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British Virgin Islands

Working paper prepared by the Secretariat

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Note: The information contained in the present paper has been derived from public sources, including those of the territorial Government, and from information transmitted to the Secretary-General by the administering Power under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations. Information was transmitted by the administering Power on 14 December 2020. Further details are contained in previous working papers, available from www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/documents/workingpapers.



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The Territory at a glance

Territory: The British Virgin Islands is a Non-Self-Governing Territory under the Charter of the United Nations administered by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Representative of administering Power: Governor John James Rankin (since January 2021).

Geography: Located approximately 100 km east of Puerto Rico and 25 km from the United States Virgin Islands, the Territory comprises a group of some 60 islands, islets and cays that form an archipelago with the United States Virgin Islands. Twenty of the islands are inhabited. The major islands are Tortola, Virgin Gorda, Anegada and Jost Van Dyke.

Land area: 153 km²

Exclusive economic zone: 80,117 km²

Population: 31,197 (2017), of whom 39 per cent are citizens, or “belongers”. The great majority of “non-belongers” hail from countries in the Caribbean region, North America and Europe.

Life expectancy at birth: 77.4 years; 74.4 years for men and 81.3 years for women.

Language: English

Capital: Road Town, located on the largest island, Tortola.

Head of territorial Government: Premier Hon. Andrew A. Fahie (since February 2019).

Main political parties: National Democratic Party; Virgin Islands Party; Progressives United; Progressive Virgin Islands Movement.

Elections: Most recent: 25 February 2019; next: 2023.

Legislature: 15-member unicameral House of Assembly.

Gross domestic product per capita: \$33,294 (2020, Ministry of Finance estimate).

Economy: Financial services and tourism.

Main trading partners: The United States of America, the United Kingdom and the Caribbean countries and territories.

Unemployment rate: 2.8 per cent (2017).

Monetary unit: United States dollar (\$).

Brief history: The earliest known inhabitants of the Territory were the Arawaks and the Caribs, indigenous peoples of the region. The Dutch established the first permanent European settlement in 1648. British planters took control of the islands in 1666, and the Territory attained the status of a British colony.

I. Constitutional, political and legal issues

1. In accordance with the Virgin Islands Constitution Order 2007, the British Crown appoints a governor whose responsibilities include defence, internal security, external affairs, the terms and conditions of service for persons in the public service and the administration of the courts. In some areas of external affairs that relate to certain matters falling within ministerial portfolios, the Constitution provides for the territorial Government to have delegated responsibility. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has reserved powers to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the British Virgin Islands. In terms of external relations, the territorial Government is entrusted to negotiate treaties in specific areas, such as matters related to the offshore financial services industry.

2. The 2007 Constitution provided for a more formally structured cabinet-style Government for the executive branch. The Cabinet consists of the Governor; the Premier, appointed by the Governor from among the locally elected members of the House of Assembly; four other Ministers, appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Premier; and one ex officio member, namely, the Attorney General. The Governor presides over the Cabinet but does not have a voting right. The agenda is agreed upon by the Cabinet Steering Committee, consisting of the Governor, the Premier and the Cabinet Secretary. The House of Assembly consists of the Speaker, the Attorney General (ex officio) and 13 elected members – 9 from one-member electoral districts and 4 representing the Territory at large.

3. General elections are constitutionally mandated to be held at least once every four years. Candidates are elected on the basis of a simple majority. Persons voting must be 18 years of age or over and have “belonger” status. Belonger status includes the right to work without a permit and the right to vote. In practice, a person must reside continuously in the Territory for 20 years before he or she may apply for permanent residence and, subsequently, belonger status. The most recent general election was held on 25 February 2019. The Virgin Islands Party, led by Andrew A. Fahie, won 8 of the 13 seats. The National Democratic Party won three seats, the Progressive Virgin Islands Movement one seat and Progressives United also one seat.

4. The law of the British Virgin Islands comprises the common law of England and legislation that is enacted either by the territorial legislature or by the United Kingdom on behalf of the Territory. The judiciary is administered by the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court, which is headquartered in Saint Lucia. It consists of the High Court of Justice and the Court of Appeal. There is a magistrates’ court, which hears prescribed civil and criminal cases, a juvenile court and a court of summary jurisdiction. There are three resident High Court judges and a visiting Court of Appeal, which comprises the Chief Justice and two judges of appeal and sits twice a year in the Territory. The Privy Council of the United Kingdom is the final court of appeal. The British Overseas Territories Act 2002 provides for the granting of British citizenship to “British Overseas Territory citizens”.

