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UK Government Expresses Concern Over Slow British Virgin Islands Reform Process

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Downing Street is a street in Westminster in London that houses the official residences and offices of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the Chancellor of the Exchequer By. GETTY IMAGES

The reform process in the British Virgin Islands is lagging behind, the U.K. government thinks.

That is the sentiment conveyed in a letter sent by UK Minister for Overseas Territories Lord Zac Goldsmith.

Addressed to BVI Governor John Rankin, the missive is in response to the governor's second quarterly review of the progress made in implementing the significant reforms undertaken by the BVI government in an attempt to stave off a pending Order in Council that would impose direct

rule on the UK territory.

“I am particularly concerned that there have been signs of insufficient commitment in some specific areas,” Mr. Goldsmith told Governor Rankin. The 19 recommendations that were marked completed by the end of January, Mr. Goldsmith noted, were mostly in Governor Rankin’s area of responsibility. Otherwise, “too many areas lag substantially behind and I am concerned that much of what has been delivered so far does not yet represent genuine legislative reform and safeguards to prevent future abuse.”

While acknowledging that some of the initial timelines presented were “unrealistic,” Mr. Goldsmith nevertheless agreed with Mr. Rankin’s assessment that “serious efforts, and a clear prioritization of time and resources, are required to pick up the pace to deliver the reform the people of the BVI want and deserve.”

The Overseas Territories minister therefore asked the governor to sit with the government that will be in place following the April 24 election, to come up with a new timetable for completion of all the action items that were agreed.

“This should include ambitious yet achievable deadlines to ensure the necessary reforms have taken root no later than May 2024,” Mr. Goldsmith said, reiterating that the Order in Council will not be lifted until all reforms have been implemented.

Mr. Goldsmith instructed the BVI Governor to consider whether he needed more resources, technical expertise, or a “grant of additional powers” to assist him in supporting or accelerating the reform program.

The revised timeline is expected along with Governor Rankin’s next Quarterly Review at the end of May.