

P-769-25

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The People of the United States Virgin Islands

United States of America

IACHR/ES
07/23/2025 10:12 AM



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PETITION FORM

SECTION I: INFORMATION ON THE ALLEGED VICTIM AND PETITIONER

1. INFORMATION ON THE ALLEGED VICTIM(S)

Please provide information about the person or group affected by the violations of human rights. In the event that there is more than one alleged victim, please create a new profile for each one.

Please provide information regarding the close family members of the alleged victim(s) who are likely to have suffered harm as a result of the alleged violation of human rights.

- 1 -

Complete name	Shelley Moorhead
Name the alleged victim identifies with	Shelley Moorhead
Gender	Male
Occupation	Advocate
Nationality	United States
Date of birth (dd/mm/yyyy)	07/07/1974
Mailing address	P.O. Box 8027 Christiansted, VI 00823-8027
Telephone	+13402440099
Fax	N/A
Email	shelley.moorhead@gmail.com
Additional information	N/A
Alleged victim is deprived of liberty	No
Names of the family members and relationship to the alleged victim	Yiore Moorhead
Gender of family member(s)	Male
Occupation of family member(s)	Student - Minor child
Nationality of family member(s)	United States
Mailing address of family member(s)	P.O. Box 8027 Christiansted, VI 00823-8027
Telephone of family member(s)	13402033702

<i>Fax of family member(s)</i>	N/A
<i>Email of family member(s)</i>	shelley.moorhead@gmail.com
<i>Additional information</i>	N/A

- 2 -

<i>Complete name</i>	African-Caribbean Reparations and Resettlement Alliance ACRRRA
<i>Name the alleged victim identifies with</i>	ACRRRA
<i>Gender</i>	N/A
<i>Occupation</i>	NGO
<i>Nationality</i>	United States
<i>Date of birth (dd/mm/yyyy)</i>	01/10/2004
<i>Mailing address</i>	P.O. Box 8027 Christiansted, VI 00823-8027
<i>Telephone</i>	+13402440099
<i>Fax</i>	N/A
<i>Email</i>	acrra.vi@gmail.com
<i>Additional information</i>	N/A
<i>Alleged victim is deprived of liberty</i>	Yes
<i>Names of the family members and relationship to the alleged victim</i>	N/A
<i>Gender of family member(s)</i>	N/A
<i>Occupation of family member(s)</i>	N/A
<i>Nationality of family member(s)</i>	N/A
<i>Mailing address of family member(s)</i>	N/A
<i>Telephone of family member(s)</i>	N/A
<i>Fax of family member(s)</i>	N/A
<i>Email of family member(s)</i>	N/A
<i>Additional information</i>	N/A

- 3 -

<i>Complete name</i>	THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS USVI
<i>Name the alleged victim identifies with</i>	USVI
<i>Gender</i>	N/A
<i>Occupation</i>	Colonized

Nationality	United States
Date of birth (dd/mm/yyyy)	31/03/1917
Mailing address	P.O. Box 8027 Christiansted, VI 00823-8027
Telephone	+13402440099
Fax	N/A
Email	acrra.vi@gmail.com
Additional information	N/A
Alleged victim is deprived of liberty	Yes
Names of the family members and relationship to the alleged victim	N/A
Gender of family member(s)	N/A
Occupation of family member(s)	N/A
Nationality of family member(s)	N/A
Mailing address of family member(s)	N/A
Telephone of family member(s)	N/A
Fax of family member(s)	N/A
Email of family member(s)	N/A
Additional information	N/A

2. INFORMATION ON THE PETITIONER

Please provide information about the person or group that is submitting the petition. In the event that it is a civil society organization, include the name of the designated persons(s) who will receive communications. If there is more than one organization or person, please create a new profile for each one.

In certain cases, the Commission can keep the identity of the petitioner confidential, if expressly requested along with presenting the respective reasons (Art. 28.2). This means that only the name of the alleged victim will be communicated to the State if the IACHR decides to process your petition.

While it is possible to keep the petitioner's identity confidential, the processing of an individual petition requires that the alleged victim's identity be revealed (person, persons, group). In exceptional cases the Commission may restrict the alleged victim's identity from the public in the published documents, for example by substituting the complete name with initials or a pseudonym. The request to restrict the identity of the alleged victim must be made to the Commission with a statement of reasons.

In cases where the alleged victim and the petitioner are the same person and you wish to restrict the identity of the person in his/her capacity as petitioner, the petition must be written in the third person. An example of this would be: "the alleged victim claims that..." (and not "I was a victim of...").

Include the person completing this form as a petitioner?	Yes
--	-----

Complete name	Shelley A. H. Moorhead
---------------	------------------------

Organization	African-Caribbean Reparations and Resettlement Alliance
Acronym of Organization	ACRRA
Nationality	United States
Mailing address	P.O. Box 8027 Christiansted, VI 00823-8027
Telephone	+13402440099
Fax	
Email	acrra.vi@gmail.com

Reserve identity of petitioner?	No
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If checkbox is selected to keep petitioner identity confidential, please explain:

N/A

3. IS YOUR PETITION RELATED TO A PREVIOUS PETITION OR PRECAUTIONARY MEASURE?

Have you previously submitted a petition to the Commission concerning these same facts?	No	
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Have you submitted a request for precautionary measures to the Commission concerning these same facts?	Yes	MC-8161-09
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SECTION II - FACTS ALLEGED

1. MEMBER STATE OF THE OAS AGAINST WHICH THE COMPLAINT IS SUBMITTED:

United States

2. THE FACTS ALLEGED

Provide, in chronological order, an account of the facts alleged that is as thorough and detailed as possible. In particular, specify the place, the date, and the circumstances in which the alleged violations occurred. As a reminder, your petition must be presented in the language of the country involved. If this is not possible, please explain.

The petitioner submits the following account of facts in support of its petition on behalf of the people of the United States Virgin Islands (USVI), who have been systematically denied their political rights, subjected to ongoing colonial domination, and recently exposed to an escalated treaty violation by the executive leadership of the United States. 1. Colonial Status and Denial of Self-Determination (1917–Present) On March 31, 1917, the United States formally acquired the Danish West Indies (now the USVI) from Denmark under the Treaty of the Danish West Indies, signed August 4, 1916. The treaty and its accompanying diplomatic note, the Lansing Declaration, assured Denmark that the U.S. would not interfere in Greenland's

sovereignty.

The population of the territory—comprised primarily of descendants of enslaved Africans—was not consulted and has remained under a colonial governance regime without full constitutional rights.

To this day, Virgin Islanders cannot vote for President, have no representation in the U.S. Senate, and possess only a non-voting Delegate in the House. The territory is classified as “unincorporated,” meaning the U.S. Constitution does not fully apply.

2. Legal Voicelessness and Exclusion from U.S. Judicial Remedies

U.S. court decisions including the Insular Cases (1901–1922) and *Sanchez-Espinoza v. Reagan* (1985) confirm that residents of the USVI do not have standing to assert treaty rights or challenge U.S. foreign policy in court.

Virgin Islanders are thus unable to seek legal redress for structural disenfranchisement or to contest violations of international agreements, including the 1916 treaty.

3. March 28, 2025 – Public Treaty Violation by U.S. Executive Officials

On March 28, 2025, U.S. President Donald J. Trump and Vice President J.D. Vance issued public statements concerning the United States' intention to reacquire Greenland and “revisit” the 1916 transfer of the Danish West Indies.

Trump delivered his remarks from the White House, while Vance spoke at Thule Air Base in Greenland during an official military visit.

Their joint statement included the following: “America must revisit the 1916 transfer, and assert a renewed doctrine of hemispheric acquisition for the 21st century.”

These remarks openly violated the Lansing Declaration, which affirmed the U.S. would not interfere with Danish sovereignty in Greenland. The statements signaled that the U.S. no longer considered the 1916 treaty framework binding.

4. Ongoing Consequences and Threat of Irreparable Harm

The repudiation of the Lansing Declaration by the current U.S. President and Vice President has:

Undermined the legal basis for the U.S. administration of the Virgin Islands;

Triggered a diplomatic and constitutional crisis concerning the territory's status;

Exposed residents to permanent political marginalization, treaty abandonment, and loss of legal protections;

Highlighted the urgent need for international oversight and precautionary intervention.

Since this violation, ACRRA has submitted filings to the Permanent Court of Arbitration, UN CERD, and the IACHR, demonstrating that no domestic remedy exists to address this breach or to restore the rights of the people of the Virgin Islands.

3. AUTHORITIES ALLEGEDLY RESPONSIBLE

Identify the person(s) or authorities who you consider responsible for the facts alleged and provide any additional information as to why you consider the State responsible for the alleged violations.

AUTHORITIES ALLEGEDLY RESPONSIBLE

The United States of America is responsible for the alleged violations as the sovereign State and administering power over the U.S. Virgin Islands since March 31, 1917. The following individuals and institutions are specifically implicated:

a) President Donald J. Trump

As the current President of the United States, Trump is directly responsible for the March 28, 2025 statement made from the White House endorsing the reacquisition of Greenland and calling for the U.S. to “revisit the 1916 transfer” of the Danish West Indies. This statement constituted a repudiation of the Lansing Declaration, a diplomatic agreement binding the U.S. not to interfere in Greenland, and thereby undermined the legal framework of U.S.

governance in the Virgin Islands.

b) Vice President J.D. Vance

As the current Vice President of the United States, Vance issued reinforcing statements during a U.S. Department of Defense visit to Thule Air Base in Greenland on the same date. Vance invoked the Danish West Indies transfer as a precedent for U.S. acquisition, signaling intent to disregard international obligations and to apply colonial logic to future territorial expansion.

c) U.S. Congress

The U.S. Congress is responsible for maintaining the unincorporated status of the Virgin Islands and for systematically denying Virgin Islanders voting rights, full citizenship protections, and legislative representation. Congress has failed to initiate any self-determination process, plebiscite, or reparative legislation in violation of international norms and human rights principles.

d) U.S. Judiciary

The U.S. federal judiciary, through its continued reliance on the Insular Cases, has upheld a doctrine of constitutional apartheid that structurally excludes the people of the Virgin Islands from full legal protection, blocks treaty enforcement claims, and denies access to remedies.

Basis for State Responsibility

Under international law, a State is responsible for the actions of its executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The above-named actors have either affirmatively caused, maintained, or enabled the violations described. Their acts and omissions have led to:

The erosion of international treaty protections;

The denial of political rights and legal remedies;

The perpetuation of racial and colonial subjugation in violation of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man.

4. HUMAN RIGHTS ALLEGEDLY VIOLATED

Indicate the rights that you consider have been violated. If possible, specify the rights protected by the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, the American Convention on Human Rights, or the other inter-American human rights treaties. Consult inter-American human rights instruments on our web page.

HUMAN RIGHTS ALLEGEDLY VIOLATED

As a member State of the Organization of American States (OAS), the United States of America is bound by the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man (1948). The following rights have been violated in the case of the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands:

a) Article II – Right to Equality Before the Law

Virgin Islanders are denied equal treatment under U.S. law based solely on territorial status. The "unincorporated territory" doctrine has created a system of racialized political exclusion whereby constitutional protections and civil rights are arbitrarily withheld from an overwhelmingly Black population.

b) Article XX – Right to Participate in Government

Residents of the U.S. Virgin Islands cannot vote for President, have no representation in the U.S. Senate, and are limited to a non-voting Delegate in the House of Representatives. This constitutes a violation of their right to participate in the political process of the government that exercises power over them.

c) Article XVIII – Right to a Fair Trial and Access to Justice

The federal judiciary of the United States has repeatedly refused to hear claims brought by Virgin Islanders related to their political status, citizenship, and treaty protections. This denial of legal standing and access to judicial remedies violates their right to fair legal process.

d) Article XVII – Right to Recognition of Juridical Personality

By withholding full constitutional status and legal recognition, the United States denies the people of the Virgin Islands recognition as equal subjects of law. This has direct consequences for their capacity to invoke rights, enforce treaties, or participate in international legal processes.

e) Article XIX – Right to Nationality

Virgin Islanders are U.S. citizens without full rights, resulting in a form of functional statelessness within the U.S. legal system. Their status is subject to unilateral congressional control, and they lack the ability to claim equal national treatment.

f) Article XXIII – Right to Property

The economic exploitation of the territory through fiscal structures such as the rum cover-over tax, and the lack of reparative policies following centuries of enslavement and colonial extraction, violate the collective economic rights and property interests of the people.

g) Right to Self-Determination (Customary International Law; recognized under OAS Charter principles and the American Declaration's spirit)

The people of the U.S. Virgin Islands have never been granted an internationally supervised process of self-determination. Their current colonial condition—perpetuated and deepened by the March 28, 2025 treaty breach—violates one of the foundational norms of postcolonial human rights law.