5. On 6 November 2018, the Government of the British Virgin Islands submitted written evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons of the Parliament of the United Kingdom, within the framework of the inquiry entitled “The future of the UK Overseas Territories”. In the document, the territorial Government stated that a constitutional review was now due, after more than a decade since the adoption of the Virgin Islands Constitution Order 2007. It also referred to the decision by the United Kingdom to impose public registers of beneficial ownership on its overseas territories by threat of Order in Council (see para. 17 below) as a departure from conventional United Kingdom policy towards the British Virgin Islands, which had an impact on their relationship and the right to self-determination. A new and

fundamentally different “constitutional construct” was required, one better suited to the strategic goals and aspirations of the Territory. The territorial Government was calling for a constitutional review to determine those desires and aspirations so that the Territory could move towards greater self-governance and to a deepening of the democratic institutions of government, as well as to enhance good governance, transparency and accountability.

6. At the Caribbean Regional Seminar on Decolonization, held from 2 to 4 May 2019, the Premier of the British Virgin Islands stated that, in recent years, the relationship between the administering Power and the Territory had become increasingly strained, as the United Kingdom had become more and more intrusive in areas of governance constitutionally devolved to the Territory’s democratically elected Government. He added that there had been a number of worrying developments over the course of that decade, which had signalled a rolling back of the progress that had been achieved earlier. He stated that the Territory was due for a constitutional review. Moving forward, the territorial Government would seek a relationship that required the international accountability provided for by the decolonization framework of the United Nations. Accordingly, in support of the Territory’s national development objectives and in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, the Territory wished to deepen its relationship with the United Nations. In their concluding observations, the participating members of the Special Committee welcomed the statement of the Premier that the Special Committee had a meaningful role to play and the proposals put forward to the Committee to facilitate a self-governing assessment of the Territory, evaluating any democratic deficiencies in the relationship between the Territory and the administering Power; dispatch a visiting mission to the Territory; facilitate an education campaign on self-determination to raise awareness on the range of options besides independence; and sit in as an official observer on public deliberations during the Territory’s next constitutional review.

7. At the 9th meeting of the Special Committee, held on 27 June 2019, the representative of the British Virgin Islands stated that the Territory’s main priorities were recovery from the damage caused by Hurricanes Irma and Maria, in 2017, and sustainable development. The United Kingdom had continued to provide assistance since the hurricanes had struck. The representative added that the Territory wished to deepen its relationship with the United Nations through a proposed comprehensive partnership agreement, under which technical assistance would be provided for its national development plan.

8. The representative of the British Virgin Islands stated that the United Kingdom had been a good partner to the Territory and that there had been positive exchanges on financial services. However, the Territory took issue with the proposal contained in a report issued by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons in February 2019 to set up public registers of beneficial ownership in the British Virgin Islands and other overseas territories without the consent of the British Overseas Territories, including the British Virgin Islands. The Government of the United Kingdom had, however, acknowledged that the British Virgin Islands, with its beneficial ownership secure search system, was at the forefront of efforts to safeguard the global financial system. The Government of the United Kingdom had confirmed that it would not use orders in council to enforce the creation of public registers, impose the legalization of same-sex marriage or alter belonging citizenship status.

9. Aware that the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism would end in 2020, and without any intention to embarrass the United Kingdom, the British Virgin Islands had expressed to the United Nations that the Territory needed a Fourth International Decade because the Territory would need more time and support to consider a better status on the ladder of self-determination. The representative of

the British Virgin Islands explained that, although independence from the United Kingdom was not a priority for the Government of the Territory, the people should be aware of their options, such as free association, in particular in the context of the constitutional review that was due to be performed in 2020. He requested that the Special Committee send a visiting mission to the Territory.

