

Visits to the TCI by UK officials in September 2021

We in TCI have had significant engagement with the UK in the last two weeks. The Royal Navy have been exercising off our coast, Commando Engineers deploying with our Regiment and RFA WAVE KNIGHT moored in Grand Turk. The Secretary General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (Stephen Twigg) visited Grand Turk and met leaders and elected representatives from across the Territory. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association from Westminster also visited to provide training to the newly elected members of the House of Assembly so they could better discharge their legislative and oversight responsibilities.

The Governors of Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands and Montserrat travelled to TCI to attend a Caribbean Governor's conference chaired by the Director of the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office's Overseas Territories Directorate and they were joined by video link by the Governor of Cayman. The Premier of TCI, supported by the Deputy Governor and Attorney General, were able to meet them over lunch and provided a deep insight into the current optimistic outlook for the islands and the reasons for that rooted partly in the handling of the COVID pandemic but also rooted in a set of good governance laws, institutions and practices consolidated over the last decade.

The Director (Mr Paul Candler) and the Deputy Director (Mr Adam Pile) of the FCDO's Overseas Territories Directorate came to TCI not only to host this conference but also to spend time understanding TCI and they were accompanied by a UK Government Economist, (Mr Samuel Edwards). The British Airways flight they arrived on included the fifth batch of vaccines from the UK Government. They were briefed in detail on National Security, Policing and Crown Land. Calls were made on the Maritime Police, Radar, the Port and the Detention Centre, Hospital and National Laboratory. They visited HMP Grand Turk, toured TCI seeing the beauty of our coastline from air, land and sea along with the boom in our top end construction sector through to the unregulated settlements of Dockyard. Environmental officers took them out on patrol so they could understand maritime protection.

They met with the Premier and his Cabinet; the Deputy Governor and Attorney General. They had lunch with the Leader of the Opposition and the Opposition's Appointed Member and spent time with 'Team Finance', 'Team Health', and DDME including the UK military liaison officer. Crucially they spent time with a group representing the young and also: NGO's; good governance bodies; leaders in TCI's industry and business; child safe-guarding; the Governor's appointed members; all the Permanent Secretaries; the Justice Stakeholders Group and the Press. They also had the opportunity to have dinner with the Premier and Deputy Premier to build a constructive relationship with the new Government and its leadership.

Hosted by the Governor, and newly appointed to his role, this was Mr

Candler's first visit to an inhabited overseas Territory and it was not coincidental he chose TCI first. The success that TCI has enjoyed over the last 18 months, weathering the initial period of the pandemic from a health perspective, rolling out the vaccines to deliver a rate of over 70%, the significant rebound of the economy and the fact it may emerge from the pandemic stronger than it entered, suggests that much is going well in TCI and there are underpinning fundamentals that TCI has worked hard to embed, over the last decade, that are worth learning from in the UK Governments relationships with other Overseas Territories. The optimism for the future was, Mr Candler said, 'palpable and real'.

As a Governor – who is now entering his third year – it was also striking to me that in almost every conversation, with every sector of society and community, and every stakeholder in its future, the importance around issues of 'identity', expressed from very different perspectives, and every different perspective, were raised by those speaking to our visitors. It impacts on opportunities linked to wealth creation, employment, health, education, child safe-guarding, policing, security, long term stability and much else. Over the last week this well-founded 'hope' for our future prosperity yet also this 'fear' around who is – and who is not – part of the future TCI nation – seems to me to mark TCI out as an Overseas Territory different from the rest. The positive point, on the latter, was how respectful to different positions each person who raised this had been, and I believe our visitors would have been struck by the constructive tone of the debate they heard, most particularly from the younger generation that they met. That's particularly apposite as I write this on national youth day.