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United States Virgin Islands

Working paper prepared by the Secretariat

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Note: The information contained in the present working 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 7 December 2022. Further details are contained in previous working papers, available at www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/documents/workingpapers.



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The Territory at a glance

Territory: The United States Virgin Islands is a Non-Self-Governing Territory under the Charter of the United Nations. As an unincorporated, organized territory of the United States of America, it is administered by the Office of Insular Affairs of the United States Department of the Interior.

Geography: The Territory is located in the eastern part of the Caribbean Sea, 1,075 miles south-east of the south-eastern tip of the United States and 60 miles east of Puerto Rico. It is made up of four main islands: Saint Croix, Saint John, Saint Thomas and Water Island. The capital, Charlotte Amalie, is located on Saint Thomas.

Land area: 352 km²

Exclusive economic zone: 33,744 km²

Population: 87,146 (2020 census)

Life expectancy at birth: 81.2 years (women: 83.5 years; men: 78.6 years (2020 estimate))

Languages: English or English Creole (74.70 per cent); Spanish or Spanish Creole (16.78 per cent); French or French Creole (6.57 per cent); and other (1.95 per cent)

Capital: Charlotte Amalie

Head of territorial Government: Governor Albert Bryan Jr. (since January 2019)

Territory's delegate to the United States Congress: Stacey Plaskett (since November 2018)

Main political parties: Democratic Party; Independent Citizens' Movement; Republican Party

Elections: The most recent general elections were held in November 2022.

Legislature: Unicameral (15 senators)

Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita: \$37,777 (2019, chained (2012) dollars)

Economy: Tourism is the primary economic activity, accounting for 80 per cent of GDP and employment. The manufacturing sector consists of petroleum refining, rum distilling, textiles, electronics, pharmaceuticals and watch assembly.

Monetary unit: United States dollar

Unemployment rate: 5.3 per cent (September 2022)

Brief history: The islands belonged to Denmark from 1754 to 1917 (Danish West Indies). On 31 March 1917, the Government of Denmark transferred ownership to the United States. The United States Virgin Islands has since been an organized, unincorporated territory of the United States.

I. Constitutional, political and legal issues

1. The United States Virgin Islands is an organized, unincorporated territory of the United States of America. Under the Organic Act of the Virgin Islands (1936), its revision in 1954 and subsequent amendments to the Revised Organic Act of 1954, the Territory has a legislature, known as the Senate, which is a unicameral body comprising 15 senators elected to a two-year term by popular vote. Executive power is vested in the Governor, who, since 1970, has been elected by popular vote to a four-year term on the same ticket as the Lieutenant Governor. The Governor is limited to two consecutive terms. With the advice and consent of the Legislature, the Governor appoints the heads of the executive departments and has the power to approve or veto legislation and issue executive orders.

2. In November 2018, Albert Bryan Jr. was elected Governor, and Tregenza Roach was elected Lieutenant Governor for a four-year term. Both were re-elected for a second four-year term in November 2022. The Territory also elects a delegate to the United States House of Representatives, who is able to vote in committees. Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett won the election held on 8 November 2022 and was elected to her fifth term as delegate. The Territory's senatorial elections were also held on 8 November 2022.

3. The Territory's judicial system has a district court, a superior court and a supreme court, of which the last-mentioned became operational in January 2007. The Supreme Court is the appellate court that hears appeals decided by the Superior Court. Its establishment eliminated federal judicial involvement in purely local legal matters. In December 2012, the President of the United States signed House of Representatives bill No. 6116 authorizing direct review by the United States Supreme Court of decisions made by the Supreme Court of the United States Virgin Islands. The legislation was sponsored by the Territory's congressional delegate.

4. Since the revision of the Organic Act of the Virgin Islands by the Government of the United States in 1954, there have been four attempts to replace it with a local constitution approved by the people of the Territory that would organize the internal mechanisms of the Government. Although the United States Congress authorized the adoption of a local constitution in 1976 under United States Public Law 94-584, none of the four attempts made was successful.

5. As previously reported, on 26 May 2009, the Fifth Constitutional Convention adopted a proposed constitution of the United States Virgin Islands by a two-thirds vote. It was submitted to the Governor on 31 May 2009. With a preamble and 19 articles, the 27-page text included provisions on a bill of rights; principles, branches and subdivisions of government; Virgin Islanders; elections; education; youth; taxation, finance and commerce; economic development; public health, safety and welfare; culture; environmental protection; referendums and recalls; and the creation of a political status advisory commission. Further details can be found in previous working papers.