10. A Commission of Inquiry was established by the Governor on 18 January 2021 to consider whether corruption, abuse of office or other serious dishonesty may have taken place among public, elected and statutory officials in recent years. Its purpose is to review the Territory's governance and make recommendations for improvement. The sole commissioner of inquiry started his work on 22 January and is expected to report in six months' time.

II. Budget

11. The fiscal year of the Government of the British Virgin Islands runs from January to December. According to the territorial Government, the 2021 budget was estimated at \$402.1 million, with recurrent expenditure and capital expenditure estimated at \$325.2 million and \$62.5 million, respectively, and \$12.5 million was allocated for debt servicing. The Ministry of Natural Resources, Labour and Immigration received the largest share of the recurrent allocations, 15.04 per cent, owing to the reassignment of the National Health Scheme to this Ministry. A 13.8 per cent share of the recurrent budget was allocated to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth Affairs, Fisheries and Agriculture, while the Ministry of Transportation, Works and Utilities was allocated 12.92 per cent of the recurrent budget.

III. Economic conditions

A. General

12. During the period from 7 August to 19 September 2017, the British Virgin Islands were affected by an unprecedented flood event and two (previously rare) category 5 hurricanes – Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria. The Territory experienced catastrophic levels of damage in the amount of an estimated \$3.6 billion across the entire economy, equivalent to more than three and a half times the annual gross domestic product (GDP). The sustained performance of the financial services industry helped to cushion the impact of the notable decline in tourism and other industries after the devastating events of 2017. As outlined in the 2021 budget estimates produced by the territorial Government, despite the slight contraction of the economy in 2018, the economy was well on its way to recovery following the devastating losses in 2017. Growth in nominal GDP was estimated at 5.4 per cent in 2019 and was expected to continue into 2020. However, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic changed the projected trajectory for 2020. The trade, tourism and financial services markets began to rapidly contract following the declaration of the pandemic in March 2020. In an effort to keep the people of the Territory safe, lockdowns and curfews were implemented, and borders were closed in March 2020, which resulted in the suspension of all tourism activities. The GDP target for 2020 was revised downwards as a result of the pandemic. Following the revision, the top three largest individual sector activities contributing to the revised GDP for 2020 were financial and insurance activities (21.3 per cent), real estate (10.6 per cent) and wholesale and retail (10.2 per cent). The main economic pillars continue to be tourism and financial services. Owing to the weight of these economic pillars, any major negative shock to these activities would result in substantial losses in terms of economic output. The impact of the pandemic will be an initial potential loss of about

14.8 per cent in economic activities for 2020 compared to 2019, and possible further contractions in 2021 and 2022, if conditions remain the same or worsen.

13. The “COVID-19 human and economic assessment of impact” report for the British Virgin Islands was published on 15 June 2020. The report was produced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the territorial Government and with the collaboration of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). In the report, a number of interventions aimed at ensuring that the territory can weather further shocks and rebuild in the wake of the crisis were outlined, and a GDP decline of 13–17 per cent was projected for 2020. According to the report, the economic impact of the pandemic had been felt most strongly in the tourism sector, which accounts for roughly a third of GDP.

14. The “Virgin Islands Strategic Blue Economy Roadmap 2020–2025”, developed by the territorial Government with support from UNDP, sets out an integrated approach to ocean-based sustainable development that brings together economy, environment and society, consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Aichi Target 11 of the Strategic Plan for Biological Diversity 2011–2020 and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

B. Financial services

15. According to the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan 2020–2022, growth in the financial services industry is anticipated to continue to decline in the medium-term (2020–2022), as the industry is faced with an unprecedented level of uncertainty stemming from the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, or “Brexit”, increasing regulations, possible “blacklisting” by the European Union of international finance centres, an unstable global macroeconomic environment, reputational risk, new competitors and changing client expectations. Further regulations, including on the common reporting standard to be fully implemented by 2025 and the public register of beneficial ownership that all British overseas territories must establish by the end of 2023, along with lower-cost technology-driven innovations, would continue to retard growth in the industry.

16. According to the 2021 budget estimates, the implementation of the economic substance requirements in 2019 resulted in a decline in new incorporations and reregistrations of companies. Between January and September 2020, there was a substantial negative growth of 20.9 per cent in new registrations compared with the same period in 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic has added to the many challenges the financial industry has faced and continues to face.