SECTION III - LEGAL REMEDIES PURSUED TO RESOLVE THE FACTS ALLEGED

Describe the actions pursued by the alleged victim(s) or the petitioner before judicial bodies. Explain any other remedy pursued before domestic authorities, including administrative agencies, if any.

ACTIONS PURSUED BEFORE DOMESTIC AUTHORITIES

The African-Caribbean Reparations and Resettlement Alliance (ACRRA), on behalf of the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands, has not pursued remedies before domestic judicial or administrative bodies in the United States for the following reasons:

a) U.S. Courts Do Not Recognize Standing for Treaty-Based or Political Status Claims

Virgin Islanders have been systematically denied standing in U.S. courts to bring claims concerning:

Treaty violations (including the 1916 Treaty of the Danish West Indies and the Lansing Declaration)

Territorial political status

Denial of voting rights or equal citizenship

Relevant precedents include:

Downes v. Bidwell, 182 U.S. 244 (1901)

Sanchez-Espinoza v. Reagan, 770 F.2d 202 (D.C. Cir. 1985)

Tuaua v. United States, 788 F.3d 300 (D.C. Cir. 2015)

These cases demonstrate that the U.S. judiciary consistently applies the "Insular Cases" doctrine, which relegates residents of unincorporated territories like the USVI to a separate and unequal legal category. As a result, no domestic legal remedy is available or effective.

b) No Administrative or Human Rights Mechanism Exists in the United States

The United States does not have a national human rights commission or administrative body where systemic political disenfranchisement, racial colonial legacy, or treaty violations can be addressed. There is no forum to file a grievance for failure to initiate a self-determination process, nor is there a path for territorial residents to challenge acts of the executive or Congress concerning international obligations.

c) Legislative Inaccessibility

The U.S. Congress, which maintains full authority over the USVI, is not subject to legal obligation to initiate a status resolution process. The territory's population has no voting representation in the Senate and is represented in the House only by a non-voting Delegate. Consequently, petitioning Congress or the Executive Branch does not meet the standard of an effective or adequate remedy as defined under international law.

Conclusion

Given the complete absence of judicial, legislative, or administrative mechanisms to address the violations alleged, the petitioner respectfully submits that this case satisfies the exhaustion of domestic remedies requirement under Article 31(2) of the IACHR's Rules of Procedure. The petition must be admitted to ensure that the people of the Virgin Islands are not permanently excluded from international legal protection.

If it has not been possible to exhaust domestic remedies, choose from the following options the one that best explains why it was not possible:

Domestic laws do not ensure due process for the protection of the rights allegedly violated
Access to domestic remedies has not been permitted, or exhausting them has been impeded

Please explain the reasons

The people of the U.S. Virgin Islands are legally and structurally denied access to effective domestic remedies. As residents of an unincorporated U.S. territory, they have no standing in U.S. courts to challenge treaty violations or to assert their right to self-determination. U.S. jurisprudence, particularly the Insular Cases and the political question doctrine, prevents Virgin Islanders from seeking redress in the federal judiciary for racial, political, and colonial injustices.

Moreover, domestic law does not provide due process for the protection of the rights at issue. The United States does not recognize the enforceability of self-determination under its Constitution, and it provides no administrative or judicial mechanism to address structural disenfranchisement, treaty breaches, or the racialized legacy of territorial colonialism. Residents of the USVI cannot vote for President, have no Senate representation, and are governed without meaningful participation in the very institutions that determine their rights and status.

Therefore, both access to remedies and the guarantee of due process are fundamentally lacking, making international intervention by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights the only avenue for protection.

Indicate whether there was a judicial investigation. Indicate when it began, when it ended, and the result. If it has not concluded, indicate why.

No judicial investigation has taken place.

There has been no judicial investigation into the treaty violation committed on March 28, 2025 by U.S. President Donald J. Trump and Vice President J.D. Vance, nor into the broader violations of political and human rights endured by the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

This is because:

U.S. courts do not permit judicial review of executive foreign policy declarations, especially those concerning treaties or territorial status.

The political question doctrine and the legacy of the Insular Cases bar judicial oversight of issues related to the constitutional and political status of U.S. territories.

There is no legal mechanism within the United States to initiate an investigation into executive-level treaty breaches or systemic disenfranchisement of territorial populations.

As a result, no domestic judicial authority has investigated or is currently investigating the violations outlined in this petition.

If applicable, indicate the date of notification of the final decision of the competent court.

Not applicable.

No judicial proceeding or investigation has taken place regarding the violations described in this petition. Therefore, no final decision has been issued, and no notification date exists from any competent court.

SECTION IV - AVAILABLE EVIDENCE

1. EVIDENCE

The available evidence includes any documents that may prove the violations alleged (for example, the principal pleadings and exhibits in judicial or administrative records, expert reports, forensic reports, photographs, and video or film recordings, among others). In the initial stage it is not necessary to send all the available documentation; it is useful to present the decisions and principal pleadings.

- If possible, upload an electronic copy to this form or send a simple copy. The copies do not need to be certified or legally authenticated.
- Please do not send originals.
- If it is not possible to send the documents, you should explain why and indicate whether you will be able to send them in the future. In any event, you should indicate which documents are relevant to proving the facts alleged.
- The documents should be in the language of the State, so long as it is an official language of the OAS (Spanish, English, Portuguese, or French). If this is not possible, the reasons should be explained.

ACRRA legal memorandum outlining March 28, 2025 treaty breach, lack of remedies, and violations of the American Declaration.	ACRRA.IACHR.Legal-Memorandum.pdf	297 Kb
ANNEX A: ACRRA Submission to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (March 29, 2025)	ANNEX-A.ACRRA.Submission-to-the-Permanent-Court-of-Arbitration.The-Hague.pdf	273 Kb
ANNEX B: ACRRA Supplemental Legal Memorandum to the PCA – Treaty Breach (March 30, 2025)	ANNEX-B.ACRRA-U.S.Virgin-Islands.Supplemental-Legal-Memorandum-to-the-Permanent-Court-of-Arbitration.The-Hague.pdf	293 Kb
ANNEX C: ACRRA Submission to the United Nations CERD (March 31, 2025)	ANNEX-C.ACRRA.CERD.Submission-March-31-2025.With-Annexes.pdf	295 Kb
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Treaty of the Danish West Indies (1916) including the Lansing Declaration — showing the U.S. commitment not to interfere in Greenland	1916 Treaty of the Danish West Indies.pdf	2268 Kb
Op-ed by Shelley Moorhead, dated March 20, 2025. Warns of the impending March 28 treaty breach and analyzes its implications under the 1916 treaty and Lansing Declaration.	Trump's Greenland Gambit - A Treaty Violation That Could Undermine U.S. Rule in the Virgin Islands.pdf	828 Kb
Op-ed and legal commentary published in Berlingske	Berlingske - Former Secretary of State - Trump's gamble with Greenland is a treaty violation that could undermine America's status in the Virgin Islands.pdf	427 Kb
Op-ed and legal commentary published in Berlingske	Berlingske - Tidligere udenrigsminister - Trumps gamble med Grønland er et traktatbrud, der kan underminere Amerikas status på Virgin Islands.pdf	422 Kb
Op-ed and legal commentary published in The St. Croix Source	A Demand for Standing_ Challenging the Colonial Exclusion of the United States Virgin Islands under the 1916 Treaty of the Danish West Indies _ St. Croix Source.pdf	224 Kb
News article published March 30, 2025 in St. Croix Source. Reports ACRRA's PCA filing and quotes Trump and Vance statements breaching the Lansing Declaration and 1916 treaty.	Trump, Vance Violating Greenland-DWI Agreement, Virgin Islanders Say _ St. Croix Source.pdf	541 Kb
Published March 30, 2025 in St. Thomas Source. Reproduces ACRRA's supplemental legal memo documenting the March 28, 2025 U.S. treaty	U.S. Violation of the 1916 Lansing Declaration _ St. Thomas Source.pdf	209 Kb

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Facebook post by Virgin Islands Source, dated March 30, 2025. Highlights treaty breach and links to article on Trump–Vance Greenland statements. Screenshot shows 318 shares.	VI Source FB Article 318 Shares 2025-04-11 18_39_51.jpg	1443 Kb
Memo dated April 12, 2025. Details why Virgin Islanders lack legal standing, due process, or remedies under U.S. law. Supports request for precautionary measures.	ACRRA.LACK-OF-LEGAL-REMEDIES-FOR-U.S.-VIRGIN-ISLANDS-RESIDENTS-UNDER-U.S.-LAW.pdf	270 Kb

2. WITNESSES

Identify, if possible, the witnesses to the alleged violations. If those persons have given statements to the judicial authorities, send, if possible, a simple copy of the witness statements or indicate whether you will be able to send them in the future. Indicate whether it is necessary to keep the identity of the witnesses confidential.

WITNESSES

The violations alleged in this petition are matters of public record, based on official statements by U.S. government officials, treaty documents, and institutional responses submitted by the petitioner (ACRRA). As such, no private witnesses have been identified at this time.

However, the following individuals are public witnesses whose statements are already published and attributed:

a) President Donald J. Trump
Delivered official remarks at the White House on March 28, 2025, calling for the United States to “revisit the 1916 transfer” and pursue Greenland acquisition.

His public statement serves as evidence of the executive-level treaty breach.

b) Vice President J.D. Vance
Delivered remarks on March 28, 2025, at Thule Air Base in Greenland, reinforcing the doctrine of hemispheric acquisition and referencing the Danish West Indies precedent.

These remarks are cited in multiple media outlets and included in ACRRA's legal filings.

c) Shelley Moorhead
President of ACRRA and author of multiple legal memoranda, op-eds, and the March 31, 2025 Transfer Day address documenting the violations.

His public statements and legal analyses are included as evidence and can be formally attested if needed.

Confidentiality:
None of the above individuals require confidentiality. If additional community-based or expert witnesses are identified during proceedings, ACRRA will notify the Commission and indicate whether protective measures are requested.

SECTION V - OTHER COMPLAINTS LODGED

Please indicate whether these facts have been presented to the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations or any other international organization:

Yes

If yes, indicate which organization and the results obtained:

1. United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)

Organization: United Nations CERD

Date Submitted: March 31, 2025

Result: Submission acknowledged. CERD is reviewing the petition as part of its upcoming session on reparations and racial discrimination. No decision has been issued yet.

2. Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), The Hague

Organization: Permanent Court of Arbitration

Date Submitted: March 29, 2025 (with supplemental memo March 30, 2025)

Result: Filing accepted. Awaiting formal response regarding admissibility and standing. No ruling issued to date.

Additional information (use this space for any additional information you consider necessary)

This petition is submitted by the African-Caribbean Reparations and Resettlement Alliance (ACRRA) on behalf of the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands, who remain under U.S. colonial rule more than a century after their transfer from Denmark in 1917. The legal and political violations detailed in this petition are not isolated events, but part of a longstanding pattern of racialized disenfranchisement and territorial subjugation that has been exacerbated by recent executive statements made on March 28, 2025, which violate the 1916 Lansing Declaration.

The documents provided have been submitted in English, the official language of the United States and one of the official languages of the OAS. If requested, ACRRA is prepared to provide further documentation, oral testimony, or supplemental filings.