6. On 26 February 2010, the President of the United States submitted the proposed constitution to Congress, endorsing the conclusions reached by the United States Department of Justice that several features of the proposed text warranted analysis and comment, including: (a) the absence of express recognition of United States sovereignty and the supremacy of federal law; (b) provisions for a special election on the territorial status of the United States Virgin Islands; (c) provisions conferring legal advantages on certain groups defined by place and timing of birth, timing of residency or ancestry; (d) residence requirements for certain offices; (e) provisions guaranteeing legislative representation of certain geographical areas; (f) provisions addressing territorial waters and marine resources; (g) imprecise language in certain provisions

of the proposed bill of rights; (h) the possible need to repeal certain federal laws if the proposed constitution were adopted; and (i) the effect of congressional action or inaction on the proposed constitution.

7. On 11 September 2012, the Governor signed Act No. 7386 establishing and convening a body called the Fifth Revision Convention, formed by the 30 delegates elected to the Fifth Constitutional Convention and five attorneys. The Fifth Revision Convention was convened on 1 October and mandated to ratify and approve, no later than 31 October and by a two-thirds majority vote of all the delegates, the final revised draft constitution consistent with the nine issues identified by the Government of the United States (see para. 6). The Act established that, if the Fifth Revision Convention agreed upon a proposed revised draft constitution by the deadline, the President of that body should have it submitted to the Governor and to the President of the United States. In case of the non-adoption of the text, both the Fifth Constitutional Convention and the Fifth Revision Convention would be dissolved, and the Legislature of the United States Virgin Islands would have full authority to address the Territory's constitution. As reported in previous working papers, however, the outcome of the Fifth Revision Convention was surrounded by controversy and has continued to remain unclear. In January 2013, in his State of the Territory address, the Governor expressed the hope that the Territory would find "the means and courage that will lead us from the Organic Act to a Virgin Islands constitution".

8. According to the administering Power, in March 2016, the Office of Insular Affairs of the Department of the Interior awarded the University of the Virgin Islands \$250,000 to establish the Office of Self-Determination and Constitutional Development. The Office works with other stakeholders across the Territory to address the issue of self-determination. Major duties and responsibilities include political status and constitutional education, research and development and universal public education.

9. The fiftieth anniversary of the first observance of the United States Virgin Islands-British Virgin Islands Friendship Day Celebration was commemorated on 22 October 2022, hosted by the Government of the British Virgin Islands.

10. At the Caribbean Regional Seminar on Decolonization held from 2 to 4 May 2019, the Lieutenant Governor said that the United States Virgin Islands required separate treatment in the decolonization process. He noted that the Congress of the United States of America had passed legislation authorizing a locally drafted constitution, but that such a constitution would require the approval of the Congress. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution [1514 \(XV\)](#), however, the United Nations would not endorse the adoption of a constitution by a Non-Self-Governing Territory that must be approved by the administering Power. He added that the current territorial Government recognized the need for the Territory to embark on a new and meaningful conversation regarding its status, which should culminate in a status referendum within the four-year term. There were challenges related to the issue of identity, and the native inhabitants should be entitled to special recognition. The Territory would welcome the presence of the United Nations as an objective and credible voice with regard to the decolonization process, as well as financial support and other resources that could serve to advance the dialogue. He added that the administering Power should also provide financial support in that regard.

11. On 7 May 2020, the territorial Legislature adopted an Act providing for a referendum vote on convening a constitutional convention to consider adopting the Revised Organic Act of the United States Virgin Islands or portions of it as the Constitution of the Territory. The bill was signed by the Governor on 19 May 2020. At the general election held on 3 November 2020, voters were asked whether they were in favour of the legislature enacting legislation to convene a constitutional

convention to adopt the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands, 68 Stat. 497, or portions of it as the Constitution of the Virgin Islands. A majority of 72 per cent voted in favour.

12. On 20 January 2022, the Committee on Government Operations and Consumer Protection of the territorial Legislature approved and forwarded for further processing Bill No. 34-0153, entitled “An Act establishing the Sixth Constitutional Convention of the Virgin Islands; and providing for an appropriation to cover convention-related expenses”. According to a press release of the territorial Government dated 2 February 2023, the Governor of the Territory approved Bill No. 34-0153, which established and provided an appropriation to fund the Sixth Constitutional Convention, although he pointed out that the measure did not have an identified adequate funding source.

