



## Remarks by Novelle E. Francis, Jr. on his Nomination by Governor John P. deJongh, Jr. to be Police Commissioner for the U.S. Virgin Islands

May 28, 2009

Government House, St. Thomas

Governor deJongh, Lt. Governor Francis, Attorney General Frazer, Members of the Governor's Cabinet and Senior Staff, Fellow Officers to include Chief Benta and Chief Querrard, Family and Friends, Members of the Press, Virgin Islanders ... Good Afternoon.

On May 26, 1987, I joined the Virgin Islands Police Department; this career choice I made early in life knowing that I wanted to make a contribution to society, responding to my desire to serve others, my instinct to provide aide to those in need, and my understanding that community cannot exist without law and order. It is with much pride that I stand before you today, an experienced officer, on the precipice of the culminating event of my law enforcement career. My journey through the ranks and files of the police department has led me to, and prepared me for this -- the opportunity to lead a group of determined and dedicated police officers in providing for the safety and protection of the citizens of these Virgin Islands, as well as the millions of visitors who call on its shores.

Today, 22 years later, almost to the exact date from when I joined the force, I graciously and humbly accept the Governor's nomination to serve as the next Police Commissioner for the Virgin Islands Police Department.

Thank you Governor deJongh for providing me with the opportunity to assume this role; let me assure you that I will face this challenge directly.

This height in my career was not attained alone. It has required the grace of God through which all deeds are accomplished, the sacrifice of my family who has had to share me throughout the years, and the oath of my colleagues who have promised to serve and protect without reservations. The decision to assume the position of police commissioner is the result of much soul-searching, many prayers, and numerous hours of contemplation. I considered the immensity of the task together with the challenges which will have to be overcome. I reflected upon everything that I have witnessed the sum of what I have learned, and all that I have to contribute in this top leadership position. The defining point for me, a crucial factor, was my view that the people of this community deserve safety, security, and law and order.

As Police Commissioner, I will lead with the notion that crime is to be confronted. It can be controlled. It must be prevented. The police force will improve its efforts in every aspect of law enforcement. Virgin Islanders will be encouraged to continue to report incidences of criminal activity.

Persons who break the law, even for minor offenses, are subject to arrest. Prosecutors will be provided with adequate investigation in order to facilitate just punishment. Sister agencies will

be utilized as a primary resource to collaborate in the review and resolution of cases. I believe that through a unified effort we will be able to successfully address the crime situation.

The level of violence in the Virgin Islands cannot continue at its current pace; it must be stopped, now! We will dis-empower those who inflict harm on the people of this territory -- no more will we allow children to be caught in the crossfire; no longer are law-abiding residents to be hostages in their homes; and not one more traveler is to become captive on an unwarranted battle field. We will work together, we will fight the violence, and we will not stop until we arrive at that time and place when our community is no longer looked upon with fear. The first challenge of this unified approach to crime will be to revitalize its brightest beacon of hope ... the Virgin Islands Police Department.

Having spent the last two decades in the Department, I know the realities that officers are confronted with daily, and I share many of their concerns. I also understand the sentiment of many outside the Agency who believe that the spirit of the Department no longer exists. However, I can attest to its presence; I have seen it, felt it, lived it ... and I am still a proud part of it. It is this driving force that resides in the brave heart of each of our officers that will lead the charge in this fight against crime. From this moment, I intend to immediately commence the process of improving morale amongst officers. There will be one code of ethics for all, from the officers on the front line to the commanders and the supervisors behind the scenes. My endeavor is to revive the energy of the police force, to rejuvenate our focus and purpose, and to provide a renewed sense of directive action against crime.

Governor deJongh, Lt. Governor Francis, and members of the public, beginning today I take responsibility for the police department. I ask for professional support from each and every member of the Police Force, for goodwill from the citizens of this community, and for partnership from those entities also charged with the protection of these Virgin Islands. You have my pledge to fulfill the mission of this agency, to provide protection and service, in furtherance of enhancing the quality of life for every resident who calls this territory home.

We will build a bridge of safety in these Virgin Islands from the points of East End, St. Croix, to the hills of Red Hook, St. Thomas, and to the shores of Cruz Bay, St. John. We will join forces to curtail the criminal elements that have plagued this territory far too long; we will take back our streets, our schools and our neighborhoods; we will put an end to the systematic and calculated destruction being caused by criminality. It is in this vein that I stand before you, representing the members of the department, prepared to fight and ready to lead the way. Yes, I am up to the task. Yes, I am able. And yes, we can do it ... together. To paraphrase a message of hope from President Obama, if we are walking down the right path, and we are willing to keep walking, then eventually, we will make progress.

