

REMARKS BY JUDITH TOWLE
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Tortola Profile Launch Ceremony

J.R. O'Neal Botanic Gardens
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Good evening ladies and gentlemen. I acknowledge those previously recognized by my friend and colleague, Dr. Michael O'Neal, and welcome all who join us this evening in celebration of the final environmental profiles for the British Virgin Islands. I am particularly grateful to the Honorable Deputy Premier and Minister of Natural Resources and Labour, not only for his presence but also for co-sponsoring this event with Island Resources Foundation. I also extend a special welcome to the members of the environmental profile project team — those researchers and writers who have worked for the last seven years on this multi-island, multi-disciplinary project and whom I shall individually acknowledge later in the programme.

Tonight we are gathered to launch the publication of the final two documents in the 5-volume BVI profile series — specifically, the Tortola Environmental Profile and a Natural History Study of Tortola's Sister Islands. But the Environmental Profile Programme for the British Virgin Islands actually had its genesis several decades ago in the 1980s, and I would like to briefly provide some of that background.

In 1986, the Caribbean Conservation Association in Barbados and the University of the West Indies sponsored a conference at which time participants acknowledged the need to produce environmental profiles in the Eastern Caribbean. This conference coincided with an action by the Congress of the United States, which had imposed a mandate on the U.S. Agency for International Development requiring that a formal environmental profile be prepared for each country in the world receiving funding from USAID.

The six OECS countries in the Caribbean were among the last countries to be addressed under this mandate, but finally, in 1987, USAID's mission in Barbados

complied with the Congressional mandate and launched a programme to provide environmental profiles for each of the AID-funded countries in the Eastern Caribbean.

The ensuing OECS Profile Project was implemented by the Caribbean Conservation Association (CCA), with Island Resources Foundation (IRF) selected to provide the technical assistance needed to prepare the documents. The six environmental profiles — for Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines — were funded by USAID, prepared over a four-year period by IRF, and published in 1991 by the Caribbean Conservation Association and IRF.

The six OECS profiles were ground-breaking for their time and provided the most comprehensive environmental overviews prepared to that date for the six OECS countries.

Shortly thereafter, the United Nations Development Programme in Barbados approached CCA and IRF to undertake a similar project for three UK territories in the Eastern Caribbean — Anguilla, Montserrat and the British Virgin Islands. UNDP provided funding and by 1993, CCA and IRF had prepared and published environmental profiles for Anguilla and Montserrat. However, the BVI declined to have an environmental profile prepared at that time.

We then jump forward to 2008, a decade-and-a-half later, when a newly revived environmental NGO on the island of Jost Van Dyke — the Jost Van Dykes Preservation Society — approached Island Resources Foundation about assisting with a profile project for the island of Jost Van Dyke, based on IRF's earlier experience with the format. At the time, the Society was looking to launch programmatic activities and realized how little environmental information was available for Jost Van Dyke. Funding was secured from the UK's Overseas Territories Environment Programme, and the first of the BVI's environmental profiles, for Jost Van Dyke, was published in 2009.

After that, it seemed logical to those of us working at IRF that there should be more than one BVI environmental profile; there should be profiles for *all* the major islands in the territory. All that was lacking was funding! Then began a slow, often tedious process to secure needed support for a profiling process that would include the entire territory. This was done incrementally over a number of years as no single donor came forward to provide needed resources for all remaining profiles.

As we moved from profile to profile — Virgin Gorda published in 2012, Anegada in 2013, and now the Tortola profiles in 2015 — a potpourri of funding sources emerged, which are identified in each of the published documents. I should however like to mention a few of our primary donors not only because they were critical to the execution of this programme, but because as a totality they demonstrate the range and extent of support for the overall Environmental Profile Project.

- The **UK Government through its Overseas Territories Environment Programme** provided all funding for the JVD profile and significant funding for the Anegada and Virgin Gorda Profiles. More recently, the Governor's office, through the **Overseas Territories Programme Fund**, provided support for the natural history study of Tortola's Sister Islands.
- The **Government of the BVI, through the Office of the Premier**, contributed early funding for the Anegada and Virgin Gorda Profiles, which was critical for demonstrating government buy-in for the programme.
- Three donors have provided ongoing support extending through the life of the Anegada and Virgin Gorda Profiles and on to the final profile project for Tortola. Specifically, I acknowledge the long-term support of:
 1. The US-based **J.A. Woollam Foundation**, by far the largest private-sector donor for the Anegada, Virgin Gorda and Tortola Profiles.