17. In May 2018, the Parliament of the United Kingdom passed the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act, pursuant to which the Secretary of State is required to provide all reasonable assistance to the Governments of overseas territories to enable each of those Governments to establish a publicly accessible register of the beneficial ownership of companies registered in its jurisdiction and to prepare, no later than 31 December 2020, a draft Order in Council requiring any overseas territory that has not introduced such a register to do so. That deadline has since been extended to 2023.

C. Tourism

18. According to the 2021 budget estimates, from the fourth quarter of 2018, tourism had begun to recover. In 2019, there were almost 900,000 visitors, which represented a 118.8 per cent increase compared with 2018. Although there was

negative growth in tourist arrivals for January 2020, falling by 18.9 per cent compared with January 2019, in February 2020 there was a significant increase, by 25.7 per cent, compared with February 2019. However, following the closure of the borders in March 2020 owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourist arrivals declined by 17.6 per cent for the first quarter of 2020 compared with the same period in 2019. Based on projections of tourism revenue losses due to the pandemic, the potential overall loss to the economy in 2020 could be within the range of \$360 million to \$450 million; overall tourism revenue losses in 2021 have been projected to range from \$340 million to \$430 million. The impact of revenue losses from tourism on the economy is reflected in the number of unemployed persons, the closure of businesses, increasing requests for support from the Family Support Network and similar services and the increase in petty crime.

D. Agriculture and fisheries

19. According to the administering Power, agriculture and fishing accounted for approximately 1.45 per cent of the Territory's GDP in 2014. Most food requirements are met through imports from the United States of America and the Caribbean. There is some agricultural production, albeit on a small scale, of mostly fruits, vegetables and small livestock, in particular poultry, produced primarily for local consumption. The United States Virgin Islands is the main importer of the agricultural and fishing products of the British Virgin Islands.

20. The Virgin Islands Fisheries Act, 1997, and Fisheries Regulations, 2003, govern commercial, pleasure and sport fisheries, which mainly serve the local market.

21. According to the 2021 budget estimates, a rapid response fishing and farming production programme was launched in March 2020 to assist fisher folk and residents engaged in farming.

E. Communications and infrastructure

22. The British Virgin Islands has more than 200 km of surfaced roads. There are three international airports, including the main international airport, Terrance B. Lettsome International Airport, located on Beef Island. Direct shipping services operate from the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States. A deepwater harbour is located in Road Town. A regular ferry service links Tortola with some of the other islands in the Territory and with the United States Virgin Islands.

23. The extension of the cruise pier in Tortola, along with landside development, which had commenced in 2014, was completed in early 2016 and commissioned for service in March 2016.

24. Physical planning in the British Virgin Islands is governed by the Physical Planning Act of 2004, under which all development in the Territory must be approved by the Physical Planning Authority.

25. Broadband telecommunications, including Internet service, is available throughout the Territory. There are three major service providers, which are governed by a telecommunications regulatory regime established in 2006.

IV. Social conditions

A. Labour and immigration

26. According to the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan 2020–2022, overall employment levels increased by an average of 2.4 per cent annually in the four years prior to the impact of the 2017 hurricanes. With the net loss of 4,691 jobs due to the closure of businesses after the hurricanes, there was a 23.3 per cent drop in employment over the period from September to December 2017 compared with the employment levels at the end of August 2017. According to the 2021 budget estimates, the number of employed persons reached 19,317 by the end of 2018 and 21,088 by the end of 2019, representing increases of 24.9 per cent and 36.2 per cent, respectively, compared with 2017. The number of persons employed in 2019 was the highest ever recorded in the Territory. The number of men employed in 2019 was 10.5 per cent higher than in 2018, which was the largest ever increase recorded for men. The number of women employed rose by 7.6 per cent compared with 2018.

27. According to the human and economic assessment of impact report, a quarter of working women are service workers and shop and market sales workers, and a fifth are skilled professionals. Because many women work in sectors that pay lower wages, 50 per cent more women than men earn a salary of between \$700 and \$1,400, and twice as many women as men earn less than \$700. The average monthly wage for women is roughly 10 per cent lower than that for men: \$2,332.77 as compared with \$2,573.05. The expected decline in GDP caused by the COVID-19 pandemic was anticipated to result in a fourfold or fivefold increase in the rate of unemployment in 2020, with a disproportionate impact expected on female workers and migrants.

