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BVI Government Minister Urging Colleagues to Complete Land Transfer to Community College Pending for Two Decades

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H. Lavity Stoutt Community College in Tortola, BVI.

On the heels of Hamilton Lavity Stoutt holiday in the British Virgin Islands last Monday, the territory's Minister for Natural Resources and Labor, Melvin Turnbull is pushing for the completion of a land transfer to the community college that bears Stoutt's name — a transaction that has been pending since 2003.

In that year, the BVI government acquired 134 acres ostensibly on behalf of the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College (HLSCC), which has been providing tertiary education to BVI residents since 1990.

Since then, the institution has grown significantly, expanding to now offer up to 23 different associate degrees and 21 professional qualifications.

“The college provides student life enrichment, a performing arts venue, Virgin Islands Studies, and access to baccalaureate and master’s degree programs through collaboration with universities abroad,” Mr. Turnbull boasted, reminding his parliamentary colleagues of the significance of HLSCC during a House of Assembly sitting on Thursday.

He expressed how proud he is of HLSCC’s contribution to the future of countless BVI residents and international students, before urging his fellow members of Parliament to action.

“In 2019, a Cabinet decision was made to enable the college to expand its operations to further develop our people through additional infrastructural development. ...The decision was to officially transfer a total of 134 acres of land to the Board of Governors of HLSCC,” Mr. Turnbull began.

“Madam Speaker, it has been brought to my attention that only 13 acres...have been transferred due to land swap agreements with the Department of Agriculture. The delay in finalizing this transfer of land is of great reproach, considering that the total of 134 acres was procured by the government on behalf of the College...yes, Madam Speaker, 20 years ago!” he exclaimed.

Mr. Turnbull told the House of Assembly, as minister with responsibility for Lands, he hopes to work with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology to finally complete this pending transaction, adding that the Ministry has an obligation to uphold the original transfer agreement for the sake of national development and must do so as soon as possible.

In addition, his ministry has initiated talks with the College to acquire land on Virgin Gorda which will give the institution the opportunity to build a second permanent campus. Over the past three decades, HLSCC’s presence on Virgin Gorda has been facilitated through rentals of commercial properties.

“The president and Board of Governors have put forth a vision for the college which sees the Virgin Gorda Campus becoming a mecca for hospitality and culinary arts. Virgin Gorda being a prime destination for tourism, this development would garner interest from the community for much needed growth in the relevant industries”, Mr. Turnbull said, before urging the relevant departments and stakeholders to work with the Department of Natural Resources and Labor, and H. Lavity Stoutt Community College, to secure the future of the territory.

Born on Tortola in 1929, Hamilton Lavity Stoutt, whose birthday is celebrated annually on the first Monday in March, was the first chief minister of the British Virgin Islands and the founding chair of the British Virgin Islands Community College Board of Trustees. The educational institution was renamed after Mr. Stoutt in 1993.