13. The Interagency Group on Insular Areas, established through Executive Order 13537 of 14 April 2010, advises the President of the United States on the establishment or implementation of policies concerning the insular areas, solicits information and advice concerning those areas from the Governors of, and other elected officials in, the insular areas and from representatives of entities or other individuals, and solicits information from executive departments or agencies for purposes of carrying out its missions, in order to help to ensure coordination and collaboration among federal agencies in addressing issues of concern to, among others, American Samoa, Guam and the United States Virgin Islands. On 8 February 2023, the Interagency Group convened its annual plenary session with the Governors of the Territories.

14. The Governor of the Territory attended the plenary session of the Interagency Group on Insular Areas and spoke about efforts to increase renewable energy and the federal Government’s requirement to use local funds to match disaster recovery funds as two remaining areas of concern for the Territory. The Governor added that the Territory had a unique opportunity to stand out as a model for renewable energy use in the United States. The Governor stated that, within two years, the Territory would have 85 megawatts of renewable energy, equivalent to the entire load of the Territory.

II. Budget

15. The fiscal year begins on 1 October and ends on 30 September. Major sources of revenue include individual income tax, corporate income tax, real property tax and gross receipts tax. On 30 September 2022, the Governor signed the executive budget for the fiscal year 2023, which amounts to \$1,030,924.

16. The Virgin Islands Office of Disaster Recovery was established in February 2019 within the Virgin Islands Public Finance Authority. The Office serves as the centre of coordination for the anticipated \$10 billion of federal funding to be received in support of the recovery from the devastation caused by the hurricanes in 2017. By Executive Order of the Governor, the Office oversees all federal disaster assistance funding programmes for the Territory, the largest of which are: Public Assistance Grant Program, Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery and Federal Highway Administration – Emergency Relief. According to the Office, as at 31 December 2022, \$7.4 billion had been allocated, which represents 74 per cent of the anticipated federal funding.

III. Economic conditions

A. General

17. On 4 March 2022, the United States Bureau of Economic Analysis released estimates of gross domestic product (GDP) for the United States Virgin Islands for 2020, in addition to estimates of GDP by industry and compensation by industry for 2019. The Bureau noted that the real GDP for the Territory had decreased by 2.2 per cent in 2020 after increasing by 2.8 per cent in 2019. The decrease in real GDP reflected decreases in exports of services, private fixed investment, personal consumption expenditure and government spending. Those decreases were offset in part by an increase in private inventory investment. Exports of services, which consist primarily of spending by visitors, decreased by 43.5 per cent. Total visitor arrivals declined by 58.5 per cent, according to statistics from the territorial Government, reflecting the effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

18. The United States Department of the Treasury approved 14 neighbourhoods in the Territory as federal opportunity zones. Qualified opportunity zones, which are economically distressed communities where new investments, under certain conditions, may be eligible for preferential tax treatment, were created in accordance with the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. The programme is designed to encourage investment in communities designated as economically distressed by allowing investors who reinvest the proceeds of capital gains in qualifying properties or businesses located in designated opportunity zones to defer and reduce their capital gains taxes. Local government officials view the programme as a complement to the programme of the Economic Development Commission. Under the new tax law, United States investors who invest in qualified property in an opportunity zone may defer capital gains tax on the new investment for up to seven years; reduce the amount of those capital gains by as much as 15 per cent; and pay no federal capital gains tax on any appreciation in the value of that new investment. The Department of the Treasury approved the creation of opportunity zones for American Samoa and the United States Virgin Islands, among others. The areas for the United States Virgin Islands include Christiansted and the entire western end of Saint Croix, as well as most of the southern half of Saint Thomas. Qualified opportunity zones retain their designation for 10 years.

19. According to the Division of Economic Research of the Office of Management and Budget of the United States Virgin Islands, after the 2017 hurricanes, the Territory began a period of economic recovery, fuelled mostly by federal disaster assistance, a resurgence in tourism expenditure and activities related to refinery construction. However, the recovery ended abruptly in March 2020 owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. In an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19, the Governor issued an executive stay-at-home order for the Territory, which stalled economic activity until June 2020. The territorial Government instituted several initiatives to stimulate business activity and provide economic relief to the residents. The Territory continues to experience long-term fiscal and budgetary concerns.