28. Work permit exemptions are granted by the territorial Government on the basis of enrolment in the school system (entrance at the primary level and completion of the secondary level), marriage to a believer for a period of no less than three years or residency in the Territory of the British Virgin Islands for 20 years or more by a person who has demonstrated good character. According to the administering Power, the number of exemptions granted is considered on an annual basis. On 8 January 2018, the Immigration Department of the territorial Government announced that a multi-year entry permit would be granted to eligible individuals. Government-contracted employees, employees of statutory bodies and persons who have been granted an indefinite work permit exemption and have lived in the Territory consistently for five years or more would be eligible for a multi-year entry permit. The multi-year entry permit would be granted in three-year intervals, as opposed to an annual permit, and would be given after the expiry date of the individual's present entry permit.

B. Education

29. The education system in the Territory is guided by the Education Act 2004 and its amendments, including the Education (Amendment) Act 2014. The regulations contained therein are expected to provide guidance to the education system and its stakeholders regarding the implementation of programmes and services, the monitoring of the delivery of education programmes operated under the Act and the conduct of school supervision, including complaint investigations requested by the public.

30. Primary and secondary education is free and compulsory for children aged 5 to 17 years. Tertiary education is offered for free to Virgin Islanders at the local community college (H. Lavity Stoutt Community College), which has campuses on

Tortola and Virgin Gorda islands. The college also collaborates with several universities outside the Virgin Islands that offer programmes at the bachelor's degree level.

31. Students from overseas territories benefit from the home student rate for tuition fees at British universities, provided that they have lived in a British overseas territory, the European Economic Area or Switzerland for the three years prior to the first academic year of their course of study. In addition, those students have access to funding provided by the European Union for higher or vocational education.

32. According to the human and economic assessment of impact report, a survey covering 2,765 households with school-age children conducted by the territorial Ministry of Education in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic found that at least 340 households lacked Internet access and a further 446 had limited packages. According to the 2021 budget estimates, the Ministry of Education provided support to students who required assistance, including through a loan programme that allowed parents to purchase laptops at a minimal cost and provisions to facilitate Internet access.

C. Health

33. The Health Services Authority of the Territory, a statutory body, was established in 2005 to manage public health-care delivery services. The National Health Insurance, providing universal health-care coverage, was launched in September 2015 and became operational in January 2016.

34. According to information from the Pan American Health Organization, the zika virus, the chikungunya virus and dengue fever are health issues of concern for the Territory's health system. Malaria is not endemic, and no imported cases were reported. Chronic, non-communicable diseases, mainly cancer, diabetes and hypertension, contribute significantly to morbidity and mortality in adults. The prevalence of obesity, owing mainly to a sedentary lifestyle and a diet high in processed or refined foods, is one of the leading health risks for chronic conditions in the British Virgin Islands, where it primarily affects women and children. The Ministry of Health and Social Development is implementing a 10-year strategy for the prevention of chronic non-communicable diseases that relies on a multisectoral approach. According to information from the Pan American Health Organization published in 2017, no maternal deaths had been recorded in the Territory in the 10 years prior to 2017. There are no training facilities, so health professionals are trained elsewhere in the Caribbean, the United Kingdom and the United States. In order to fill the necessary health personnel positions in the public and private sectors, staff are recruited from the Caribbean, the United States, Canada, the Philippines and some African countries.

35. After confirming its first cases of COVID-19 in late March 2020, the territorial Government implemented a 24-hour lockdown that lasted nearly a month. In his 2021 budget address on 12 November 2020, the Premier and Minister of Finance said that following the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the territorial Government had put in place a number of preventive and control measures. Measures to assist people with food and other essential services were implemented. A health emergency operations centre was established and an economic task force was convened to evaluate the potential impact of the pandemic on the economy, including its social impact, and to make recommendations on how to deal with the possible scenarios.