This petition is urgent, and the harm described is ongoing and irreparable. The petitioner respectfully urges the Commission to act without delay to adopt precautionary measures, initiate review of the full petition, and signal to the international community that denial of self-determination and treaty obligations cannot be tolerated within the inter-American system.

SIGNATURE : acrra.vi@gmail.com

DATE : 11/04/2025 05:31 PM

Legal Memorandum

In Support of ACRRA's Petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

I. Introduction

This memorandum is submitted in support of the petition filed by the African-Caribbean Reparations and Resettlement Alliance (ACRRA) to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (the "Commission") concerning systemic and ongoing violations of the human rights of the people of the United States Virgin Islands (USVI) by the United States of America.

The petition alleges that the people of the USVI are subjected to a continuing regime of political disenfranchisement, territorial subjugation, and denial of effective legal remedy, in direct violation of rights guaranteed by the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man (the "American Declaration"), including the rights to equality, juridical personality, political participation, property, due process, and self-determination.

On March 28, 2025, U.S. President Donald J. Trump and Vice President J.D. Vance issued public statements indicating their support for the future reacquisition of Greenland and their intent to "revisit" the 1916 transfer of the Danish West Indies to the United States. These statements—made by the current executive leadership of the United States and declared 2026 presidential candidates—constitute a de facto breach of the 1916





Treaty of the Danish West Indies and its accompanying Lansing Declaration. This development has triggered new legal consequences for the political and juridical status of the U.S. Virgin Islands, and makes the long-standing violations of residents' rights all the more urgent and undeniable.

The Commission is now called upon to review and investigate this situation, as domestic remedies have proven unavailable, ineffective, or structurally inaccessible to the petitioners due to their political and legal disenfranchisement.

II. Jurisdiction of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has jurisdiction to receive and investigate petitions alleging violations of human rights protected under the American Declaration, particularly when committed by a member state of the Organization of American States (OAS) that has not ratified the American Convention on Human Rights. The United States, while a founding member of the OAS and a signatory to the Declaration, has not ratified the Convention, and therefore the Commission's competence over U.S. actions is grounded in the Declaration itself.

This petition is filed on behalf of the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands, a population held in an unincorporated territorial status under U.S. sovereignty. The petitioners are denied full representation in Congress, lack voting rights in federal elections, and are excluded from key legal and political processes, including international treaty arbitration mechanisms. These circumstances establish a prima facie case of systemic rights deprivation.

The legal standing of ACRRA as petitioner is grounded in its representational mandate and consistent jurisprudence from the Commission recognizing petitions





submitted on behalf of communities, classes, or non-governmental entities. ACRRA's work as a reparative justice institution with active international legal engagement on behalf of Virgin Islanders, including submissions to the United Nations and the Permanent Court of Arbitration, further affirms its legitimacy in filing this petition.

The Commission has previously accepted jurisdiction over similar petitions arising from colonial legacies, non-self-governing territories, and racial or ethnic minority disenfranchisement. In this context, it is not only appropriate but necessary for the Commission to assert jurisdiction to protect the rights of a population that has, for over a century, been denied meaningful access to full citizenship, political agency, and legal recourse.

III. Factual Background

A. The 1916 Treaty of the Danish West Indies and the Lansing Declaration

On August 4, 1916, Denmark and the United States signed the Treaty of the Danish West Indies, which transferred sovereignty over the islands of St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John from Denmark to the United States. The treaty was ratified and entered into force on January 17, 1917. Alongside the treaty, U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing issued a diplomatic assurance—known as the Lansing Declaration—affirming that the people of the Danish West Indies “shall be entitled to the same rights and protection as the citizens of the United States.”

Despite this assurance, the people of the Virgin Islands were never incorporated into the constitutional structure of the United States. Instead, they were designated as residents of an "unincorporated territory," governed by Congress under the Territorial Clause of the U.S. Constitution. To this day, Virgin Islanders cannot vote for President,





have no voting representation in the U.S. Senate or House of Representatives, and remain subject to congressional plenary power. The promise of equal rights under the Lansing Declaration has never been fulfilled.

B. The Persistent State of Colonial Disenfranchisement

For over a century, the residents of the U.S. Virgin Islands have lived in a legal limbo. They are U.S. citizens by statute, but not constitutional citizens in practice. The U.S. Supreme Court's Insular Cases doctrine, which enshrines the second-class status of unincorporated territories, has been repeatedly criticized for its colonialist logic and discriminatory effect. Virgin Islanders are excluded from key federal programs, denied the right to vote in federal elections, and deprived of full judicial and legislative recourse. The absence of self-determination mechanisms, plebiscites, or meaningful participation in treaty processes further compounds this condition. The United Nations continues to list the Virgin Islands as a non-self-governing territory. Yet no effective process exists within the U.S. legal or political framework to remedy this status, leaving Virgin Islanders in a state of permanent political exclusion.

C. The March 28, 2025, Breach: Greenland and the Reconsideration of the 1916 Transfer

On March 28, 2025, U.S. President Donald J. Trump and Vice President J.D. Vance publicly endorsed the idea of a renewed American effort to acquire Greenland. In their joint statement, they declared: "America must revisit the 1916 transfer, and assert a renewed doctrine of hemispheric acquisition for the 21st century." These remarks not only invoked the transfer of the Danish West Indies but also signaled a willingness to question the legitimacy and finality of the treaty itself.





This declaration constitutes a material breach of the 1916 Treaty and Lansing Declaration. By reopening the treaty for political reconsideration, U.S. leaders undermined the integrity of the original agreement and nullified the presumption of settled sovereignty that underpins the current legal status of the Virgin Islands. Moreover, the comments were made in the context of an electoral campaign, reflecting the posture of candidates actively seeking executive authority in the United States.

The breach has triggered renewed legal and diplomatic urgency. On March 29, 2025, ACRRA filed a petition before the Permanent Court of Arbitration requesting procedural review and recognition of third-party standing under the 1916 treaty. The filing asserts that the people of the Virgin Islands, as the affected population, possess an independent legal interest in the treaty's preservation and enforcement—an interest now imperiled by U.S. executive branch statements.

D. Structural Exclusion from International Remedy and Treaty Review

Despite the gravity of the March 28 breach, the people of the Virgin Islands have no recognized standing under U.S. or international mechanisms to demand review of the treaty's terms. Neither Denmark nor the United States has taken steps to address the breach or acknowledge the legal implications of the Lansing Declaration's abrogation.

As a result, Virgin Islanders are structurally excluded from any arbitration or remedy process under the treaty that defines their political identity. This exclusion is not merely procedural—it is substantive, denying the population access to the basic tools of legal redress guaranteed under human rights law.

IV. Legal Violations under the American Declaration

1. Article II – Right to Equality Before the Law





Virgin Islanders are denied equal rights under federal law, including the right to vote in federal elections and equal representation in Congress. This structural inequality perpetuates a racialized and colonial legal status.

2. Article XVII – Right to Recognition of Juridical Personality

Exclusion from treaty review and legal standing before international tribunals violates the juridical personality of Virgin Islanders as a people with a distinct legal identity and interest.

3. Article XX – Right to Vote and Participate in Government

Denial of voting rights and lack of federal representation constitute a direct breach of political rights under the Declaration.

4. Article XXI – Right to Property

Economic marginalization and discriminatory federal policies violate the right to property by denying equal economic protections.

5. Article XXIV – Right of Petition

Inaccessibility of domestic or international legal remedies infringes upon the right to petition for redress.

6. Article XXVI – Right to Due Process of Law

No legal mechanism exists to contest the terms of the treaty or the political status of the territory, violating due process.

7. Right to Self-Determination (*Customary International Law & Inter-American Jurisprudence*)

No self-determination process has been provided to the people of the Virgin Islands, despite the existence of international norms requiring it.





V. Pattern of Colonial Subjugation and Structural Disenfranchisement

The U.S. Virgin Islands continues to function under a colonial framework entrenched by the Insular Cases and perpetuated through unilateral congressional authority. Residents are politically voiceless, economically marginalized, and legally excluded from treaty processes that determine their fate.

This condition parallels international precedents of non-self-governing territories and stateless populations, and it violates both the spirit and letter of human rights law. The March 28, 2025, breach only sharpens the legal urgency and exposes the enduring colonial logic behind the Virgin Islands' status.

VI. Request for Relief

ACRRA respectfully requests that the Commission:

1. **Recognize the Violation of Fundamental Rights** under the American Declaration.
2. **Recommend a Formal Self-Determination Process**, including an internationally observed plebiscite.
3. **Acknowledge the March 28, 2025, Treaty Breach** as material and destabilizing.
4. **Recommend Bilateral and International Dialogue** between the U.S., Denmark, and Virgin Islanders.
5. **Convene a Public Hearing** on this petition.
6. **Recommend Interim Protective Measures** to prevent further deterioration of status or rights.





VII. Conclusion

The people of the United States Virgin Islands have waited over a century for justice. The promises of the 1916 treaty have gone unfulfilled, and the recent breach of that treaty makes further silence impossible. ACRRA submits this petition not only as a legal instrument, but as a call for dignity, recognition, and redress.

We urge the Commission to act swiftly, decisively, and publicly—to ensure that the legacy of colonialism is not allowed to persist through inaction.

APRIL 12, 2025

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED, IN SOLIDARITY AND SERVICE OF MY
PEOPLE,

SHELLEY MOORHEAD

PRESIDENT, AFRICAN-CARIBBEAN REPARATIONS AND RESETTLEMENT
ALLIANCE

FORMER MINISTER OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, UNITED STATES
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FORMER SECRETARY-GENERAL, INTER-VIRGIN ISLANDS COUNCIL

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AFRICAN-CARIBBEAN REPARATIONS AND RESETTLEMENT ALLIANCE

Associate Member of the CARICOM Reparations Commission

IACHR/ES
07/23/2025 10:12 AM

ANNEX A

INITIAL SUBMISSION TO THE PERMANENT COURT OR ARBITRATION (MARCH 28, 2025)

Legal memorandum requesting procedural review and third-party standing under the 1916 Treaty of the Danish West Indies.



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AFRICAN-CARIBBEAN REPARATIONS AND RESETTLEMENT ALLIANCE

Associate Member of the CARICOM Reparations Commission

SUBMISSION TO THE PERMANENT COURT OF ARBITRATION REGARDING THE 1916 TREATY OF THE DANISH WEST INDIES

SUBMISSION

TO: **MR. MARCIN CZEPELAK**
SECRETARY-GENERAL
PERMANENT COURT OF ARBITRATION
PEACE PALACE
CARNEGIEPLEIN 2
2517 KJ THE HAGUE
THE NETHERLANDS

FILED BY: **SHELLEY MOORHEAD**
PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER
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FORMER MINISTER OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,
UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS
FORMER SECRETARY-GENERAL, INTER-VIRGIN ISLANDS
COUNCIL
FORMER CHAIRMAN, INTER-VIRGIN ISLANDS COUNCIL
STANDING COMMITTEE

ON BEHALF OF: **THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS**

DATE: **28 MARCH 2025**

SUBJECT: **REQUEST FOR PROCEDURAL REVIEW AND
RECOGNITION OF THIRD-PARTY STANDING UNDER THE
1916 TREATY OF THE DANISH WEST INDIES**

I. INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF INTEREST

This Submission is respectfully presented to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA)¹ at The Hague to request a formal review of procedural rules that continue to exclude the People

¹ To the best of the author's knowledge, this submission represents the first formal communication to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) challenging the structural exclusion of a non-sovereign people—specifically, the *Inhabitants* of the United States Virgin Islands—from participation in treaty-based





of the United States Virgin Islands (USVI) from participating in or petitioning for Arbitration under the 1916 Treaty of the Danish West Indies. This request is submitted in the interest of Historical Justice, adherence to evolving International Legal Norms, and protection of the right to Self-Determination.