2. The members of the **Hokin family of the Bitter End Yacht Club in Virgin Gorda**, who joined with IRF in the earliest days of this programme and have stayed the course throughout.
 3. **Sir Richard Branson** of Necker and Mosquito Islands, who contributed to the profiles for Virgin Gorda and Anegada, which are in his neighborhood of the BVI, and who initially told me Tortola entrepreneurs would need to fund the Tortola profile — but then relented and he provided support for Tortola too!
- More recently, other private-sector donors helped to make the Tortola project a reality, since, for the Tortola Profile, no public-sector funding was available. These major contributors for Tortola included:
 - **The Faile Foundation**
 - **Nancy and Curt Richardson**
 - **The Falconwood Foundation**
 - **The Nora Hazel Point Estate**
 - And lastly, for our final profile report — the natural history study for Tortola's sister islands — we received funding from owners and residents on several of the sister islands: **Little Thatch, Cooper Island, Great Camanoe, and Marina Cay**, all of whom are acknowledged individually in the introduction to that document. Several of these donors are present this evening, and I welcome and thank you all.

The BVI Environmental Profile Programme was predicated on the premise that knowledge is power — a premise also forming a basic tenant of Island Resources Foundation, namely, a recognition that information is the basis for informed decision-making about the environment. What we set out to do in 2008 in Jost Van Dyke, and what we then extended to the territory, was to provide a current-state description and assessment of the BVI's environment. This has now been accomplished in five volumes comprising well over 1,000 pages of text and data.

In short, we wanted to expand the environmental information base for the BVI and to make that information more easily accessible to all.

The final of the four major profiles—that for Tortola—is, like the island it describes, big and sweeping, over 350 pages in length. Its companion document, focusing on Tortola’s offshore sister islands, represents the first time we elected *not* to include these smaller islands within the profile created for the primary island. Instead, we created a separate natural history study for the sister islands. I only wish we had had the funding and resources to complete a separate document for the sister islands of Jost Van Dyke and Virgin Gorda — but then that is a task for others to undertake in the future.

And, speaking of the future, this is an appropriate time for me to note that Island Resources Foundation will be sunsetting as an organisation early next year. The Foundation was established as an environmental NGO in the US Virgin Islands almost 45 years ago. At the time, IRF was one of the very few organisations addressing environmental change in the Caribbean; now we are one of many, and it is time for those of us associated with the Foundation to bequeath the future to a new generation of environmental scientists and advocates.

As I look back on our four-plus decades in the region, I am particularly proud of the fact that IRF was, in the early 1970s, among the first to put forward the premise that islands are special places, that their environments are unique and vulnerable, and that the Foundation’s mission would be to assist small islands (especially those in the Caribbean) to address environmental change, side by side with social, economic and institutional change. It has been an exciting and rewarding four decades for those of us engaged in that journey.

In closing, I would like to mention the special place that the British Virgin Islands has played in the development of Island Resources Foundation. Indeed, I would not be standing before you today if it were not for the BVI. Back in 1967, my late husband and IRF founder, Dr. Edward Towle, was a curator of naval history at the

Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. Ed was sent by the Smithsonian in the summer of 1967 to the island of Anegada on a marine archeological expedition.

On his homeward journey he passed through the island of St. Thomas, where, quite by chance, he was offered a position as director of the Caribbean Research Institute at the then College (now University) of the Virgin Islands. The rest, as they say, is history. We moved to the Caribbean, and five years later Ed and I established Island Resources Foundation. So, if it had not been for the island of Anegada and all those shipwrecks, the Towles might never have left Washington, DC!

I still remember my first visit to Tortola in 1969. The Wickham's Cay development project was underway in Road Harbour, and suddenly historical artifacts were coming up the dredge pipe and being scattered about recently pumped sand. Cyril Romney, then serving as Government's Financial Secretary, had remembered reading about a new chap at the college in neighboring St. Thomas who had a marine archaeology background. He called Ed for assistance, I tagged along, and we were in Road Town the next day.

Here we were met by the long-standing chair of the National Parks Trust, J.R. O'Neal, who had already gathered volunteers, supplied all with wheel barrels and shovels from his hardware store, and was awaiting advice from the "expert" in St. Thomas. There followed a rescue effort to salvage artifacts before they were lost to the dredging operation. I even remember that Cyril Romney's personal bathtub, filled with fresh water, served as a temporary repository to hold some of the recovered artifacts.

That was the Towles' first adventure in the BVI. We made new friends on that visit, and we knew we would be back — as indeed we have been for more than 45 years.

Island Resources Foundation's work in the BVI and the wider Caribbean is now winding to a close. Concurrently, the BVI Environmental Profile Programme has come to an end. However, as I wrote in the introduction to the Tortola

Environmental Profile, this final profile and those that preceded it are dedicated to the people of the Virgin Islands. The environment of these islands — as described in detail throughout the pages of the profiles— belongs to them, to lovingly protect and wisely manage.