20. According to the territorial Government, the Territory is a small open economy dependent on tourism and rum exports. The economy is vulnerable to external shocks and has exhibited volatility in real economic growth rates. Over the period 2008–2018, it saw positive real growth in five of the years, and negative real growth in six of the years. The economy has experienced three major shocks that led to economic downturns (the 2008 financial recession, the closing of the Hovensa oil refinery over the course of 2012 and 2013, and the 2017 hurricanes), resulting in an estimated \$10.76 billion of economic damages. The main challenges for the economy continue to be how to diversify the economic structure, create better-paying jobs,

reduce public debt loads, improve the financial position of the territorial Government, improve competitiveness and improve the quality of public services. The Hovensa petroleum refinery resumed operations in February 2021. It was shut down a few months later and then sold in December 2021 to a new company that plans to restart the facility.

21. According to the report entitled “Public debt outlook: 2021 update”, published by the United States Government Accountability Office, the total public debt outstanding as a share of GDP increased slightly from 68 per cent to 69 per cent of GDP between fiscal years 2016 and 2018, the most recent year for which audited financial data are available.

22. On 20 October 2020, the Governor announced the commission of a 20-year economic development plan for the Territory. In March 2021, the Economic Development Authority completed Vision 2040, a long-term economic recovery, revitalization and resilience plan for the Territory. The plan sets two macroeconomic goals for the Territory: reaching full employment by 2030 and achieving economic stability by 2040. The plan also establishes eight aspirational goals to help the Territory to achieve those macroeconomic goals.

B. Tourism

23. According to the United States Virgin Islands Bureau of Economic Research, there were 1,021,182 cruise passengers in 2022 compared with 245,695 in 2021, an increase of 315.6 per cent. In 2022, 414 cruise ships called at ports in the Territory, a 195.7 per cent increase compared with 2021. There were 800,069 air visitor arrivals in 2022 compared with 826,823 in 2021, a decrease of 3.2 per cent.

C. Manufacturing and construction

24. According to the Division of Economic Research, in fiscal year 2020, jobs in the construction sector continued to grow owing to ongoing disaster-related infrastructure restoration and recent construction work in connection with the restart of the Lime Tree Bay Terminals refinery operations. The number of construction jobs rose to 3,765 by the end of fiscal year 2020, representing an increase of 49.8 per cent over the total of 2,513 jobs reported in fiscal year 2019. In 2021, the Territory recorded \$457.3 million in total construction building permit value, surpassing the 2020 value of \$234.7 million, which represents a 93.5 per cent increase. The construction sector now accounts for 9 per cent of non-agricultural employment. In prior years, the Territory’s construction sector accounted for only 4 per cent of non-agricultural employment. According to the United States Energy Information Administration, manufacturing is now focused on rum distilling, electronics and pharmaceuticals.

25. According to the Division of Economic Research, the rum industry consists of two companies. Both distilleries have a combined production capacity of 29 million proof gallons of rum per year. Rum produced in the Territory is exported to the United States primarily in bulk and sold to local and regional bottlers for sale under a variety of brands.

D. Trade, transportation and utilities

26. The United States Virgin Islands has some 1,250 km of roadways. The Territory also enjoys one of the deepest natural harbours in the Caribbean and is strategically located along the Anegada Passage, a key route for ships bound for the Panama Canal.

The Territory has five major docking facilities, which can accommodate cruise ships and some naval vessels. Three of the docks are on Saint Croix: South Shore, Gallows Bay and Frederiksted. The other two are on Saint Thomas: the facilities operated in Crown Bay by the Virgin Islands Port Authority, a semi-autonomous government agency, and the West Indian Company, which is owned by the United States Virgin Islands.

E. Agriculture and fisheries

27. The Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture provides basic agricultural services and technical support to the Territory's farming community. The Department is primarily responsible for expanding the production and marketing of agricultural commodities and the processing of agricultural products throughout the Territory; enforcing environmental protection laws relating to land, water and soil; and enforcing regulatory practices relating to veterinary services.

28. The Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan was published in May 2022. The goal of the Plan is to increase agricultural productivity locally to make food security and sovereignty a reality for people living in the Territory. According to the Plan, 97 per cent of the food supply is imported. Importing food not only puts the local food supply at risk of shortages but also affects the quality of the food by reducing its freshness and nutritional value while adding extra transportation costs. Moreover, importing food has significant environmental implications, as it contributes to increased carbon emissions and pollution.

IV. Social conditions

A. Labour

29. According to the Bureau of Economic Research, 40,496 persons were employed in civilian jobs in November 2022, an increase of 1.5 per cent from the 39,909 persons employed in November 2021. As noted by the Governor in his state of the Territory address delivered on 23 January 2023, the unemployment rate declined to 5.3 per cent in September 2022, which was higher than the pre-pandemic rate of 3.5 per cent in February 2020 but lower than the average rate of 10.0 per cent in 2021.