I, Shelley Moorhead, submit this petition in my capacity as President of the African-Caribbean Reparations and Resettlement Alliance (ACRRA) and as a representative voice for the politically disenfranchised descendants of those impacted by the 1916 Treaty. I respectfully submit that the PCA's exclusive recognition of Denmark and the United States as "*High Contracting Parties*" under Article XII of the Treaty constitutes a Structural Barrier that violates both the letter and spirit of International Law in its modern application.

II. BACKGROUND: THE 1916 TREATY AND STRUCTURAL EXCLUSION

The 1916 Treaty of the Danish West Indies, executed between Denmark and the United States, transferred Sovereignty of the Danish West Indies to the United States in exchange for \$25 Million in Gold. Article XII of the Treaty provides:

"Any differences which may arise between the High Contracting Parties with regard to the interpretation or the execution of the present convention shall be settled by Arbitration at The Hague."

Article VI of the same Treaty referred to the residents of the transferred Territory as "*Inhabitants*," denying them voice, agency, or legal personhood in the transaction. This designation reflected Colonial-Era Norms rooted in the now discredited *Doctrine of Discovery*, which denied non-European Peoples Sovereign status or Legal Standing.

arbitration under a colonial-era agreement. No prior submission has sought redress before the PCA on the grounds that the legal architecture of the Court fails to accommodate the standing of territories acquired through imperial transfer without the consent or representation of the governed.





To this day, the PCA interprets its jurisdiction and procedures under this Treaty as permitting only Denmark and the United States to engage in Arbitration. This practice excludes the Virgin Islands population—who remain materially and politically affected by the Treaty’s execution and consequences.

It bears emphasis that Denmark remains the only European Colonial Slave Power to have sold one of its former Colonies—and its People—in the Twentieth Century. The 1917 sale of the Danish West Indies, conducted without the consent of its *Inhabitants* and in exchange for \$25 Million in Gold, represents an extraordinary and singular act in Modern Legal History. This transaction bypassed every principle that would later come to define International Law, Decolonization, and Human Rights. No Reparations were paid, no Development guarantees were offered, and no mechanism for Self-Determination was afforded. That Denmark was permitted to exit its Colonial Obligations in this manner—without subsequent review or accountability—renders the exclusion of the United States Virgin Islands from Treaty Arbitration today especially egregious and urgently in need of rectification.

III. LEGAL BASIS FOR PROCEDURAL REVIEW

A. Violation of the Right to Self-Determination

Under binding International Law, including the Charter of the United Nations (Articles 1 and 55) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 1), all Peoples have the right to Self-Determination. This right includes the ability to determine their Political Status and pursue Legal Remedy for historic and ongoing violations of that right.

B. The Doctrine of Discovery and Structural Discrimination

The PCA’s reliance on “*High Contracting Parties*” as the exclusive actors entitled to Arbitration under Colonial-Era Treaties is a legacy of the *Doctrine of Discovery*. Continuing





to enforce these designations today constitutes Procedural Discrimination, denying access to International Justice based on inherited Colonial Status.

C. Advisory Precedents from the International Court of Justice

In Western Sahara (1975), the ICJ rejected *claims of Terra Nullius* and affirmed that Peoples under Colonial Rule retain the right to freely determine their Political Future. In Chagos Archipelago (2019), the ICJ emphasized that Decolonization is not complete without the express and informed consent of the affected People.

IV. REQUEST FOR RECOGNITION AND PROCEDURAL REFORM

1. Recognition of Standing

The PCA is respectfully requested to:

- Recognize that the People of the U.S. Virgin Islands, though not parties to the 1916 Treaty, are its direct and continuing subjects;
- Acknowledge that Virgin Islanders have a Right to Be Heard in any dispute, interpretation, or Arbitration involving the 1916 Treaty or its consequences;
- Confirm that individuals or legal entities acting on behalf of such populations may file Third-Party Submissions or Interventions.

2. Procedural Reform

The PCA is asked to review and consider amending its rules or internal protocols to:

- Permit Amicus Curiae Submissions by disenfranchised or non-sovereign populations in Historical Treaty Cases;
- Enable formal requests for Consultative Hearings or Declarations regarding the continuing effects of Colonial-Era Treaties;





- Establish a pathway for Non-State Actors to petition for inclusion in Arbitration where their rights, land, or Sovereignty were historically transferred without Consent.

V. STRUCTURAL EXCLUSION AND THE TERM OF ART “HIGH CONTRACTING PARTIES”

The term *High Contracting Parties*, while a standard phrase in treaty law, is a *term of art* with origins in a colonial legal framework shaped by the *Doctrine of Discovery*. It institutionalized the notion that only colonizing powers held legal agency in treaty-making, while colonized peoples were denied subjecthood, consent, and standing. Its continued use in international law reflects and reproduces a framework of sovereignty that remains structurally exclusionary. Reconsidering this language—and the legal assumptions it carries—is essential to achieving a more equitable and decolonized international legal system.

VI. CONCLUSION

The exclusion of the People of the U.S. Virgin Islands from Arbitration under the 1916 Treaty of the Danish West Indies is no longer legally or morally defensible. The PCA, by continuing to recognize only Denmark and the United States as relevant parties under the Treaty, effectively perpetuates the racial and Colonial Injustices of the early Twentieth Century.

As the International Community increasingly confronts the legacies of Slavery, Colonialism, and Legal Disenfranchisement, it is time for the PCA to join that effort. The recognition of Virgin Islanders’ Right to participate in Treaty Review and Arbitration is an essential step toward Justice, Legitimacy, and Reform.





This Submission is made in good faith, with deep respect for the Rule of Law, and in the belief that Justice Delayed should no longer be Justice Denied.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED, IN SERVICE OF MY PEOPLE,

SHELLEY MOORHEAD

PRESIDENT, AFRICAN-CARIBBEAN REPARATIONS AND RESETTLEMENT ALLIANCE

FORMER MINISTER OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

FORMER SECRETARY-GENERAL, INTER-VIRGIN ISLANDS COUNCIL

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AFRICAN-CARIBBEAN REPARATIONS AND RESETTLEMENT ALLIANCE

Associate Member of the CARICOM Reparations Commission

ANNEX B

SUPPLEMENTAL LEGAL MEMORANDUM TO THE PERMANENT COURT OF ARBITRATION (MARCH 30, 2025)

Filing documenting the breach of the 1916 Lansing Declaration by U.S. officials and its implications for treaty validity and third-party rights.



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AFRICAN-CARIBBEAN REPARATIONS AND RESETTLEMENT ALLIANCE

Associate Member of the CARICOM Reparations Commission

**SUPPLEMENTAL LEGAL MEMORANDUM SUBMITTED TO THE
PERMANENT COURT OF ARBITRATION REGARDING THE 1916
TREATY OF THE DANISH WEST INDIES AND THE REQUEST FOR
PROCEDURAL REVIEW AND RECOGNITION OF THIRD-PARTY
STANDING**

SUPPLEMENTAL SUBMISSION

TO: **MR. MARCIN CZEPELAK**
SECRETARY-GENERAL
PERMANENT COURT OF ARBITRATION
PEACE PALACE
CARNEGIEPLEIN 2
2517 KJ THE HAGUE
THE NETHERLANDS

FILED BY: **SHELLEY MOORHEAD**
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FORMER SECRETARY-GENERAL, INTER-VIRGIN ISLANDS
COUNCIL
FORMER CHAIRMAN, INTER-VIRGIN ISLANDS COUNCIL
STANDING COMMITTEE

ON BEHALF OF: **THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS**

DATE: **30 MARCH 2025**

SUBJECT: **SUPPLEMENTAL SUBMISSION TO PCA – PROCEDURAL
REVIEW AND TREATY BREACH (1916 DANISH WEST
INDIES TREATY)**



**SUPPLEMENTAL LEGAL MEMORANDUM**

RE: UNITED STATES VIOLATION OF THE 1916 LANSING
DECLARATION THROUGH OFFICIAL CONDUCT IN
GREENLAND

DATE: 30 MARCH 2025

SUBMITTED BY: **SHELLEY MOORHEAD**
PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER
AFRICAN-CARIBBEAN REPARATIONS AND RESETTLEMENT
ALLIANCE (ACRRA)
FORMER MINISTER OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,
UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS
FORMER SECRETARY-GENERAL, INTER-VIRGIN ISLANDS
COUNCIL
FORMER CHAIRMAN, INTER-VIRGIN ISLANDS COUNCIL
STANDING COMMITTEE

I. INTRODUCTION

This supplemental memorandum is submitted in support of the original filing made before the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) requesting recognition of third-party standing for the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands under the 1916 Treaty of the Danish West Indies. It provides urgent documentation of a material treaty breach by the United States, which has occurred subsequent to the filing.

II. BACKGROUND: THE LANSING DECLARATION AND THE 1916 TREATY

On August 4, 1916, U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing issued a formal diplomatic note affirming the United States would not interfere in Danish sovereignty over Greenland. The language was unequivocal:





“The Government of the United States will not object to the Danish Government extending their political and economic interests to the whole of Greenland.”

This commitment, known as the Lansing Declaration, was a precondition to the 1916 Treaty of the Danish West Indies—whereby Denmark transferred sovereignty over the Danish West Indies (now the U.S. Virgin Islands) to the United States. The two agreements formed a diplomatic package, linking recognition of Danish sovereignty in the Arctic with U.S. acquisition of territory in the Caribbean.

III. NEW DEVELOPMENT: PUBLIC BREACH BY U.S. PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT

On March 28, 2025, during a high-profile visit to Greenland, Vice President JD Vance—accompanied by National Security Advisor Mike Waltz—made multiple public statements directly repudiating Denmark’s political and economic interests in Greenland.

Key statements include:

- *“Denmark has not done a good job for the people of Greenland.”*
- *“This is why Trump’s policy is what it is.”*
- *“We have to have Greenland.” —President Donald Trump, March 28, 2025, White House press briefing*
- *“We’re going to cut a Trump-style deal.”*
- *“Greenlanders will choose the U.S. over Denmark.”*





These remarks were made at the U.S. Pituffik Space Base in northern Greenland, on foreign soil, and during an ongoing diplomatic dispute between the U.S. and Denmark over Arctic policy. The comments were broadcast globally, provoking immediate reaction from the Danish Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and members of the Greenlandic parliament.

IV. LEGAL ANALYSIS: A MATERIAL BREACH OF THE LANSING DECLARATION

The public and official nature of these statements constitutes a material breach of the Lansing Declaration. The United States, through its highest executive officials, has:

1. **Publicly objected** to Denmark's political leadership in Greenland;
2. **Declared intent** to pursue unilateral acquisition of Greenland;
3. **Undermined the legal and diplomatic commitments** made in 1916 in exchange for Denmark's transfer of the Virgin Islands.

This breach affects not only U.S.–Danish relations but the legal foundation of U.S. sovereignty in the Virgin Islands. As the Lansing Declaration and the 1916 Treaty formed a single diplomatic structure, repudiation of one element destabilizes the integrity of the whole.

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR THIRD-PARTY STANDING AND TREATY REVIEW

The public breach reinforces the necessity of immediate procedural recognition of the people of the Virgin Islands before the PCA. It confirms:





- That the treaty continues to produce legal consequences today, despite excluding Virgin Islanders from the original agreement;
- That the United States no longer honors the original framework in its entirety;
- That Virgin Islanders are entitled to challenge the continued legal validity of their transfer and present political status under the doctrine of self-determination and post-colonial redress.

VI. CONCLUSION

This memorandum supplements the legal petition currently before the PCA and is submitted as part of the evidentiary record. The violation of the Lansing Declaration is not hypothetical—it has occurred. The time for recognition, review, and remedy is now.

30 MARCH 2025

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED, IN SERVICE OF MY PEOPLE,

SHELLEY MOORHEAD

PRESIDENT, AFRICAN-CARIBBEAN REPARATIONS AND RESETTLEMENT ALLIANCE

FORMER MINISTER OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

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AFRICAN-CARIBBEAN REPARATIONS AND RESETTLEMENT ALLIANCE

Associate Member of the CARICOM Reparations Commission

ANNEX C

Submission to United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) - March 31, 2025.

