



STATEMENT BY PREMIER AND MINISTER OF FINANCE
HONOURABLE ANDREW A. FAHIE

**PREMIER CALLS FOR LIVE STREAMING OF THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY:
WANTS NO SECRETS**

19 JANUARY, 2021

Good day and God's Blessings to all the people of the Virgin Islands and beyond.

Yesterday, 18 January, 2021, His Excellency Governor Augustus J. U. Jaspert announced that a Commission of Inquiry would be held to inquire into the conduct of public affairs as these relate to allegations of corruption or misconduct. The full details of the Terms of Reference of the one-man Commission have not yet been advised, but the Governor has indicated that this would be done in the near future.

It is my considered view, and that of your Government, that this Commission of Inquiry should be open to the public and broadcast live, including on the Internet, given the international interest that exists in this matter, and I have so advised the Governor by letter today.

As I indicated in my statement yesterday, your Government has no objection to the holding of a transparent Commission of Inquiry.

Your Government, which you elected 23 months ago, has nothing to hide and we do not wish for anything to be hidden from you the people. Clearing the air on long-outstanding contentious issues will help us to gain closure in those issues and move forward, ensuring that trust in public institutions is restored and that institutions are further strengthened. This is important for our journey to self-determination.

Persons who have done wrong must be held accountable. And persons who have been innocently and falsely accused deserve to have their names cleared and their reputations restored.

This is the very reason why, even as an Opposition Representative, I have been calling for Commissions of Inquiry into certain matters – as I have done since becoming Premier 23 months ago.

So, I remain steadfast in these principles, as does all the other Members of your Government, although Governor Jaspert always advised us as Cabinet Members that before a Commission of Inquiry can be convened, that to ensure due process, all Government institutions established to ensure accountability, transparency and Good Governance must be allowed to function and produce their reports.

I also wish to reiterate that anyone who has evidence for the Commission should provide that information to the Commission. This is your opportunity. This is your right.

Governor Jaspert's announcement and a similar statement released yesterday by UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab have been receiving wide attention in the international media. Both my Government and I learnt about the Commission of Inquiry for the first time at the same time as the entire world, and I am sure many of you have seen the statements and the media reports.

While both statements contained elements that were accurate, they also contained comments that are grossly inaccurate and which have cast the BVI, the present and past BVI Government and the people of the BVI in a very disparaging light to the world population.

According to the parable, one of the most hurtful and dangerous things that cannot be called back is the spoken word – and in this case the written word. So we must trust that a transparent, public Commission of Inquiry will clear up those issues in the international space.

But, we must be mindful that the BVI's economy is heavily dependent on international business; and success in international business depends on your reputation. We have companies and individuals who are today having to face international business associates who are reading uncomplimentary reports about the BVI and its people in the international press.

The BVI's international reputation and indeed the reputation of Virgin Islanders and persons who do business in the BVI are affected by these reports that are being syndicated through and republished from the UK media houses.

Given the international interest in - and the international implications of - this Commission of Inquiry, I have today written the Governor requesting that the Commission's hearings should be open to the public and should be broadcast live through the various media channels, including live internet streaming. It is common practice in many jurisdictions for hearings in Commissions of Inquiry to be broadcast live. This aids the public in having accurate information and in seeing that the Inquiry is conducted in a transparent manner with no secrets or hidden agendas.

Section 2 of the Commissions of Inquiry Act 1880 as amended provides that unless there is any contrary direction, inquiries should be public. Section 9 of the Act provides for the Commissioner to make rules for the conduct and management of the Inquiry. So, if there is any doubt about live broadcasts, Section 9 should clear this up.

I wish to take this opportunity to advise members of the public to get a copy of the Commissions of Inquiry Act and familiarize yourself with it. I will be asking that GIS assist in making the Commissions of Inquiry Act 1880 accessible on the Government website. This Act was passed 140 years ago and has undergone several amendments since - the last being 50 years ago. It is important that all Virgin Islanders learn about the mechanisms in our legal architecture. And, this is an opportunity to learn about how Commissions of Inquiry work.

For instance, many persons may not be aware that anyone who is the subject of the inquiry or who may be in any way implicated or concerned in the matter is entitled to have a legal representative present to look after their legal rights. And, a subpoena to attend or to give evidence before the Commission must be treated in the same way as a summons from the High Court. Being informed will help you to properly participate in the Inquiry.

So let us utilise the opportunity of this Commission of Inquiry to build ourselves in our ongoing journey to self-determination.

I thank you and may God bless these beautiful Virgin Islands and her people.