30. Small business owners who needed assistance as a result of the pandemic were granted the opportunity to apply for the federal Paycheck Protection Program offered by the United States Small Business Administration. According to a report of the Small Business Administration on the Program, approximately 2,000 small businesses in the Territory had received loans totalling \$127.8 million through the Program as of August 2020. The Program ended on 31 May 2021.

B. Education

31. Education in the United States Virgin Islands is compulsory and free for all children between 5 and 16 years of age. The Territory's Department of Education comprises a State-level education agency and two local education agencies, one for the Saint Thomas-Saint John district and the other for the Saint Croix district. Each district has 2 high schools, 3 middle schools and 10 elementary schools. The University of the Virgin Islands has campuses on Saint Thomas and Saint Croix and a combined full-time and part-time body of some 2,500 students.

32. According to the Virgin Islands Department of Education, 10,166 students were enrolled for the 2022/23 school year: 5,072 in the Saint Croix district and 5,094 in the Saint Thomas–Saint John district. The total represents a slight decrease from the 2020/21 school year. Adult basic education and adult secondary education courses were offered in both districts as part of the adult education programme. A total of 140 certificates were issued to graduates of the career and technical education programme in June 2021.

33. According to the Bureau of Economic Research, kindergarten through twelfth grade school enrolment has been falling consistently since 2010; there was a 6.9 per cent decrease in enrolment in 2021 compared with 2020, while the decline over the five-year period 2017–2021 was 9 per cent. The number of graduates of the University of the Virgin Islands decreased from 370 in 2020 to 313 in 2021, a significant decline of 15.4 per cent.

C. Public health

34. The Territory's Department of Health maintains facilities on Saint Thomas, Saint John and Saint Croix, as well as a long-term care facility on Saint Thomas. Outreach efforts include educational, preventive and treatment services using clinics and subdivisions to address maternal and child health, family planning, environmental health, sexually transmitted infections, HIV, tuberculosis, mental health and substance abuse. The Department administers 33 activity centres and 16 federal programmes under the auspices of the Office of the Commissioner and the divisions dealing with fiscal affairs, support services, public health services, health promotion and statistics.

35. According to the Pan American Health Organization publication "Health in the Americas 2022", life expectancy at birth in 2022 was 75.1 years – higher than the average for the region of the Americas – representing an increase of 3.3 years over the 2000 figure.

36. According to the administering Power, the Government of the United States provided considerable financial assistance to the United States Virgin Islands to assist the Territory in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act included \$55 million in funding assistance for insular areas, which included the United States Virgin Islands, to support efforts to prepare for, prevent and respond to the pandemic.

D. Crime and crime prevention

37. According to the proposed executive budget for the fiscal years 2023 and 2024, the Virgin Islands Police Department is charged primarily with the enforcement of laws. The Department comprises seven divisions: the Office of the Commissioner, the Division of Police Operations – Saint Thomas – Water Island, the Division of Administration Support and Logistics, the Division of Police Operations – Saint Croix, the Division of Highway Safety, the Division of Training and the Division of Police Operations – Saint John.

V. Environmental protection and disaster preparedness

38. The responsibility for ensuring the Territory's resilience to disasters lies with the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency. The Agency ensures the Territory's ability to recover rapidly from large and small disasters by assessing

and mitigating hazards, enhancing preparedness, ensuring an effective response and building the capacity to recover.

VI. Relations with international organizations and partners

39. The United States Virgin Islands is an associate member of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. The Territory has observer status with the Association of Caribbean States and the Alliance of Small Island States, which serves as a platform to promote action on environmental issues, including climate change. According to information provided by the administering Power, the United States Virgin Islands received acceptance as a territorial Government with observer status at the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States in 2009.

40. 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 at the meetings include law enforcement, pleasure boating and sport fishing, other maritime matters, cooperation in tourism, energy and utilities, and culture and education. The 9th meeting of the Inter-Virgin Islands Council was held on Saint Thomas.

VII. Future status of the Territory

A. Position of the territorial Government

41. Developments regarding discussions on the future status of the United States Virgin Islands are reflected in section I.