This submission outlines the intergenerational harm stemming from enslavement, colonial transfer, and continued political exclusion.



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SUBMISSION TO THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION (CERD)

General Recommendation on Reparations for Enslavement, the
Transatlantic Trade in Africans, and Colonialism

Submitted by:

African-Caribbean Reparations and Resettlement Alliance | ACRRA

March 31, 2025

INTRODUCTION

The African-Caribbean Reparations and Resettlement Alliance (ACRRA) submits this report in response to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)'s call for inputs on reparations for enslavement, the transatlantic trade in Africans, and colonialism. This submission represents the voices of the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI). Founded and led by descendants of the enslaved, ACRRA is dedicated to pursuing reparatory justice on behalf of the Virgin Islands community.

The case for reparations for the USVI is grounded in historical evidence, economic data, and international legal principles. Over 246 years of colonial rule (1671–1917), Denmark directly participated in the transatlantic slave trade, enslaving tens of thousands of





Africans in the Danish West Indies (now the USVI). The island's economy was built entirely on enslaved labor, which produced vast quantities of sugar, cotton, and rum — commodities that enriched Danish planters, merchants, financial institutions, and the Danish Crown.

Denmark abolished slavery in 1848. However, instead of offering restitution to those who had been enslaved, it compensated former slaveowners — rather than the enslaved — thus perpetuating racial injustice. The sale of the Virgin Islands to the United States in 1917 was another egregious violation of the inhabitants' right to self-determination. Virgin Islanders were treated purely as economic assets to be sold. They had no voice in the transaction or in their political future. Today, the descendants of those enslaved continue to experience structural inequalities, political disenfranchisement, and economic hardship — all of which are direct legacies of Danish colonial rule.

New research — including the Brattle Group's 2023 report on reparations for transatlantic chattel slavery and the study "Reconstructing a Slave Society" (Galli et al., 2023) — provides empirical data quantifying Denmark's economic gains from slavery and its long-term impact on the USVI. These findings establish Denmark's financial and moral responsibility to compensate the descendants of enslaved Africans in the territory. Moreover, Denmark has a clear obligation under international human rights law — including ICERD Article 6, the 2001 Durban Declaration, and the 2005 UN Basic Principles on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation — to provide reparatory justice. Addressing these historical wrongs is essential to eliminating the enduring racial discrimination they have engendered.





This submission outlines Denmark's historical responsibility, the resulting economic harm, the international legal framework for reparations, and a plan for implementing comprehensive and transformative reparatory measures.

The legacy of slavery in the Virgin Islands was not limited to labor exploitation. It also included the systematic dehumanization and erasure of African identity. Families were torn apart on auction blocks, children were separated from parents, and enslaved individuals were stripped of their languages, religions, and cultural practices. Denmark's colonial regime imposed rigid racial hierarchies, with laws and customs designed to maintain white dominance and enforce Black subjugation. These practices did not end with emancipation but persisted well into the 20th century, reinforced by economic disenfranchisement and social exclusion.

Moreover, Denmark's colonial governance treated the Virgin Islands not as a society to be nurtured, but as an extraction zone. There was no serious investment in long-term development, infrastructure, or institutions that would have empowered the local population. The public education system, for instance, was deliberately underdeveloped, ensuring a steady supply of cheap labor and denying generations of Virgin Islanders the tools to advance socially or economically.

These colonial patterns laid the foundation for the structural inequalities that continue to affect the territory today. Unemployment, inadequate healthcare services, under-resourced schools, and limited access to capital all reflect a continuum of neglect rooted in Danish colonial design. When Denmark exited the territory in 1917, it left behind no





transition plan, no developmental support, and no legacy of inclusion. This failure was not simply a historical oversight but an intentional act of abandonment.

Today, the economic and psychological impact of these policies is still keenly felt. Virgin Islanders remain politically disenfranchised as residents of an unincorporated U.S. territory, unable to vote for president and lacking full congressional representation. The social and economic indicators in the USVI — from child poverty rates to infrastructure conditions — continue to reflect the compounded effects of slavery, colonialism, and systemic disinvestment. Reparations, therefore, are not merely about redressing a historical grievance; they are about acknowledging and ending a continuum of racial injustice that Denmark helped initiate and failed to resolve.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND LASTING IMPACTS OF DANISH COLONIAL RULE

For nearly 250 years, the islands of St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John (the Danish West Indies) were integral to Denmark’s colonial empire. From the late 17th through the mid-19th century, Denmark enslaved and transported over 100,000 African men, women, and children to these Caribbean islands. These individuals endured extreme physical brutality, deprivation, and dehumanization under one of the region’s harshest plantation regimes.





The sugar-based colonial economy was the backbone of Danish rule, generating enormous wealth through the production of sugar and other commodities that were exported annually to Denmark.

Denmark maintained a highly organized system of slavery in the Virgin Islands. It was enforced through government-chartered trading companies (such as the Danish West India Company) that controlled the islands' commerce, through oppressive "slave codes" that ensured enslaved persons remained legally the property of the Crown and plantation owners, and through generous financial incentives for planters (including loans and insurance provided by Danish banks to expand plantation operations). This exploitative system generated immense profits for Denmark but left the enslaved community and their descendants with nothing. Not a single portion of the wealth extracted during this period was ever shared with those who suffered.

In addition to economic exploitation, Danish colonial rule also imposed severe cultural and social changes on the enslaved population. Traditional African customs, languages, and social structures were systematically suppressed, replaced by European norms and practices. This cultural erasure has had lasting impacts, contributing to the identity struggles and social fragmentation that continue to affect the Virgin Islands' population today.

The effects of this injustice are still evident today in the USVI, manifesting as chronic economic underdevelopment, enduring racial disparities in areas like health and education, and continued political marginalization of the territory's people. Decades of





being told to “move on” have not healed these wounds; colonialism’s damage does not simply fade away over time, but instead has festered across generations.

THE 1848 EMANCIPATION WITHOUT REPARATIONS

On July 3, 1848, a mass rebellion by the enslaved population of the Virgin Islands compelled Danish Governor Peter von Scholten to declare an immediate end to slavery. However, emancipation brought no justice or material assistance for the freed people. It is important to note that this emancipation was not a benevolent gift from Denmark, but was precipitated by the courage and resistance of the enslaved people themselves. Denmark instead paid the equivalent of millions of dollars in “compensation” to former slaveowners for their lost “property,” while the newly freed individuals received no land, financial restitution, or support. With no resources to build independent livelihoods, most freed people had to continue laboring on the same plantations under exploitative contracts. This arrangement ensured that the Black population remained economically dependent on the Danish colonial elite even after slavery’s formal abolition.

THE 1917 SALE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

In 1917, after nearly two and a half centuries of colonial rule, Denmark sold the Virgin Islands to the United States for \$25 million in gold. This deal was struck without any consultation of the islands’ inhabitants. This was a blatant disregard of their right to self-





determination. In the transaction, Virgin Islanders were treated as commodities. They obtained no compensation or remedy, even though generations of their labor had created the very wealth being exchanged. The transfer of sovereignty simply replaced Danish colonial rule with American colonial administration. As a result, the people of the Virgin Islands were left without full political rights or self-governance under the new colonial power. This final act of exploitation further cements Denmark's duty to provide reparations.

NEW RESEARCH AND ECONOMIC HARM

The immense scale of colonial exploitation in the Virgin Islands can also be expressed in stark economic terms. Modern analyses have attempted to quantify Denmark's financial debt arising from its colonial enterprise. The Brattle Group's 2023 report, for example, provides a detailed framework for calculating the reparations owed by former colonial powers, including Denmark.

Academic studies (e.g., Galli et al., 2023) likewise underscore the severe, long-term systemic economic losses inflicted on the USVI through Danish colonial policies.

Denmark's direct economic gains from slavery were enormous. At the height of the 18th-century plantation economy, up to 75% of Denmark's Gross National Product was derived from exports from the Danish West Indies, such as sugar, rum, and cotton. Danish banks and insurance companies also heavily financed and profited from the slave economy. For instance, a bond issuance in 1757 to fund Danish slaving expeditions was equivalent to





billions of dollars in today's terms. Major financial institutions like the Danish National Bank, and insurers such as Alm. Brand and Tryg, amassed great wealth by insuring plantations, slave ships, and even the lives of enslaved people as property.

By applying conservative interest rates to the value of unpaid labor and expropriated wealth (the monetary equivalent of stolen labor, liberty, and resources), researchers have estimated that Denmark's outstanding reparations liability is on the order of \$500–\$700 billion. In concrete terms, one model calculates approximately \$486 billion owed for the slavery era (using a 2.3% annual interest model), while a slightly higher interest assumption (2.5%) yields about \$681 billion. In addition, roughly \$6 billion is attributable to post-emancipation economic disparities imposed on Virgin Islanders. (For context, the current GDP of the USVI is only on the order of a few billion dollars per year, underscoring how these reparations estimates are several hundred times larger and reflect the massive scale of wealth extracted.)

By any measure, Denmark profited immensely at the expense of the Virgin Islands. This established an undeniable economic responsibility to make reparations.

LEGAL BASIS FOR REPARATIONS

International law provides a clear foundation for Denmark's obligation to deliver reparative justice for its historic role in slavery and colonialism:





ICERD Article 6: Requires that victims of racial discrimination receive “just and adequate reparation or satisfaction” for any damage suffered.

Durban Declaration (2001): Recognizes slavery and the slave trade as crimes against humanity, and calls on states to assume responsibility for past injustices and their lasting consequences.

UN Basic Principles on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation (2005): Affirms that victims of gross human rights violations are entitled to full and effective reparation, which includes measures of compensation, restitution, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition.

These instruments collectively reaffirm that the passage of time does not diminish the duty to remedy such injustices under international law.

Denmark is a State party to ICERD and was an active participant in the 2001 World Conference against Racism that produced the Durban Declaration. Denmark’s pervasive involvement in the slave trade and colonial exploitation of the USVI clearly meets the criteria identified in these international instruments. Thus, providing reparations is not a discretionary act — it is a binding requirement under international human rights law.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPARATORY JUSTICE

ACRRA urges the following measures to achieve meaningful reparatory justice for the U.S. Virgin Islands:





Formal Apology: Denmark must officially acknowledge and apologize for its role in enslaving Africans in the Danish West Indies, recognizing that slavery was a crime against humanity. This apology should be issued at the highest levels of the Danish government and directed to the descendants of the enslaved people of the Virgin Islands.

Financial Reparations: Denmark should establish a substantial Reparations Fund for the USVI. The scale of this fund must be commensurate with the documented economic harm — such as the hundreds of billions of dollars quantified by recent studies — and sufficient to compensate for the enduring legacy of slavery and colonial exploitation. The fund should directly benefit the descendants of enslaved people and the broader Virgin Islands community.

Development-Based Initiatives: Invest in modern infrastructure, quality healthcare services, education, and renewable energy in the USVI to reverse colonial-era underdevelopment and address persistent disparities. These long-term development programs would foster self-sufficiency and improve the standard of living for Virgin Islanders, thereby serving as a form of rehabilitation and a guarantee of non-repetition.

Institutional and Corporate Accountability: Require Danish institutions and corporations that profited from slavery — including prominent banks and insurers — to contribute to the reparations program. This step ensures that those who benefited from centuries of exploitation acknowledge their historical wrongdoing and actively participate in redressing the harm.





Cultural and Historical Restitution: Return stolen historical artifacts, archival records, and other cultural heritage items to the people of the Virgin Islands. This will help restore the territory's cultural patrimony and honor the history and identity of its people.

Together, these recommendations encompass the major pillars of reparatory justice. They address acknowledgment and apology, compensation, rehabilitation and development, accountability, and restitution, in line with established international standards.

CONCLUSION

Denmark's legacy of slavery and colonialism continues to shape the economic and social conditions of the U.S. Virgin Islands to this day, leaving the territory's majority-African-descendant population with enduring inequities. The descendants of enslaved Virgin Islanders have waited far too long for justice and repair. Providing reparations is not optional; it is a legal obligation and an urgent moral imperative necessary to finally rectify centuries of injustice and dispossession. Reparations are about more than monetary compensation; they are fundamentally about acknowledgment, healing, and the restoration of dignity to a people who have endured intergenerational trauma.

