

Inaugural Address of British Virgin Islands Premier D. Orlando Smith

9 November 2011

I greet you the people of our beloved Virgin Islands with a humble and grateful heart. I thank God on whose advice you depended to allow us to gain victory at the polls on November 08.

Today is a new day for this country. We all, no matter our party affiliation, must with one agreement work to improve the quality of life in our country. As I said in my victory speech last evening: at the end of the day this is our beloved home and we all want the best for it. So let the healing begin today. Let the journey of recovery begin for our territory in an atmosphere of goodwill. Let us put our country first, under God, and let us work together to reclaim and restore the greatness of our territory.

Our beloved territory needs the ideas and assistance of all its people. Today, I therefore call on all who care about our Virgin Islands, no matter your party affiliation, your ethnicity or country of origin to join with us in moving this country forward. There is much work to do and we will need your help, your input, your ideas and your involvement.

With your vote of confidence you have given us an overwhelming command to work for you and to work with you. As we did at our many campaign rallies we once more make a solemn promise to you that we will not make decisions in seclusion or exclusion. We will strive to always seek your advice, we will welcome your input in decisions we will have to make on your behalf.

To rebuild the BVI together we must and will keep the lines of communications open. I truly believe that we all want a better Virgin Islands but we all have different opinions and ideas on how to get where we need to be. We will keep you apprised of plans and activities that we carry out on your behalf. We hope in turn that you will continue to respond to us and to let us know what we're doing right and what you think we're doing wrong. We learnt the hard way of doing otherwise four years ago and will not repeat that error again.

Ladies and gentlemen, as of today we only have a vague idea of what financial condition our country is in. We are asking every person in this Territory to have patience with us as we try to unravel the spider's web our Government has become.

We will reacquaint ourselves with you the loyal and hardworking public Civil Servants on whom we have to depend for the next four years and hopefully beyond. We rely on you to help us to help the people of this country under whose mandate we will serve.

Some hard decisions may have to be made concerning decisions made by the last Government especially those in recent weeks that were purely self-serving and not in the interest of the BVI. Whatever we do we sincerely promise to do our best on your behalf, always keeping in mind that we all have to live here and that we want peace and harmony to be the hallmark of our administration.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our road to victory was paved with promises that we will fix the economy. I reiterate that promise today. We will keep that promise. Our first priority therefore is the economy and to get it right. We will rely on our Manifesto and your further ideas to do so.

We have taken careful note of the ills that had beset our country: from poor infrastructure, including our road network which is in dire need of resuscitation, to the individual needs of our citizens including the need for better access to health care, better education for all including our children with special needs, better care for our seniors, and the need to give more attention to the needs of our young people – our future.

Ladies and Gentlemen change must come, given the last four tough years we have faced.

This morning a BVI voter sent me one page from an article about another Caribbean territory that found its economy in a state of decline, until it changed course. It identified five problem areas that needed fixing:

- 1) Attitudes: a service economy where a large part of the population resent serving
- 2) Prices: in relative terms, value for money was in decline for many years
- 3) Labour, management, race, politics etc: the country no longer worked as a team
- 4) Environment: Loss of pride
- 5) Greed: Unrealistic expectations

Do any of these sound familiar? We have got to roll up our sleeves and fix these problems and fix them now. Ladies and gentlemen, we must fix them now, if we are to regain our competitive advantage.

Another friend's congratulatory note read in part as follows: 'We need to remember that the rest of the world owes us nothing and that it is our responsibility to offer services that make us relevant.' I could not have said this better.

People of the Virgin Islands, together we will rebuild a sustainable economy around the twin pillars of tourism and financial services where we will return BVI to our state of full employment for all the people of this territory. I call on each citizen of this territory to join us in this great work.

We will actively encourage investment in both our tourism and financial services sectors. And let me be clear: when I talk of investment I speak of investment by BVI Islanders as well as investment from international sources that does not compete with or strangle local investment. Investment is the key to our economic strength.

Further Ladies and Gentlemen, we will work together with you to build an economy that will provide opportunities for you to create your own businesses, and will further work with you to make sure that once you have seized those opportunities that you will be successful.

My victory message of yesterday was in part to the Youth of this territory and I repeat some of what I said then:

The youth of this territory represent the future. During the campaign and in the elections they spoke loud and clear about the future they wish to see. I remain full of admiration for their talent, creativity, enthusiasm and energy.”

I was happy to use all the social media available to me during the campaign. I found the relationships I established on Face Book with young people especially rewarding. last night I gave a special shout out to my many Face Book friends who really kept me buoyant throughout the campaign with their positive vibes and good humour. I do so again today and as I said then I won't put any of you on blast but you know who you are!

I also said yesterday that it is clear that this government will not pay lip service to the needs of our young people. They will play a vital role in the development of our territory. Four of them were on our slate in the recent elections. And what a huge impact they made. We will always be proud of them and they will continue to be a part of the team that will put our country first.

We campaigned on a youth Agenda. Let me say this to the young people of the BVI regardless of your political persuasion: A dynamic Youth Agenda will remain central to this new Government's Agenda.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Our Government will be a people's Government where each one of you will have access to your nine representatives and you will be able to make your concerns and opinions known and expect to have them acted upon wherever possible. By the same token we must also take into account the views of all the representatives of the people. We can only commit ourselves to work for you and with you and we ask you to help us to serve as your very good servants over the next four years.

Continue to take us to the throne of grace in your prayers and the nine of us in turn ask God's blessings on each and every person in this beautiful country. Once more our grateful thanks for your support. With God's help and your prayers we will not let you down.

Thank you and we pray that God will continue to bless you and may he continue to bless our beloved Virgin Islands.