B. Position of the administering Power

42. In a letter dated 2 November 2006 addressed to the delegate of American Samoa to the United States House of Representatives, the Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs elaborated on the position of the Government of the United States. He indicated that the status of the insular areas regarding their political relations with the federal Government was an internal United States issue and not one that came within the purview 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. He said that the Special Committee had no authority to alter in any way the relationship between the United States and those territories and had no mandate to engage the United States in negotiations on their status. He also said that, at the same time, in accordance with its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations to provide regularly to the United Nations statistical and other information of a technical nature relating to the economic, social and educational conditions in the Non-Self-Governing Territories, the federal Government submitted annual updates on the Territories under its administration to the Special Committee as a demonstration of its cooperation as an administering Power and as a way of correcting any errors in information that the Special Committee might have received from other sources.

43. At the 9th meeting of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), on 14 October 2022, during the seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly, the representative of the United States said that his Government was committed to advancing shared progress in American Samoa, Guam and the

United States Virgin Islands and recognized the challenges that they faced owing to their size, remote locations and limited natural resources, as well as the impact of years of slavery, colonialism and wars, followed by conflict and social adjustment, including during the periods of administration by the United States and the development of internal self-government. His Government had close partnerships with the territorial Governments, whose people were an integral part of United States society, as had been demonstrated by their inclusion in the same COVID-19 pandemic relief and recovery package provided to all 50 States and in the roll-out and implementation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022. The federal Government worked in close partnership with the local governments to promote political, economic and social development. The current Administration, as part of its policies aimed at recognizing and remediating ethnic and racial injustice, had recognized past federal actions and institutionalized practices that in some cases and circumstances had not been consistent with the protection of equal rights and opportunities for all members of the diverse communities of the Territories.

44. He added that the United States recognized its obligations under Article 73 (e) of the Charter to promote self-determination for the peoples of American Samoa, Guam and the United States Virgin Islands. While they had the status of Non-Self-Governing Territories, they were locally self-governing and enjoyed federal political representation. Their elected representatives to the House of Representatives served on several important committees, where they participated in debates on national legislation. The Governors of the Territories were regularly invited to meetings of the Senate and House committees of jurisdiction to report on territorial status and to advocate federal policy changes and initiatives. The Interagency Group on Insular Areas hosted the Governors and United States representatives from each Territory at an annual senior plenary session, where representatives of the Administration were in attendance, and they could register priorities and concerns related to the local execution of federal policies and initiatives.

45. At the same meeting, the representative reiterated his delegation's concern that the draft resolutions to be adopted at the meeting placed too much weight on independence as a one-size-fits-all status option for Territories in pursuit of self-determination. He said that, as stated in the 1970 Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the people of a Non-Self-Governing Territory could validly opt for free association as an alternative to independence or any other political status, including integration with the administering State, provided that that status was freely determined by the people, and that therefore the United Nations must not seek to influence the outcome of decolonization processes, but rather respect the free will of the people (see [A/C.4/77/SR.9](#)).

VIII. Action taken by the General Assembly

46. On 12 December 2022, the General Assembly adopted its resolution [77/147](#) without a vote on the basis of the report of the Special Committee for 2022 ([A/77/23](#)) and the subsequent recommendation by the Fourth Committee. In the resolution, the Assembly:

(a) Reaffirmed the inalienable right of the people of the United States 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 United States 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 United States 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) Welcomed the proposal of a draft constitution emanating from the Territory in 2009, as a result of the work of the United States Virgin Islands Fifth Constitutional Convention, for review by the administering Power, and requested the administering Power to assist the territorial Government in achieving its political, economic and social goals, in particular the successful conclusion of the internal Constitutional Convention exercise;

(e) Requested the administering Power to facilitate the process for approval of the proposed constitution and its implementation, once agreed upon in the Territory, and to regularly provide the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples with relevant updates in that regard, including on the process for convening a constitutional convention following the referendum held in November 2020;

(f) Also 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;

(g) Welcomed the establishment of the Office of Self-Determination and Constitutional Development in the University of the Virgin Islands, with funding from the administering Power, to address the issue of self-determination, including political status and constitutional education;

(h) Reiterated its call for the inclusion of the Territory in regional programmes of the United Nations Development Programme, consistent with the participation of other Non-Self-Governing Territories;

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

(j) Stressed that the Territory should continue to participate in the activities of the Special Committee, including regional seminars, in order to provide the Committee with up-to-date information regarding the decolonization process;

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

(l) 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 United States Virgin Islands, and encouraged the administering Power to facilitate visiting and special missions to the Territory;

(m) 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;

(n) 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 were not aligned with the interest of the people of the Territory;

(o) 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;

(p) 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 assistance necessary 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;

(q) Requested the Special Committee to continue to examine the question of the United States Virgin Islands and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session and on the implementation of the present resolution.

Annex

Map of the United States Virgin Islands