Indeed, around the world, governments and institutions are increasingly acknowledging and atoning for similar historical wrongs, and Denmark should not be an exception.

ACRRRA respectfully calls on CERD to urge Denmark to formally commit to a comprehensive reparations program that acknowledges its past, compensates its victims,



and ensures justice for future generations. Only through such concrete action can Denmark begin to atone for its past and ensure a just future for the people of the Virgin Islands.

SUBMITTED BY:

African-Caribbean Reparations and Resettlement Alliance (ACRRA)

ANNEXES:

ACRRA's submissions to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (dated 28 March and 30 March 2025) are attached to this report as supporting legal documentation.

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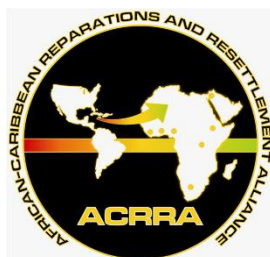
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Documented Public Statements Violating the 1916 Lansing Declaration

Date of Violation: March 28, 2025

Subjects: President Donald Trump, Vice President JD Vance

Location:

- By President Trump at a White House press briefing in Washington, D.C., and
- By Vice President Vance during a U.S. Department of Defense site visit at Thule Air Base, the key U.S. military installation in northwestern Greenland.

I. Introduction

This memorandum is submitted in support of the petition filed by the African-Caribbean Reparations and Resettlement Alliance (ACRRA) to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (the “Commission”) concerning systemic and ongoing violations of the human rights of the people of the United States Virgin Islands (USVI) by the United States of America.

The petition alleges that the people of the USVI are subjected to a continuing regime of political disenfranchisement, territorial subjugation, and denial of effective legal remedy, in direct violation of rights guaranteed by the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man (the “American Declaration”), including the rights to equality,





juridical personality, political participation, property, due process, and self-determination.

On March 28, 2025, U.S. President Donald J. Trump and Vice President J.D. Vance issued public statements indicating their support for the future reacquisition of Greenland and their intent to “revisit” the 1916 transfer of the Danish West Indies to the United States. These statements—made by the current executive leadership of the United States and declared 2026 presidential candidates—constitute a de facto breach of the 1916 Treaty of the Danish West Indies. The statements were delivered during a White House press briefing and during Vice President Vance’s televised remarks in Greenland. They call into question the United States’ respect for prior treaty obligations and directly invoke the 1916 transfer of the Danish West Indies as a model for possible acquisition of Greenland.

Overview

On March 28, 2025, during an official U.S. military visit to Greenland, Vice President J.D. Vance delivered public remarks endorsing American sovereignty over Greenland, while President Donald J. Trump issued supporting statements from the White House. Together, these statements openly violated the principles of the 1916 Lansing Declaration—a diplomatic note affirming that the United States would not interfere with Denmark’s political and economic control over Greenland.





These statements were delivered during a White House press briefing and during Vance's televised remarks in Greenland. They call into question the United States' respect for prior treaty obligations and directly invoke the 1916 transfer of the Danish West Indies as a model for possible acquisition of Greenland.

Key Statements Documented

- **President Donald Trump (March 28, 2025, White House Press Briefing):**
 - “Denmark has not done a good job for the people of Greenland.”
 - “This is why Trump’s policy is what it is.”
 - “We have to have Greenland.”
 - “We’re going to cut a Trump-style deal.”
 - “Greenlanders will choose the U.S. over Denmark.”
 - **Vice President JD Vance (during visit to U.S. military facility, Greenland):**
 - “We’re revisiting the 1916 transfer because the future of the Arctic must not be dictated by weak European commitments.”
 - “This is about hemispheric stability. The Danish precedent gives us a path forward.”
-

Treaty Language Contradicted



Lansing Declaration (1916):

“The Government of the United States will not object to the Danish Government extending their political and economic interests to the whole of Greenland.”

The above statements clearly contradict this diplomatic assurance, constituting a material breach of the diplomatic understanding between the United States and Denmark and creating serious implications for the legality of U.S. territorial governance in the Caribbean.

Published Sources and References

- **Reuters (March 28, 2025):**

“U.S. Vice President Vance lands in Greenland as Trump renews interest in acquisition”

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us-vice-president-vance-visit-greenland-island-trump-wants-control-2025-03-28>

- **PBS NewsHour (March 28, 2025):**

“Vance lands in Greenland as Trump reiterates desire to take territory”

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/vance-lands-in-greenland-as-trump-reiterates-desire-to-take-territory>

- **ABC News (March 28, 2025):**

“JD Vance and Rep. Mike Waltz visit Greenland amid Trump’s territorial claims”





<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/jd-usha-vance-mike-waltz-visit-greenland-trump/story?id=120180601>

Purpose of Submission

This document is submitted as evidentiary support for ACRRA's petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The statements recorded herein constitute a direct and material breach of the diplomatic instruments governing U.S.–Danish relations over Greenland and undermine the legal stability of the 1916 Treaty of the Danish West Indies. As such, they reinforce the petitioners' claims of political vulnerability, disenfranchisement, and denial of legal recourse.

APRIL 12, 2025

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED, IN SOLIDARITY AND SERVICE OF MY PEOPLE,

SHELLEY MOORHEAD

PRESIDENT, AFRICAN-CARIBBEAN REPARATIONS AND RESETTLEMENT ALLIANCE

FORMER MINISTER OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

FORMER SECRETARY-GENERAL, INTER-VIRGIN ISLANDS COUNCIL





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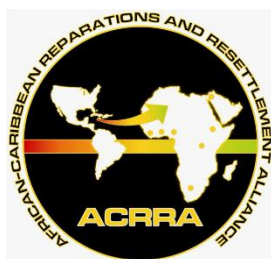
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*CONVENTION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES
AND DENMARK, ETC.*

TREATY SERIES, No. 629

CONVENTION

BETWEEN

THE UNITED STATES AND DENMARK

39 Stat. 1706

CESSION OF THE DANISH WEST INDIES

SIGNED AT NEW YORK, AUGUST 4, 1916

RATIFICATION ADVISED BY THE SENATE, SEPTEMBER 7, 1916

RATIFIED BY THE PRESIDENT, JANUARY 16, 1917

RATIFIED BY DENMARK, DECEMBER 22, 1916

RATIFICATIONS EXCHANGED AT WASHINGTON, JANUARY 17, 1917

PROCLAIMED, JANUARY 25, 1917

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A PROCLAMATION

Whereas a Convention between the United States of America and Denmark providing for the cession to the United States of all territory asserted or claimed by Denmark in the West Indies, including the islands of St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix, together with the adjacent islands and rocks, was concluded and signed by their respective Plenipotentiaries at the City of New York on the fourth day of August, one thousand nine hundred and sixteen, the original of which Convention, being in the English and Danish languages, is word for word as follows:

The United States of America and His Majesty the King of Denmark being desirous of confirming the good understanding which exists between them, have to that end appointed as Plenipotentiaries:

The President of the United States:

Mr. Robert Lansing, Secretary of State of the United States, and His Majesty the King of Denmark:

Mr. Constantin Brun, His Majesty's Envoy extraordinary and Minister plenipotentiary at Washington,

who, having mutually exhibited their full powers which were found to be in due form, have agreed upon the following articles:

Article 1.

His Majesty the King of Denmark by this convention cedes to the United States all territory, dominion and sovereignty, possessed, asserted or claimed by Denmark in the West Indies including the Islands of Saint Thomas, Saint John and Saint Croix together with the adjacent islands and rocks.

This cession includes the right of property in all public, government, or crown lands, public buildings, wharves, ports, harbors, fortifications, barracks, public funds, rights, franchises, and privileges, and all other public property of every kind or description now belonging to Denmark together with all appurtenances thereto.

In this cession shall also be included any government archives, records, papers or documents which relate to the cession or the rights and property of the inhabitants of the Islands ceded, and which may now be existing either in the Islands ceded or in Denmark. Such archives and records shall be carefully preserved, and authenticated copies thereof, as may be required shall be at all times given to the United States Government or the Danish Government, as the case may be, or to such properly authorized persons as may apply for them.

ANNOTATIONS

1. **Real property.** Title to real property belonging to the [Danish] State Treasury prior to the 1917 cession passed to the United States pursuant to the terms of the Convention with Denmark. 1 V.I.Op.A.G. 40.

Article 2.

Denmark guarantees that the cession made by the preceding article is free and unencumbered by any reservations, privileges, franchises, grants, or possessions, held by any governments, corporations, syndicates, or individuals, except as herein mentioned. But it is understood that this cession does not in any respect impair private rights which by law belong to the peaceful possession of property of all kinds by private individuals of whatsoever nationality, by municipalities, public or private establishments, ecclesiastical or civic bodies, or any other associations having legal capacity to acquire and possess property in the Islands ceded.

The congregations belonging to the Danish National Church shall retain the undisturbed use of the churches which are now used by

them, together with the parsonages appertaining thereunto and other appurtenances, including the funds allotted to the churches.

Article 3.

It is especially agreed, however, that:

1) The arms and military stores existing in the Islands at the time of the cession and belonging to the Danish Government shall remain the property of that Government and shall, as soon as circumstances will permit, be removed by it, unless they, or parts thereof, may have been bought by the Government of the United States; it being however understood that flags and colors, uniforms and such arms or military articles as are marked as being the property of the Danish Government shall not be included in such purchase.

2) The movables, especially silver plate and pictures which may be found in the government buildings in the islands ceded and belonging to the Danish Government shall remain the property of that Government and shall, as soon as circumstances will permit, be removed by it.

3) The pecuniary claims now held by Denmark against the colonial treasuries of the islands ceded are altogether extinguished in consequence of this cession and the United States assumes no responsibility whatsoever for or in connection with these claims. Excepted is however the amount due to the Danish Treasury in account current with the West-Indian colonial treasuries pursuant to the making up of accounts in consequence of the cession of the islands; should on the other hand this final accounting show a balance in favour of the West-Indian colonial treasuries, the Danish Treasury shall pay that amount to the colonial treasuries.

4) The United States will maintain the following grants, concessions and licenses, given by the Danish Government, in accordance with the terms on which they are given:

a. The concession granted to "Det vestindiske Kompagni" (the West-Indian Company) Ltd. by the communications from the Ministry of Finance of January 18th 1913 and of April 16th 1913 relative to a license to embank, drain, deepen and utilize certain areas in St. Thomas Harbor, and preferential rights as to commercial, industrial or shipping establishments in the said Harbor.

b. Agreement of August 10th and 14th, 1914 between the municipality of St. Thomas and St. John and "Det vestindiske Kompagni" Ltd. relative to the supply of the city of Charlotte Amalie with electric lighting.

c. Concession of March 12th 1897 to "The Floating Dock Company of St. Thomas Ltd.", subsequently transferred to "The St. Thomas Engineering and Coaling Company Ltd." relative to a floating dock in St. Thomas Harbor, in which concession the maintenance, extension, and alteration of the then existing repairing slip are reserved.

d. Royal Decree Nr. 79 of November 30th 1914 relative to the subsidies from the colonial treasuries of St. Thomas and Sainte Croix to "The West India and Panama Telegraph Company Ltd."

e. Concession of November 3rd, 1906, to H. B. Hey to establish and operate a telephone system on St. Thomas island, which concession has subsequently been transferred to the "St. Thomas Telefonselskab" Ltd.

f. Concession of February 28th 1913 to the municipality of Sainte Croix to establish and operate a telephone system in Sainte Croix.

g. Concession of July 16th 1915 to Ejnar Svendsen, an Engineer, for the construction and operation of an electric light plant in the city of Christiansted, Sainte Croix.

h. Concession of June 20th 1904 for the establishment of a Danish West-Indian bank of issue. This bank has for a period of 30 years acquired the monopoly to issue bank-notes in the Danish West India islands against the payment to the Danish Treasury of a tax amounting to ten percent of its annual profits.

i. Guarantee according to the Danish supplementary Budget Law for the financial year 1908-1909 relative to the St. Thomas Harbor's four percent loan of 1910.

