

**Ministerial Statement**  
To the House of Assembly

BY

**The Hon E. David Burt JP, MP**  
Premier and Minister of Finance

**Joint Ministerial Council (JMC) 2023**  
and  
**The Joint Declaration of Governments of the United Kingdom and British Overseas Territories**

**Friday, November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

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Mr Speaker, I am pleased to advise this Honourable House of my recent attendance at the Joint Ministerial Council (JMC) in London last week. Honourable Members will recall that this annual meeting is convened at the invitation of the UK government and brings together all of the heads of government of the Overseas Territories. Joining me in London for these meetings was the Honourable Member, the Deputy Premier.

Mr Speaker, the most significant item on the agenda of this year's Council was the consideration of a Joint Declaration between the Governments of the United Kingdom and British Overseas Territories. The commitments within the Declaration will guide a UK internal strategy outlining how the UK will fulfil its commitments and obligations to the Territories across every Whitehall Government Department.

This Joint Declaration represents a significant development in the relationship between the United Kingdom and its Overseas Territories. Leaders & UK Ministers discussed the impact of the 2012 White Paper relating to security, success and sustainability of the Overseas Territories, and there is a broad acknowledgement that the 2012 White Paper has run its course.

Mr Speaker, in preparation for the JMC, I wrote to the Minister for Overseas Territories, David Rutley, at his request, expressing our views on the proposed strategy for Overseas Territories and Bermuda's ambitions. I made clear that our relationship with the UK relies upon two fundamental principles: attaining full self-governance AND enhanced representation of Bermuda's global interests. I highlighted the need for a modern partnership with the UK in which the UK will devolve powers to Bermuda and the other Overseas Territories where appropriate.

Constitutional advancement is the ambition of all the UK's Overseas Territories as we seek to devolve greater responsibility to our elected governments. Bermuda is currently considered a 'Non-Self-Governing Territory' according to the United Nations. We stated that we desire a process of self-determination for OTs through UN participation in line with Article 73 of the Charter of the United Nations. Additionally, due to Bermuda's mature constitution, there must be consultation on the application of UK laws and conventions that may have an impact on Bermuda.

Mr Speaker, supporting economic growth remains a primary objective of this Government. We communicated that we desire equivalent legal recognition between a British Overseas Territory Citizen and a British Citizen in travel and migration, where BOTCs require visas in jurisdictions where British Citizens do not. On another matter regarding fair treatment, the Overseas Territories made it clear that the UK Government's demands to the Overseas Territories must be accompanied by similar demands made to the UK's Crown Dependencies.

Mr Speaker, the UK will support closer links between the British Overseas Territories and the Commonwealth, and we will work together to examine options for the greater participation of the Territory Governments and Commonwealth organisations.

The UK will ensure there is, at a minimum, an effective mechanism to consult British Overseas Territory governments in exceptional cases when proposed new UK primary legislation extends to their territories. It was stated that the UK will improve its processes for consulting and informing British Overseas Territories regarding new

international obligations. The commitment will respect the constitutional roles of elected Governments, legislatures, the UK, and appointed Governors.

Mr Speaker, the JMC recognised the global leadership provided by Overseas Territories in critical areas. Firstly, the global environmental importance of the British Overseas Territories and our vulnerability to the effects of climate change while celebrating our impact on international environmental science. Secondly, we are at the cutting edge of worldwide efforts to combat illicit finance and corruption, including increasing transparency, implementing and upholding global standards and ensuring the implementation and enforcement of effective sanctions regimes.

Mr Speaker, the Deputy Premier and I also gave submissions to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC). We discussed Bermuda's uniqueness amongst other Overseas Territories, specifically in relation to our constitution. We addressed the need to modernise Bermuda's constitution, our relationship with the UK, and the need for the UK to engage Territories in decisions and policies that impact us. Similar sentiments were shared by elected leaders across the Overseas Territories. It was notable that one of the members of this committee raised the issue of the UK Government's rejection of Bermuda's Cannabis Licensing Act, which was passed by this Honourable House twice.

Mr Speaker, we also participated in another hearing with members of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee chaired by Alicia Kearns MP. MP Kearns has a depth of understanding of the issues relating to Bermuda and the Territories and has assured that the Foreign Affairs Committee will play its part in holding the UK Government accountable for its obligation to engage with the Overseas Territories.

As such, it was announced that a new Overseas Territories sub-committee of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee will be formed to review the FCDO's relations with Overseas Territories. This Sub-Committee will examine how the FCDO conducts its relationships with Overseas Territories and will probe how the UK Government performs against its commitments to the Overseas Territories.

Mr Speaker, in the bilateral meeting with David Rutley MP, Minister of State for the Overseas Territories, I took the opportunity to reinforce Bermuda's position on the security coding of Bermuda passports. Our team, consisting of civil servants from the Department of Immigration and the London Office alongside the UK Government, have worked to ensure a resolution, and we are preparing for the BMU code to be restored to Bermuda passports by April 2024. I expressed relief to Minister Rutley that this matter that has been so important to so many was finally resolved. Bermudians spoke, we listened, and we delivered. At this meeting, we also shared the Government's Throne Speech commitment regarding CARICOM, and Minister Rutley gave his fulsome support for the Government's proposal to explore full membership.

Mr Speaker, the issue of Public Accessible Registers of Beneficial Ownership continues to remain a priority in our discussions with the UK Government. Bermuda's position remains firm: we have committed to publicly accessible registers within twelve months of the publication of the implementation review of the European Union's fifth Anti-Money-Laundering Directive. Bermuda will then bring into effect the legislative framework to establish public access to beneficial ownership data held in a central register, mindful of the recent European Court ruling that stated the privacy rights that may be infringed by a public register must be balanced by a legitimate interest test for persons seeking access to that register.

Mr Speaker, finally, I had the privilege to meet Ms Tayla Imani Bean who proudly represented Bermuda at the UK Youth Parliament sitting last week Friday. Ms Bean spoke passionately to her peers about addressing anti-social behaviour amongst the youth in Bermuda. Ms Bean highlighted that the concept of communal support in raising children has diminished and spoke about Bermuda's National Youth Policy – a Throne Speech pledge from 2020 that this Government has delivered.

Mr. Speaker, the Youth Parliament is to be congratulated for their work developing an essential space for the voices of our youth to be nurtured and heard. I am pleased that this gathering in the UK will now be an annual opportunity for Bermuda's youth parliamentarians.

Mr. Speaker, the Overseas Territories are a diverse family of primarily small Islands, ranging from places like Bermuda with advanced economies, to islands like Pitcairn with a population of less than 50 persons. There emerges a constant theme of elected leaders attuned to the unique times in which we live and whose sole ambition is to achieve the best for their people. The often-unwieldy relationship with the UK Government takes work to manage for the benefit of the voters in our territories.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, Bermuda is a respected voice at the Joint Ministerial Council table, and we recognise that our shared commitment to developing and advancing our sister territories is worthy of the UK's full support.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.