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BVI Opposition Member Crosses the Floor to Join Majority Government

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Angela Burns **January 21, 2020**

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Alvera Maduro-Caines By. ANGELA BURNS/VI CONSORTIUM

ROAD TOWN, TORTOLA — In an unprecedented move, Opposition Member of the Virgin Islands House of Assembly, Alvera Maduro-Caines, made a shocking announcement that she had resigned from her National Democratic Party NDP and joined the ruling Virgin Islands Party VIP government.

In a joint press conference with Premier and Leader of the VIP Andrew Fahie, Mrs. Maduro-Caines said she submitted her resignation to the NDP, which she has been a part of for the past two plus terms, representing the 6th Electoral District.

“It takes a great deal of courage to make the bold step that Honourable Maduro-Caines has taken and I’d like to congratulate her on her strength,” declared Mr. Fahie, as he welcomed her to the team.

He thanked her for the confidence expressed in the VIP government and its vision for the Territory.

The premier said this is a very important time in the political, social and economic life of the BVI with some “serious storm clouds gathering on the horizon”. He said there is a need for all leaders to step back and appreciate the big picture.

Mr. Fahie referred to the constant attacks by international forces on the BVI’s financial services sector, one of the twin pillars of the economy. In 2019, the BVI lost about \$30m in revenue due to a decline in registration directly linked to new policies and conditions “forced upon us”.

He said events such as this threaten the BVI’s ability to accurately rebuild in a faster way, to upgrade and maintain infrastructure and to provide for the needs of citizens in a more timely manner. More than 80% of the territory’s infrastructure was wiped out during the 2017 hurricanes and the rebuilding process, while it has come a long way, is still ongoing.

The premier said his government is focusing on diversifying the economic foundation and he is glad that the former Opposition Member recognizes the broader issues and is aligning herself with the vision of his party.

“There’s a lot of work that needs to be done and we need as many hands on deck as we can get,” he said. He said she came not asking for anything, she didn’t switch for political mileage, rather she wants to help the territory.

For her part, Mrs. Maduro-Caines, who defeated 31 year veteran political giant the late Omar Hodge, to win the 6th District seat in 2011, said the decision was made after deep contemplation and prayer over the past several weeks, about the challenges of the people of the Virgin Islands.

“Having considered the vision for the Territory outlined by Premier Andrew A Fahie in his 2020 Budget Address, I believe this is a plan that will make strides in positioning the BVI to where it needs to be to secure the present and future for all Virgin Islanders,” she declared.

Mrs. Maduro-Caines said this is a plan that is deserving of the full support of all patriotic citizens.

She lauded the progress of the VIP government over the last 11 months, “despite the obstacles”. She highlighted ongoing programmes to allow citizens to more easily access industry training and academic qualifications, develop and pursue business opportunities and to leap into the arena of digital business.

“I believe this is the direction that our territory must be headed,” she stated, as she advised of her resignation from the NDP and become a member of the sitting government in the House of Assembly. “I pledge my support to Honourable Andrew Fahie and his government in the furtherance and pursuit of the vision of transforming the Virgin Islands into a leading regional economy and to the uplifting of Virgin Islanders across the territory.”

Up to appearing at the press conference this afternoon, she said she had not received any feedback from the NDP, but in her letter, she voiced her dissatisfaction that the NDP’s “party structure is not working”.

NDP Interim Chairman and Leader of the Opposition in the House of Assembly Marlon Penn said the resignation of Mrs. Maduro-Caines is regrettable, "as she has always been a strong representation of the NDP's core philosophy and values, where people and family are at the heart of who we are. I am truly disappointed that her decision was made without consultation with me or the party."

He said the NDP, which governed for two terms prior to 2019, remains united and strongly opposed to "the spectacle of form over substance, ineptitude rather than competence, the tyranny of victimisation, the prevalence of cronyism and the many other ills perpetrated by the VIP Government on the people of this Territory, in just under one year."

The NDP was handed a convincing defeat in the February 2019 General Elections, when a revamped VIP swept to victory with 8 of 13 seats.

Reports on infighting within the NDP were proven true when the party split shortly before the last elections, resulting in the formation of the Progressive Virgin Islands Movement PVIM. The NDP managed to only capture three seats, including Mrs. Maduro Caines, while the PVIM won one seat. Another party, Progressives United, won a lone seat.

With the crossing of the floor of Mrs. Maduro-Caines, the VIP's majority has been increased to nine. She is the third female now in the ruling party, joining Territorial At Large Members Shereen Flax-Charles and Sharie de Castro.

Premier Fahie shot down suggestions that Mrs. Maduro-Caines is being disloyal with this move. He said she has not committed political adultery. "She was loyal to where she was, but now she wants to exercise her passion to better help the people of her district and the young people of the territory."

He said today is a new day in the Virgin Islands. He said members of the government will be visiting the 6th district to show solidarity with their representative.