5) Whatever sum shall be due to the Danish Treasury by private individuals on the date of the exchange of ratifications are reserved and do not pass by this cession; and where the Danish Government at that date holds property taken over by the Danish Treasury for sums due by private individuals, such property shall not pass by this cession, but the Danish Government shall sell or dispose of such property and remove its proceeds within two years from the date of the exchange of ratifications of this convention; the United States Government being entitled to sell by public auction, to the credit of the Danish Government, any portion of such property remaining unsold at the expiration of the said term of two years.

6) The Colonial Treasuries shall continue to pay the yearly allowances now given to heretofore retired functionaries appointed in the islands but holding no Royal Commissions, unless such allowances may have until now been paid in Denmark.

Article 4.

The Danish Government shall appoint with convenient despatch an agent or agents for the purpose of formally delivering to a similar agent or agents appointed on behalf of the United States, the territory, dominion, property, and appurtenances which are ceded hereby, and for doing any other act which may be necessary in regard thereto. Formal delivery of the territory and property ceded shall be made immediately after the payment by the United States of the sum of money stipulated in this convention; but the cession with the right of immediate possession is nevertheless to be deemed complete on the exchange of ratifications of this convention without such formal delivery. Any Danish military or naval forces which may be in the islands ceded shall be withdrawn as soon as may be practicable after the formal delivery, it being however understood that if the persons constituting these forces, after having terminated their Danish service, do not wish to leave the Islands, they shall be allowed to remain there as civilians.

Article 5.

In full consideration of the cession made by this convention, the United States agrees to pay, within ninety days from the date of the exchange of the ratifications of this convention, in the city of Washington to the diplomatic representative or other agent of His Majesty the King of Denmark duly authorized to receive the money, the sum of twenty-five million dollars in gold coin of the United States.

Article 6.

Danish citizens residing in said islands may remain therein or may remove therefrom at will, retaining in either event all their rights of property, including the right to sell or dispose of such property or its proceeds; in case they remain in the Islands, they shall continue until otherwise provided, to enjoy all the private, municipal and religious rights and liberties secured to them by the laws now in force. If the present laws are altered, the said inhabitants shall not thereby be placed in a less favorable position in respect to the above mentioned rights and liberties than they now enjoy. Those, who remain in the islands may preserve their citizenship in Denmark by making before a court of record, within one year from the date of the exchange of ratifications of this convention, a declaration of their decision to preserve such citizenship; in default of which declaration they shall be

held to have renounced it, and to have accepted citizenship in the United States; for children under eighteen years the said declaration may be made by their parents or guardians. Such election of Danish citizenship shall however not, after the lapse of the said term of one year, be a bar to their renunciation of their preserved Danish citizenship and their election of citizenship in the United States and admission to the nationality thereof on the same terms as may be provided according to the laws of the United States, for other inhabitants of the islands.

The civil rights and the political status of the inhabitants of the islands shall be determined by the Congress, subject to the stipulations contained in the present convention.

Danish citizens not residing in the islands but owning property therein at the time of the cession, shall retain their rights of property, including the right to sell or dispose of such property, being placed in this regard on the same basis as the Danish citizens residing in the islands and remaining therein or removing therefrom, to whom the first paragraph of this articles relates.

ANNOTATIONS

1. **Federal Constitution, applicability.** Treaty between the United States and Denmark by which the Virgin Islands were acquired by the United States showed that the United States intended to have the Constitution apply to the Virgin Islands. *Richardson v. Electoral Boards*, D.C.V.I. 1936, 1 V.I. 301.

2. **Citizenship.** A person residing in the Virgin Islands on January 17, 1917, and on February 25, 1927, who did not preserve Danish citizenship by a declaration provided for in the Convention with Denmark of August 4, 1916, is a citizen of the United States by virtue of Act of Congress, February 25, 1927, ch. 192, 44 Stat. 1234. 1 V.I.Op.A.G. 11.

This article, concerning the rights of former Danish citizens, provides that these rights should not be abridged, provided such persons remain in the Islands. 2 V.I.Op.A.G. 200.

Former Danish citizens enjoyed no vested rights under this article except such as related to property, and therefore could not claim that neither the Legislature nor the courts could change the requirements for admission to the bar. 2 V.I.Op.A.G. 200.

Article 7.

Danish subjects residing in the Islands shall be subject in matters civil as well as criminal to the jurisdiction of the courts of the Islands, pursuant to the ordinary laws governing the same, and they shall have the right to appear before such courts, and to pursue the same course therein as citizens of the country to which the courts belong.

Article 8.

Judicial proceedings pending at the time of the formal delivery in the islands ceded shall be determined according to the following rules:

1) Judgments rendered either in civil suits between private individuals, or in criminal matters, before the date mentioned, and with respect to which there is no recourse or right to review under Danish law, shall be deemed to be final, and shall be executed in due form and without any renewed trial whatsoever, by the competent authority in the territories within which such judgments are to be carried out.

If in a criminal case a mode of punishment has been applied which, according to new rules, is no longer applicable on the islands ceded after delivery, the nearest corresponding punishment in the new rules shall be applied.

2) Civil suits or criminal actions pending before the first courts, in which the pleadings have not been closed at the same time, shall be confirmed before the tribunals established in the ceded islands after the delivery, in accordance with the law which shall thereafter be in force.

3) Civil suits and criminal actions pending at the said time before the Superior Court or the Supreme Court in Denmark shall continue to be prosecuted before the Danish courts until final judgment according to the law hitherto in force. The judgment shall be executed in due form by the competent authority in the territories within which such judgment should be carried out.

Article 9.

The rights of property secured by copyrights and patents acquired by Danish subjects in the Islands ceded at the time of exchange of the ratifications of this treaty, shall continue to be respected.

Article 10.

Treaties, conventions and all other international agreements of any nature existing between Denmark and the United States shall *eo ipso* extend, in default of a provision to the contrary, also to the ceded islands.

Article 11.

In case of differences of opinion arising between the High Contracting Parties in regard to the interpretation or application of this

convention, such differences, if they cannot be regulated through diplomatic negotiations, shall be submitted for arbitration to the permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague.

Article 12.

The ratifications of this convention shall be exchanged at Washington as soon as possible after ratification by both of the High Contracting Parties according to their respective procedure.

In faith whereof the respective plenipotentiaries have signed and sealed this convention, in the English and Danish languages.

Done at New York this fourth day of August, one thousand nine hundred and sixteen.

[SEAL]

ROBERT LANSING.

[SEAL]

C. BRUN.

And whereas in giving advice and consent to the ratification of the said Convention, it was declared by the Senate of the United States in their resolution that "such advice and consent are given with the understanding, to be expressed as a part of the instrument of ratification, that such Convention shall not be taken and construed by the High Contracting Parties as imposing any trust upon the United States with respect to any funds belonging to the Danish National Church in the Danish West Indian Islands, or in which the said Church may have an interest, nor as imposing upon the United States any duty or responsibility with respect to the management of any property belonging to said Church, beyond protecting said Church in the possession and use of church property as stated in said Convention, in the same manner and to the same extent only as other churches shall be protected in the possession and use of their several properties;"

And whereas it was further provided in the said resolution "That the Senate advises and consents to the ratification of the said Convention on condition that the attitude of the United States in this particular, as set forth in the above proviso, be made the subject of an exchange of notes between the Governments of the two High Contracting Parties, so as to make it plain that this condition is understood and accepted by the two Governments, the purpose hereof being to bring the said Convention clearly within the Constitutional powers of the United States with respect to church establishment and freedom of religion;"

CONVENTION—U.S. AND DENMARK

And whereas this condition has been fulfilled by notes exchanged between the two High Contracting Parties on January 3, 1917;

And whereas the said Convention has been duly ratified on both parts, and the ratifications of the two Governments were exchanged in the City of Washington, on the seventeenth day of January, one thousand nine hundred and seventeen;

Now, therefore, be it known that I, Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States of America, have caused the said Convention to be made public, to the end that the same and every article and clause therefore may be observed and fulfilled with good faith by the United States and the citizens thereof, subject to the said understanding of the Senate of the United States.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington this twenty-fifth day of January in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and seven-
[SEAL] teen, and of the Independence of the United States of America the One hundred and forty-first.

WOODROW WILSON.

By the President:

ROBERT LANSING,
Secretary of State.

DECLARATION.

In proceeding this day to the signature of the Convention respecting the cession of the Danish West-Indian Islands to the United States of America, the undersigned Secretary of State of the United States of America, duly authorized by his Government, has the honor to declare that the Government of the United States of America will not object to the Danish Government extending their political and economic interests to the whole of Greenland.

ROBERT LANSING.

New York, August 4, 1916.

HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

[Exchange of Notes mentioned in Proclamation.]

[*The Secretary of State to the Danish Minister.*]

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
WASHINGTON, January 3, 1917.

SIR:

I have the honor to inform you that the Senate of the United States by its resolution of ratification has advised and consented to the ratification of the convention between the United States and Denmark, ceding to the United States the Danish West Indian Islands, with the following provisos:

“Provided, however, That it is declared by the Senate that in advising and consenting to the ratification of the said convention, such advice and consent are given with the understanding, to be expressed as a part of the instrument of ratification, that such Convention shall not be taken and construed by the High Contracting Parties as imposing any trust upon the United States with respect to any funds belonging to the Danish National Church in the Danish West Indian Islands, or in which the said church may have an interest, nor as imposing upon the United States any duty or responsibility with respect to the management of any property belonging to said church, beyond protecting said church in the possession and use of church property as stated in said Convention, in the same manner and to the same extent only as other churches shall be protected in the possession and use of their several properties. And provided further, that the Senate advises and consents to the ratification of the said Convention on condition that the attitude of the United States in this particular, as set forth in the above proviso, be made the subject of an exchange of notes between the Governments of the two High Contracting Parties, so as to make it plain that this condition is understood and accepted by the two Governments, the purpose hereof being to bring the said Convention clearly within the Constitutional powers of the United States with respect to church establishment and freedom of religion.”

In view of this resolution of the Senate I have the honor to state that it is understood and accepted by the Government of the United States and the Government of Denmark that the provisions of this Convention referring to the property and funds belonging to the Danish National Church in the Danish West Indian Islands shall not

CONVENTION—U.S. AND DENMARK

be taken and construed by the High Contracting Parties as imposing any trust upon the United States with respect to any funds belonging to the Danish National Church in the Danish West Indian Islands, or in which the said church may have an interest nor as imposing upon the United States any duty or responsibility with respect to the management of any property belonging to said church, beyond protecting said church in the possession and use of church property as stated in said Convention, in the same manner and to the same extent only as other churches shall be protected in the possession and use of their several properties.

I trust that your Government will in a formal reply to this communication accept this understanding as to the meaning and construction of the provisions of said Convention in accordance with the foregoing resolution of the Senate.

Accept, Sir, the renewed assurances of my highest consideration.

ROBERT LANSING

Mr. CONSTANTIN BRUN,

Minister of Denmark.

[The Danish Minister to the Secretary of State.]

THE DANISH LEGATION

WASHINGTON, D. C.

January 3rd, 1917.

SIR:

In reply to your communication of this day concerning the relation of the United States to the rights of the Established Church in the Danish West Indies and to the provisions referring to this point in the convention between the United States and Denmark ceding to the States the Danish Westindian Islands, I have the honor to state that it is understood and accepted by the government of Denmark and the Government of the United States that the provisions of this convention referring to the property and funds belonging to the Danish National Church in the Danish Westindian Islands shall not be taken and construed by the high contracting parties as imposing any trust upon the United States with respect to any fund belonging to the Danish National Church in the Danish Westindian Islands or in which the said Church may have an interest nor as imposing upon the United States any duty or responsibility with respect to the man-

HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

agement of any property belonging to said church beyond protecting said church in the possession and use of church property as stated in said convention in the same manner and to the same extent only as other churches shall be protected in the possession and use of their several properties.

