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# BVI 40 Percent Complete With 'Ambitious' Reform Agenda at the End of Initial 6-Month Timeframe, Says Premier Wheatley

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**Roadtown, Tortola in the BVI By. V.I. CONSORTIUM**

Six months after committing to undertake sweeping investigations and reforms of governance and administration in the British Virgin Islands, Premier Dr. Natalio Wheatley says the process is about 40 percent complete.

A Commission of Inquiry conducted over several months in 2021 by Rt. Hon Sir Gary Hickinbottom, resulted in a report published in April of last year which contained 49 recommendations. During a recent address by the premier to his colleagues in the House of Assembly, Mr. Wheatley said of those 49, "15 of the recommendations have been completed and

33 recommendations are in progress," as of December 31st.

"The recommendations are currently split into 132 Actions," the premier continued. "Of these, 52 (39%) are completed, 31 (23%) are in progress and on track, 26 (20%) are in progress but experiencing challenges and 22 (17%) have not been started as yet."

The items not yet addressed, Premier Wheatley explained, depend on the completion of actions still in progress.

Initially, a 6-month timeline was agreed for the implementation of the COI recommendations between the BVI's Government of National Unity and the Government of the United Kingdom, but as the magnitude of the task at hand became clearer, it became obvious that this had been, as the premier put it, an "ambitious" target.

Dr. Wheatley noted that the Constitutional Review Commission asked for 18 months rather than 12 within which to complete their work. He also noted the mountain of legislative work needed for successful reform, which presented a major bottleneck given the limited number of drafters in the Attorney General's Chambers. Government needed to address this issue, the premier urged, if the needed work is to be completed within an acceptable timeframe.

Personnel issues extended to experiencing challenges in selecting suitable reviewers for more important recommendations. Some reviewers have also asked for more time.

"Madam Speaker, the Government of National Unity has recognized that while reform must be done in a timely and expedited manner, the public must be informed and their views must be reflected in the reform for it to be sustainable and meaningful. As such, a few recommendations will need to include an extended period of public consultation," the premier argued.

Another wrinkle Dr. Wheatley highlighted is "with the General Elections constitutionally due by May of this year, the House of Assembly will have to be dissolved by March of this year. While the Government of National Unity will attempt to tackle as much of the legislative work that is possible before elections, we recognize the challenges to see the full legislative program through."

As agreed in a November meeting, Mr. Wheatley says he wrote to Governor John Rankin requesting that he seek time extensions from the UK Government. The matter will also be raised with UK Minister for Overseas Territories Lord Goldsmith, who is currently in the BVI for talks with the premier and other officials.

Despite the delays, the premier said he was pleased with the progress being made by those tasked with implementing the numerous reforms. "The COI Recommendations Implementation Unit (COI Unit) has been fulfilling its mandate of coordinating with other implementing actors to ensure a holistic approach and smooth implementation of the reforms," he expounded.

"A number of reviewers and auditors have been hard at work sifting through the voluminous body of documents with respect to their respective tasks. The Steering Committee has provided oversight of the process, and monthly tripartite meetings, chaired by the governor and myself, and attended by ministers, the attorney general, the financial secretary and permanent secretaries, have been on schedule," the premier continued.

Mr. Wheatley reiterated his call for the public to take a keen interest in the work being done, assuring that it was not just a "box-ticking" exercise, but one which would result in a strengthened

governance system with new policies and processes.

Recent submissions, he said, including some highly anticipated reports from the auditor general, are currently being reviewed before being submitted first to Cabinet, then tabled in the House and ultimately published for public scrutiny and feedback.

“We recognize, and I know the [British] Virgin Islands community agrees, that for what is at stake and the benefits that will accrue from strengthening our governance systems and processes, it is necessary and it will be worth it for us to push ourselves a bit harder,” he said.

“We will continue to maintain our momentum to complete the reform resulting from the recommendations from the Commission of Inquiry report.”

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