

The US Virgin Islands and Denmark, a troubled past, a common future

A declaration from the Moravian Church in Denmark and several citizens of Denmark, 2017

In 1917, Denmark sold St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John, known as the US Virgin Islands to the United States of America. It is 100 years ago and it is a time for reflecting on the past and for seeking common visions for the future.

The Danish presence in the islands began in 1666. For more than 100 years, people of African descent were forcibly being brought across the Atlantic Ocean as slaves to labor in plantations, in homes of planters and other entities owned by people of Danish origin and people of other nationalities. Commodities produced through slave labor on the islands, including sugar and rum were instrument in the creation of an increasing wealth in Denmark.

The amount of human sorrow, pain and despair caused by the slavery cannot be imagined. The lack of respect of the human dignity of the people, who against their will were enslaved, is not comprehensible for us today. The injustice caused by our forefathers to the forefathers of the population of the islands is inexcusable.

It is time to face the past. It is time to share, in honesty and humbleness, the feelings and thoughts, we as 21st Century Danes have. Doing this will allow neither the people of the US Virgin Islands, nor the people of Denmark to forget the past. However, the hope is that doing so, will help all of us in unison to seek a future, in which mutual understanding, love and respect set our course as two peoples, which through a troubled past are bound together. It is time for reconciliation of our hearts and minds.

As citizens of Denmark, we take this opportunity to declare:

- Together with several other citizens of Denmark, we declare to be troubled about a deeply regrettable past, in which the forefathers of the population on the US Virgin Islands were enslaved and against their will were forced to labor for masters, many of whom came from Denmark. For this, although belated, we apologize in the spirit of love!
- The atrocities of slavery were inhuman; they were against the will of God, who through Jesus Christ taught us that human beings are all equal, created in the image of God. The atrocities were against all the human values, on which our societies are founded.
- We recognize that despite all the cruelty and injustice suffered, the people of the US Virgin Islands had the human, the spiritual and the cultural strength to come through this time and create a future together.
- We recognize that the people of the US Virgin Islands, in part shaped by the hardships of the past, in part due to the identity and integrity of the people, have an important role to play on the world scene today and in the future.
- As citizens of Denmark, as a Church in Denmark, as people of the 21st Century, as citizens of the global village, we declare that we see all human beings as our brothers and sisters; in particular, we wish to let the people of the US Virgin Islands know that we are siblings.

- We recognize that what has been done cannot be undone. However, as the world has changed, as we in our generation have opportunities of moving towards a common destiny, we all have a responsibility strengthen our ties as peoples and build international understanding.

As citizens of Denmark, we envision:

- To further the development of the contacts and partnership between the people of the US Virgin Islands and the people of Denmark.
- To create closer bonds between our peoples in areas of commerce, tourism, religion, science and art.
- Together to move forward towards a relation between our peoples that may serve as an example in a world, in which injustice due to slavery, war and cruelty has been a reality in many countries, over centuries; this we will do, bearing in mind that even today, millions of people are victims of unjust political and social structures.

Last, but not least: We ask with respect and humbleness, the people of the US Virgin Islands to receive this declaration in the spirit in which it is conveyed, with openness, love and a will to live in peace and harmony together.

So help us God.

The Moravian Church in Denmark and several citizens of Denmark, signed from 27.3. 2017 on www.wechange.dk

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