36. The territorial Government implemented entry protocols for persons travelling to the Territory through a phased reopening. Phase 1 began on 2 June 2020 and allowed for Virgin Islanders, belongers and residents to travel to the Territory. Phase 2 began on 1 September 2020, allowing entry for more categories of residents, including work

permit holders, dependants, homeowners and students. Phase 3 began on 1 December 2020, allowing the reopening of the tourism industry. Prior to that, a reopening steering group was established on 11 November 2020 to address the concerns of the public with regard to phase 3.

37. A team of experts from Public Health England visited the Territory in December 2020 to provide technical support and advice on key health initiatives. According to the Minister for Health and Social Development, the purpose of the visit was for territorial health officials and Public Health England to jointly assess the Territory's tracing system, laboratory testing capability and emergency preparedness with regard to COVID-19.

38. In a statement on 28 January 2021, the Minister for Health and Social Development stated that the Territory had confirmed 141 positive cases of COVID-19 and had recorded one death. Vaccination began in the Territory on 11 February.

39. The Government of the United Kingdom has been supporting the overseas territories throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The support has included the funding and supply of testing kits, laboratory consumables, medical equipment and medical supplies and the provision of public health expertise. In addition, the Government of the United Kingdom has committed itself to supplying the overseas territories with a share of the COVID-19 vaccines that it procures. According to the administering Power, its support is in line with its enduring commitment to the peoples of its overseas territories.

D. Crime and public safety

40. In 2020, HMS *Medway* and RFA *Argus* were stationed in the Caribbean as part of the North Atlantic patrol tasking of the Royal Navy, ensuring a year-round maritime presence of the United Kingdom to support the overseas territories to prepare for and respond to the threat of hurricanes and other disasters and to provide humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and crisis communications support in the region. The Government of the United Kingdom indicated its commitment to providing assistance to the overseas territories to deal with major storms and other disasters in the future.

E. Human rights

41. Major international and European human rights conventions have been extended to the British Virgin Islands. Chapter 2 of the 2007 Constitution enshrines fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual and provides for the establishment by law of a human rights commission.

42. A national policy on gender equity and equality was adopted in 2013, complementing the Domestic Violence Protocol, which was approved by the Cabinet in November 2010. The Domestic Violence Act 2011, which came into force on 31 October 2012, broadens the definition of domestic violence to include economic abuse, intimidation, harassment, stalking and damage to and destruction of property, while offering protection to persons in visiting relationships. The Partnership for Peace is a 16-week court-connected violence prevention, psychoeducational programme for men who are abusive towards women. In October 2011, the Cabinet approved the After-Support Programme for men who have completed the Partnership for Peace Programme.

V. Environment

43. The British Virgin Islands has acceded to several multilateral environmental agreements, including the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on Wetlands. According to the administering Power, since 2015, the Territory has been actively involved in global initiatives and specific projects on climate change adaptation, including the passage of the 2015 Climate Change Trust Fund Act, and in sustainable land management in partnership with the European Union and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States.

44. In 2014, the territorial Government passed legislation to establish a permanent shark sanctuary in its territorial waters and prohibit commercial fishing of all shark and ray species throughout those waters. According to the Government, there are approximately 51 designated protected areas in the current system of protected areas, including national and marine parks, fisheries protected areas, a forestry reserve (Sage Mountain National Park) and water areas. Depending on their designation, protected areas are currently managed by the National Parks Trust or the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. In December 2020, the National Parks Trust launched the first “Environmental Atlas”, which is expected to promote greater awareness of the Territory’s natural landscape and biodiversity.

45. According to the Pan American Health Organization, the management of solid waste is a critical issue in the British Virgin Islands. The Territory has little land available for landfill use, and the situation is aggravated by the rolling terrain, which makes it difficult and expensive to engineer landfills. The Territory has experienced a threefold increase in waste volume in the past decade; waste is either dumped or incinerated, while recycling facilities are being established on a pilot basis. Waste disposal is handled mainly through incineration at the Pockwood Pond incinerator on Tortola, which has a capacity of 100 tons per day, with additional landfills on the main islands of Tortola, Virgin Gorda and Anegada.

46. According to the Recovery to Development Plan, the Territory’s natural resources sustained considerable damage from the disasters in 2017. Ecosystems such as coral reefs, mangroves, beaches, seagrass beds, salt ponds, *ghuts* and moist and dry forests were severely affected by strong winds, storm surge, flood waters and associated sedimentation, pollution and debris.

