



**POST-ELECTION STATEMENT BY CHIEF MINISTER
DR. THE HONOURABLE D. ORLANDO SMITH, OBE
Thursday, 8 September 2005**

Ladies and gentlemen

The passing of our friend and colleague the Honourable Paul Wattley placed a huge responsibility upon the shoulders of our Territory.

This past Monday, we were called in the name of our democracy to conduct an election to fill the vacated seat and to ensure the smooth continuation of our freely elected institutions.

Tonight, I wish to first and foremost congratulate and pay tribute to all the people of the British Virgin Islands who responded to this moment with all the dignity and sense of shared duty that are the truest hallmarks of a free people. I thank every voter for making the time to exercise your democratic right given under the Constitution of the Virgin Islands.

And the voice of the people in this election was clear and unambiguous. By electing Mr. Elmore Stoutt to serve the remainder of Paul Wattley's term as Territorial Representative, the people of the BVI have reaffirmed their faith in the path of empowerment and opportunity that this government has championed since the day we were elected.

We welcome Mr. Stoutt to the halls of Government with enthusiasm and pride. I would like to take a moment to thank all those who made this moment possible. I would like to thank our Supervisor of Elections Ms. Juliette Penn, our election officials and volunteers who laboured under extraordinary circumstances to ensure that the election process was orderly and proper – working through Monday night and into the early Tuesday morning.

In this regard the performance of Mrs Antoinette Skelton was outstanding and an indication of how well our public servants can rise to these challenges when called upon to do so. As many have said she deserves a medal and much more and I share this view.

I would like to congratulate all the candidates in the race. A vibrant and enduring democracy requires men and women who are prepared to stand before their community and contest the privilege of leadership. The measure of their service is not simply about who won and who lost, but also the spirit of competing ideas that are the life's blood of an open society.

And above all, I would like to thank Mr. Elmore Stoutt. When God in his infinite wisdom called our friend Paul Wattlely home, he set out a call to duty for our brother Elmore Stoutt – and Mr. Stoutt answered that call with all the integrity and energy and wisdom that we have known him for over his decades of service.

Every person in this community is well aware of the lifetime of exemplary service that Mr. Stoutt has devoted to this Territory. And we all saw in this campaign that the same qualities of leadership and compassion that he brought to the school house will now serve us all well in the halls of Government.

After seeing his dignified and energetic campaign, we have no doubt that he will successfully sustain his spirit of dedication and commitment that has made him such a trusted figure over the past thirty years.

And we know well that there is much for work for our new team to address. We have a hospital to build. We have a telecom system to reform. We have a 5-star resort development to finalize and get off the ground. We have roads to pave, schools to strengthen and social services to improve.

We have a long and ambitious agenda ahead of us and we have no intention of resting or relenting for one moment in our labours. And we recognize that in order to accomplish these goals on behalf of the people of this Territory, we must stand united.

The trials of a political campaign always bring divisions to the surface. And sometimes in the heat of battle things are said and done that are later regretted. That is not unusual. But that does not make it acceptable.

Here in the BVI we are a small community. A family. And as a family we must say in one voice, loud and clear that the politics of personal attacks must end – now and forever.

And so I say again as I have said before: I call on all leaders of all parties to make a personal commitment to reject personal attacks of this kind.

Honest men and women can disagree about policies and politics and voice those disagreements energetically. But we should all agree that the ties that bind us together are far more important and more enduring than anything that separates us.

And upon that basis of unity and common cause we must now come together to build a stronger community. This does not mean that there is no room for honest debate or dissent – quite the opposite is the case.

When I sat on the Opposition benches in the previous Legislature I saw it as my sworn duty to constantly question the Government's actions and to hold them to account. And in doing so, I believe that my colleagues and I were able to make the Government more vigilant in the discharge of their duties and more effective in their service of the people.

So too, I do not shy away from the constructive criticism of the current Opposition. Careful examination of our actions, questions about our choices and priorities – all these are legitimate grounds for an open public dialogue. But there is a clear and critical distinction between healthy debate and destructive attacks.

When the Opposition holds this Government accountable to the effective implementation of our agenda then they are doing good service to our community. When they offer counterproposals or new ideas of their own, they are making our political process even stronger.

That is the basis for effective governance – and that is the level to which I hope we will all aspire in the coming years. Because the simple truth is this: As leaders of the Territory, both in Government and in Opposition, we must remember that the people of the BVI sent us to do a job.

We were sent here to serve the best interests of the people of this Territory – and to work together to build a stronger future. The people of the BVI have now sent Elmore Stoutt to assist us and support us in that task.

We must all turn our eyes forward and think of completing the next task and the next task and the next task, with an understanding that the only measure for success is the better world we build for our children and their children and generations of BVI Islanders not yet imagined.

We offer a humble prayer of thanks to God for helping guide us through these difficult days. We pray for strength and wisdom to carry his work forward.

And we pray that God continue to bless our British Virgin Islands.