I have always believed in the principle that police visibility serves as a deterrent to crime. The public is notified and criminals are put on notice -- the police will be performing their duties, en masse, throughout the territory. All categories of laws will be strictly enforced, according to the governor's mandate, as this department returns to basic policing. There will be no more passes for speeding, for failing to use seat belts, for having windows tinted too dark, or for using a cell phone while driving. Your movement on the island will be subject to roadblocks at selected traffic points. As a Department, if we are to seize the big things then we must first get a handle on the little things.

In the upcoming days, the Department will focus on several key areas to include Weapons discharges, Drugs, and Gang Related Activities. We must ensure that our enforcement efforts are properly targeted so that we see the results. We plan to utilize CompStat software, which uses geographical mapping and information systems to identify high crime areas. This will determine where we concentrate our crime control and reduction efforts.

Weapons discharges are occurring too often during all hours of the day; this ill practice is deadly and has cost the lives of innocent bystanders. We will obtain “shot spotter”, a camera based system that will pinpoint the location and source of shots as they are fired. This technology will aid in the identification and prosecution of perpetrators.

Drugs are a dangerous threat to our society. The Deputy Chiefs for each District will be required to design aggressive action plans to curtail the Sale, Distribution, and Transportation of Illegal Drugs by identifying and analyzing hot spots, prosecuting minor offenses, and tagging repeat offenders.

Gang related activities, or crimes committed by groups of individuals acting as one, is on the rise within our youth population. A Tactical Anti-Gang Intervention Coordinator will be assigned to address the issues of gang development and expansion in the territory as well as spearheading the implementation of Gang Enforcement Legislation. In conjunction with this effort, we will coordinate joint programs with the Department of Education and Family and Community Services.

Nightclubs are repeatedly chosen by perpetrators as their venue to settle feuds, or to assert their superiority; these violent incidences endanger innocent patrons. Establishments which are associated with two or more such occurrences within a calendar year will be closely monitored by police patrol. As a result of this failure to provide security for their customers, those nightclubs may have their license to operate restricted, and may be required to adhere to more stringent regulations.

We have to establish a personal presence in the community, so our residents know we are protecting them. We will reinstitute Community Oriented Policing as a standard operational requirement; It will become mandatory for all new police graduates to be engaged in foot, bike or scooter patrol, during the first six months of service in the department, with more experienced officers being assigned ‘outside the vehicle’ on a rotational basis.

Based on the recent audit of the Inspector General concerning inventory controls for case evidence, we are in the process of finalizing a new location and facility for the Police Department Evidence Room on St. Thomas which will allow us to safeguard the crucial data needed to move cases toward prosecution with the department of justice.

The Police Department will initiate a renewed Public Information Campaign geared toward the timely and accurate dissemination of information to the people. We will maintain an updated electronic department webpage, open dialogue with media outlets, methods for providing responses to community inquiries, and concerted community outreach efforts. These programs will be coordinated with the governor’s current schedule of community meetings throughout the territory.

An Inter-Governmental Task Force will be organized with sitting members from various local, state and federal Law Enforcement Agencies with active assignments in the Territory. The primary focus of this collaboration will be to exchange information, among and between the entities, about criminal events in order to reduce their occurrences. This 'collective conferencing' will increase the efficiency of the police department with exposure to enhanced strategies and updated techniques for criminal investigation.

Our Recruitment, Retention and Training Initiative will be reworked and redesigned to build and maintain a proper police force that will protect and serve the Territory of the Virgin Islands. All Officers will be adequately prepared in keeping with the National Police Officer Training Standards to include leadership, safety, and use of force.

Accountability, Discipline and High Moral will become the cornerstone of the Virgin Islands Police Department. It is my goal for the Department, within three years, to obtain National Accreditation from the Commission of Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies. This Professional Excellence recognition is awarded to police departments that use the best practices in modern policing and that are a model for other agencies to emulate. I believe that we can achieve this designation, but more importantly we are striving to win the confidence of the people by doing our jobs to the best of our abilities.

The preceding is only the beginning of what we plan to immediately address during the next few months. We intend to hold steady on this course of action until such time that there is noticeable progress.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the positive developments that have occurred in the last couple of months with the increased level of response and involvement from members of this community. The Crime Stoppers program has been effective and we appreciate the results and the rate of information flow from the public that has been so instrumental in resolving cases. As Governor deJongh has done, I too, as the Police Commissioner will continue to embrace this program. I must also express thanks to the residents who serve on the Community Integration Teams; Their guidance has helped to improve our interaction with the public, and has had an impact on several internal processes.

I would like to thank Governor deJongh for the privilege to lead this administration's efforts, during this next phase of his Public Safety Agenda. Governor, I know that you place a high value on the safety of the people and the security of these islands, and I am committed to that task – thank you for your confidence.

Ladies and gentlemen, members of the clergy, in closing, I thank each and every one of you for the support I have received throughout my career, and now more than ever, I seek your partnership and your prayers as we begin this journey towards a safer and more peaceful community. Thank you.