VI. Relations with international organizations and partners

47. The British Virgin Islands has associate membership in the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

48. The Territory is an associate member of the Caribbean Community and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States and is a borrowing member of the Caribbean Development Bank.

49. The Territory participates in meetings of the Inter-Virgin Islands Council between the British Virgin Islands and the United States Virgin Islands, with a view to addressing mutual interests and challenges and fostering and promoting cooperation between the two Territories. Topics addressed in the meetings include law enforcement, pleasure boating and sport fishing, other maritime matters, cooperation in tourism, energy and utilities and culture and education. The 8th meeting of the Council was held on Tortola on 4 February 2020.

50. The Premier and Minister of Finance participated in the XII Ministerial Forum for Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean on the theme “COVID-19 – beyond recovery: towards a new social contract for Latin America and the Caribbean”, organized by ECLAC and held virtually from 12 to 14 January 2021. The Premier also participated in a panel discussion on “Challenges for the Caribbean to build back better” held virtually on 27 October 2020 in the framework of the thirty-eighth session of ECLAC. The Premier also attended the sixth meeting of the Caribbean Development Round Table, on “Securing debt sustainability and resilience in the time of COVID-19”, held virtually on 10 September 2020.

51. In November 2020, UNDP and the British Virgin Islands formally signed a memorandum of understanding strengthening their partnership for the opening of a project office in order to further address the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 and other external shocks, such as natural disasters, financial crises or pandemics. In addition, the agreement reinforces support for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda, including mainstreaming the Goals in policies and plans, accelerating their implementation and providing technical assistance for sectoral analyses, the promotion of the blue economy and additional relevant activities.

52. On 10 September 2020, the British Virgin Islands were elected as Vice-Chair of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee, a subsidiary body of ECLAC.

53. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines opened a consular office in the British Virgin Islands on 16 October 2020.

VII. Future status of the Territory

A. Position of the territorial Government

54. The position of the territorial Government regarding the future status of the British Virgin Islands is reflected in section I above.

B. Position of the administering Power

55. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the eighth meeting of the United Kingdom-Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council was held virtually from 23 to 26 November 2020, when the administering Power hosted the representatives of the Governments of its overseas territories. With the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in attendance, the participants held wide-ranging discussions on such topics as economic issues, COVID-19 response and recovery, the protection of vulnerable groups and environmental matters. According to the administering Power, the statement made by the Prince of Wales at the meeting, ahead of discussions on the environment and the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be hosted in 2021 by the United Kingdom, showed the importance placed by the United Kingdom on its relationship with the overseas territories and its recognition of their significant contribution to its biodiversity.

56. In the communiqué adopted at the eighth meeting of the Joint Ministerial Council, the Government of the United Kingdom and the leaders of the overseas territories indicated that the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, applied to the peoples of the overseas territories. They reaffirmed the importance of promoting the right of

those peoples to self-determination, a collective responsibility of all parts of the Government of the United Kingdom.

57. The Government of the United Kingdom and the leaders of the overseas territories committed themselves to exploring ways in which the overseas territories could maintain international support in countering hostile sovereignty claims. It was also stated that for those Territories with permanent populations that wished so, the United Kingdom would continue to support their requests for removal of the Territory from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

58. At the 3rd meeting of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), on 15 October 2020, during the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, the representative of the United Kingdom stated that the relationship of his Government with its overseas territories was a modern one based on partnership, shared values and the right of the people of each Territory to choose to remain British.

59. He stated that his Government's responsibility was to ensure the security and good governance of the territories and their peoples and that territorial Governments were expected to meet the same high standards as the Government of the United Kingdom in maintaining the rule of law, respect for human rights and integrity in public life, delivering efficient public services and building strong and successful communities. He explained that his Government was committed to involving all overseas territories in the negotiations on its future relationship with the European Union, in order to ensure that their priorities were taken into account at every stage of the process.

60. He added that, while the United Kingdom would carry out all the responsibilities of the sovereign Power, the Governments of the United Kingdom and its overseas territories were in agreement that the overseas territories were internally self-governing, subject only to the United Kingdom retaining powers to enable it to carry out its obligations under international law. He also added that the Joint Ministerial Council met annually to monitor and drive forward collective priorities.

