, Sir Gary concluded that the ongoing and severe deficits in good governance practices over several administrations would not be addressed by a simple change in elected officials, but needed to be completely rooted out from political culture in the territory. He argued that elected officials seemed not only to ignore but to actively encourage the dysfunction in government, and argued that a temporary return to direct rule from the UK was the only way to effectively address the deep-seated issues in the territory.

Public opposition to this possibility was preceded by that of acting Premier Dr. Natalio Wheatley, who issued a statement last week in which he addressed the recommendations aimed at reforming governance in the territory. “In my view, those can be achieved without the partial or full suspension of the constitution in which direct rule would apply,” the acting Premier’s statement read. Instead, Wheatley suggested what he called an “enhanced cooperation mechanism” between Governor Rankin and the executive branch, to quote “swiftly implement recommendations under a very tight timetable, without resorting to direct rule”.

The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, of which the BVI is an associate member, has also come out against the possibility of direct rule over the territory by the UK, calling the abolition of Parliament in the BVI a quote “retrograde step” which went contrary to the UN Proclamation of Human Rights to be free of colonial rule.

Meanwhile, the organization said it “noted with great concern” the arrest of Premier Fahie, and reminded the public that he was entitled to the presumption of innocence, procedural fairness, and a free and fair trial within a reasonable time, as is everyone charged with a criminal offense.

Fahie, for his part, is asserting diplomatic immunity and demanding his immediate release from custody. A filing by his attorney Theresa Van Vliet on Monday claims that as the duly elected and sitting head of government in the BVI, Fahie is immune from arrest and detention, which entitles him to immediate and unconditional release from the federal lockup in Miami where he currently resides. Van Vliet further argues that there was no known express waiver of Fahie’s immunity. The U.S. government has [rejected this claim](#).

Yet even as his attorney argues for his release on the strength of his position as the Premier of the British Virgin Islands, Fahie’s own party is urging him to step aside for the good of the good of the country. On Saturday, acting Premier Wheatley announced that he, by unanimous vote, had replaced Fahie as chair of the Virgin Islands Party, and that his colleague Parliamentarians were taking steps to appoint him Premier. “Given the practical realities of the current situation, it is

incumbent that steps be taken to have a new Premier substantively appointed to this critical constitutional post”, said Dr. Wheatley. Opposition Leader Marlon Penn echoed calls for Fahie’s resignation on Sunday, and also criticized the VIP and acting Premier Wheatley for thus far failing to denounce the Premier’s alleged actions.

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