VIII. Action taken by the General Assembly

61. On 10 December 2020, the General Assembly adopted resolution [75/110](#) without a vote, on the basis of the report of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples for 2020 ([A/75/23](#)) and the subsequent recommendation by the Fourth Committee. In that resolution, the General Assembly:

(a) Reaffirmed the inalienable right of the people of the British Virgin Islands to self-determination, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations and with General Assembly resolution [1514 \(XV\)](#), containing the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples;

(b) Also reaffirmed that, in the process of decolonization of the British Virgin Islands, there was no alternative to the principle of self-determination, which was also a fundamental human right, as recognized under the relevant human rights conventions;

(c) Further reaffirmed that it was ultimately for the people of the British Virgin Islands to determine freely their future political status in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter, the Declaration and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, and in that connection called upon the administering Power, in cooperation with the territorial Government and appropriate bodies of the United

Nations system, to develop political education programmes for the Territory in order to foster an awareness among the people of their right to self-determination in conformity with the legitimate political status options, based on the principles clearly defined in Assembly resolution 1541 (XV) and other relevant resolutions and decisions;

(d) Recalled the 2007 Constitution of the British Virgin Islands, and stressed the importance of continued discussions on constitutional matters, to accord greater responsibility to the territorial Government for the effective implementation of the Constitution and increased levels of education relating to constitutional matters;

(e) Requested the administering Power to assist the Territory by facilitating its work concerning public educational outreach efforts, consistent with Article 73 *b* of the Charter, and in that regard called upon the relevant United Nations organizations to provide assistance to the Territory, if requested;

(f) Welcomed the active participation of the Territory in the work of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean;

(g) Stressed that the Territory should continue to participate in the activities of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, including regional seminars, in order to provide the Committee with up-to-date information regarding the decolonization process;

(h) Also stressed the importance of the Special Committee being apprised of the views and wishes of the people of the British Virgin Islands and enhancing its understanding of their conditions, including the nature and scope of the existing political and constitutional arrangements between the British Virgin Islands and the administering Power;

(i) Called upon the administering Power to participate in and cooperate fully with the work of the Special Committee in order to implement the provisions of Article 73 *e* of the Charter and the Declaration and in order to advise the Committee on the implementation of the provisions under Article 73 *b* of the Charter on efforts to promote self-government in the British Virgin Islands, and encouraged the administering Power to facilitate visiting and special missions to the Territory;

(j) Also called upon the administering Power to facilitate a visiting mission to the Territory, and requested the Chair of the Special Committee to take all the steps necessary to that end;

(k) Reaffirmed the responsibility of the administering Power under the Charter to promote the economic and social development and to preserve the cultural identity of the Territory, and requested the administering Power to take steps to enlist and make effective use of all possible assistance, on both a bilateral and a multilateral basis, in the strengthening of the economy of the Territory;

(l) Took into account the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals, stressed the importance of fostering the economic and social sustainable development of the Territory by promoting sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth, creating greater opportunities for all, reducing inequalities, raising basic standards of living, fostering equitable social development and inclusion and promoting the integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems that supports, inter alia, economic, social and human development, while facilitating ecosystem conservation, regeneration, restoration and resilience in the face of new and emerging challenges, and strongly urged the administering Power to refrain from undertaking any kind of illicit, harmful

and unproductive activities, including the use of the Territory as an international financial centre, that are not aligned with the interest of the people of the Territory;

(m) Requested the Territory and the administering Power to take all measures necessary to protect and conserve the environment of the Territory against any degradation, and once again requested the specialized agencies concerned to monitor environmental conditions in the Territory and to provide assistance to the Territory, consistent with their prevailing rules of procedure;

(n) Reiterated its call upon the administering Power, the specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system and regional organizations to provide all the necessary assistance to the Territory, support the recovery and rebuilding efforts and enhance capabilities for emergency preparedness and risk reduction, in particular in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria that impacted the Territory in 2017;

(o) Requested the Special Committee to continue to examine the question of the British Virgin Islands and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its seventy-sixth session and on the implementation of the resolution.

Annex

Map of the British Virgin Islands