It will be evident from the above that the Danish Government accept the understanding as to the meaning and construction of the provisions of the said convention in accordance with the resolution of the United States' Senate concerning the question of the rights of the Church in the Islands.

I have the honor to be, Sir,
with the highest consideration,
Your most obedient and humble servant,

C. BRUN.

The Honorable

ROBERT LANSING,

Secretary of State of the United States.



AFRICAN-CARIBBEAN REPARATIONS AND RESETTLEMENT ALLIANCE

Associate Member of the CARICOM Reparations Commission

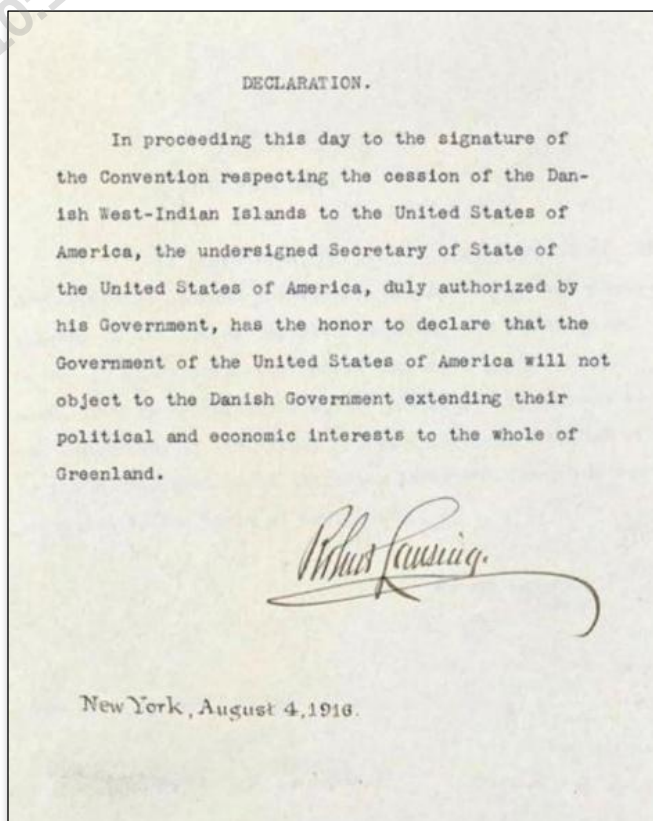
Trump's Greenland Gambit: A Treaty Violation That Could Undermine U.S. Rule in the Virgin Islands

By Shelley Moorhead

March 20, 2025 – Christiansted, U.S. Virgin Islands

President Trump's recent comments about acquiring Greenland have reignited debates over territorial sovereignty. While global attention focuses on Greenland, this discussion also casts a necessary spotlight on the U.S. Virgin Islands, another former Danish colony transferred to the United States in 1917. Yet, there is a critical, overlooked factor that directly challenges Trump's territorial ambitions—the [Lansing Declaration of 1916](#).

Signed by U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing, this agreement explicitly recognized Denmark's sovereignty over Greenland at the time of the Virgin Islands' purchase. If Trump disregards this key U.S.-Denmark treaty, does that not undermine America's own claim to the Virgin Islands?



This is not merely a matter of historical oversight—it is a direct contradiction in U.S. foreign policy. Lansing's signature formalized a transaction that determined the fate of both Greenland and the Virgin Islands. To dismiss or override this historic agreement without acknowledging its broader implications is to undermine the very legal foundation of U.S. territorial sovereignty. The Lansing Declaration was not just a diplomatic formality; it was an official U.S. foreign policy stance that reaffirmed America's recognition of Danish sovereignty over Greenland.



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By disregarding this commitment, Trump not only undermines Lansing's legacy but also breaks with over a century of U.S. foreign policy precedent. If the United States selectively abandons this position now, what does that mean for the legitimacy of its own territorial claims in the Caribbean? And more importantly, what does it mean for the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands—who, more than a century later, remain politically voiceless in the very nation that governs them?

Greenland's Autonomy vs. the U.S. Virgin Islands' Lack of Self-Determination



Greenland, a semi-autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark, has been granted significant self-governance. In 2008, Greenlanders voted in a referendum resulting in greater autonomy, allowing control over local affairs and recognition as a distinct people under international law. This progression reflects Denmark's acknowledgment of Greenlanders' right to self-determination, including the potential for full independence.

In stark contrast, the U.S. Virgin Islands lack any comparable mechanisms for self-determination.

Despite being U.S. citizens, Virgin Islanders cannot vote for president, yet our young men and women are sent into war under a commander-in-chief they did not elect. Our delegate to Congress has no voting power, leaving us taxed without representation. Unlike Greenland, the U.S. Virgin Islands have no representation at the United Nations. Like Puerto Rico and Guam, we remain politically voiceless—trapped in colonial limbo.

Unlike Greenland, Virgin Islanders have never been given a federally recognized, binding referendum on their political future. While non-binding referendums were held in 1982 and 1993, neither resulted in any change, as they lacked federal recognition and failed to produce a decisive outcome. The question remains: Why does the U.S. deny Virgin Islanders the same right to self-determination that Denmark grants Greenland?

And perhaps the greatest modern-day injury to Virgin Islands dignity and self-determination will occur when President Trump, as commander-in-chief, deploys U.S. Virgin Islands soldiers to Greenland to pursue the sought after and much desired U.S. Territorial sovereignty there—soldiers who themselves have no vote in the country they serve.





Trump's Greenland Comments and the Colonial Mindset

As recently as March 13, 2025, during a White House press conference, President Trump openly questioned Denmark's sovereignty over Greenland, stating:

"A boat came ashore there 200 years ago or so, and Denmark says they have rights to Greenland. I don't know if this is true. I actually don't think so."

Yet, there was not a single mention of the U.S. Virgin Islands—no acknowledgment of U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing, nor the signature that places all of this into its proper geopolitical and historical context.

Trump later continued:

"We've been dealing with Denmark; we've been dealing with Greenland."

And yet, the United States has not been dealing with the U.S. Virgin Islands. There has been no consultation, no dialogue, no engagement with the people of the Virgin Islands, just as there was none in 1917 when the islands were transferred from Denmark to the U.S.

In fact, the very language of the 1916 Treaty of the Danish West Indies classified the people of the Virgin Islands as "Inhabitants"—a legal designation that deliberately denied them political agency, rights, or a say in their own future. More than a century later, nothing has changed. The people of the Virgin Islands remain politically voiceless, their self-determination still a matter of imperial negotiation rather than democratic consultation.

This deliberate exclusion raises the question: Does the Doctrine of Discovery still govern U.S. territorial policy?

The doctrine that once justified the dispossession of Indigenous lands—a legal principle that denied non-European peoples the right to govern themselves—seems to remain intact in the treatment of the U.S. Virgin Islands. After more than 100 years under American rule, Virgin Islanders are still treated as if their political fate is not theirs to decide.

Will the Proposed U.S. Acquisition of Greenland Void Its Sovereignty Over the Virgin Islands?

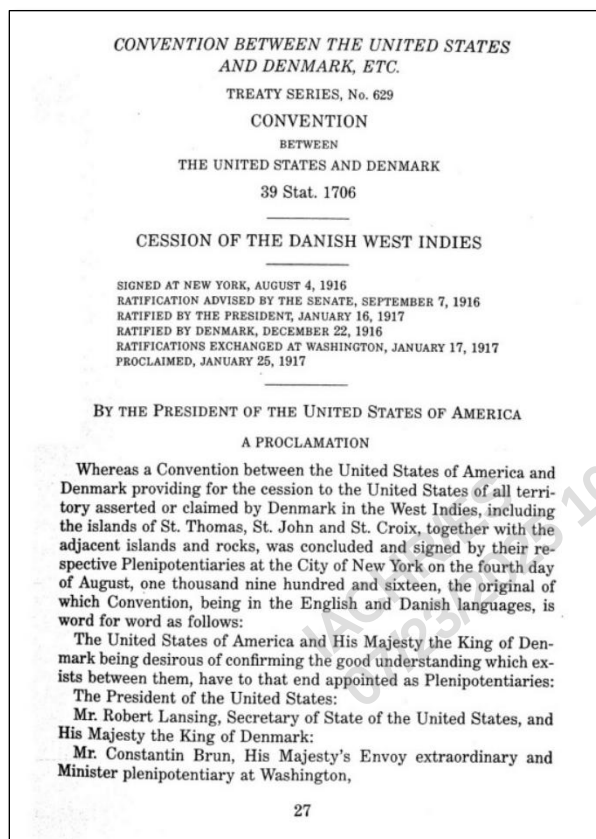
[The 1916 Treaty of the Danish West Indies](#) facilitated the transfer of the Virgin Islands to the United States for \$25 million in gold—without consulting the islands' inhabitants. This treaty included the Lansing Declaration, in which the U.S. formally recognized Denmark's sovereignty over Greenland.

If current U.S. actions challenge this aspect of the treaty, it raises fundamental questions about the validity of the entire agreement—including the status of the Virgin Islands.





If Trump follows through on his proposal to acquire Greenland, will this act challenge U.S. sovereignty over the Virgin Islands? If America is willing to override the part of the 1916 treaty that recognized Denmark's full claim to Greenland, does that mean the rest of the treaty—including the transfer of the Virgin Islands—is also open to review?



And if that question is even remotely valid, what does this mean for Virgin Islanders—people who have already been denied the right to self-determination for over a century? If Greenland's status can be renegotiated, wouldn't that also open the door to reviewing the legitimacy of the 1917 transfer of the Virgin Islands to the U.S.?

But there is a deeper legal question that remains unresolved: What exactly was transferred to the United States in 1917?

Denmark's claim to the Virgin Islands was originally based on the Doctrine of Discovery—the colonial legal principle that allowed European powers to claim lands inhabited by non-Europeans. If Denmark's sovereignty over the Virgin Islands was itself grounded in a legal fiction that denied Indigenous and African-descended peoples the right to sovereignty over their own lands, then what did the U.S. actually acquire in 1917?

Did the United States, in effect, inherit the legal justification of the Doctrine of Discovery as part of the deal? If the U.S. never formally repudiated this doctrine, does its claim to the Virgin Islands still rest on a legal principle that denies non-European peoples the right to sovereignty over their own lands?

Trump's argument against Denmark's sovereignty over Greenland is a double-edged sword. If he denies that "a boat came ashore there 200 years ago" is a sufficient basis for Danish ownership, then what does that mean for the U.S. Virgin Islands? The United States acquired the Virgin Islands from Denmark based on the very same legal logic—the Danish Claim to these lands and their Inhabitants.

After all, it was a Danish boat that came ashore in Charlotte Amalie in 1666, laying the very foundation for Denmark's territorial claim to the Danish West Indies, now U.S. Virgin Islands. If Trump is willing to dismiss Denmark's Claim to Greenland despite the Lansing Declaration of 1916, then why should the U.S. Virgin Islands not challenge the legitimacy of America's continued rule, which rests upon the same colonial framework?





It was Denmark's Claim to the Danish West Indies that the United States purchased in 1917, just as Denmark's Claim to Greenland was explicitly recognized by the Lansing Declaration in 1916. So why does Trump uphold Denmark's Claim to the Virgin Islands while rejecting its Claim to Greenland?

The legal foundation of U.S. sovereignty over the Virgin Islands rests entirely on Denmark's historical Claim, much like Denmark's claim to Greenland. If the Doctrine of Discovery and colonial legal fictions can be dismissed in Greenland, then what prevents the Virgin Islands from challenging the same legal basis that underpins their continued status as an unincorporated U.S. territory?

If the foundation of U.S. sovereignty over the Virgin Islands remains rooted in a colonial doctrine that was never corrected, then what legitimacy does the U.S. truly have in continuing to govern the islands without granting them full political agency?

The 1916 Lansing Declaration—A Foreign Policy Paradox

[The Lansing Declaration of 1916](#) was not a symbolic agreement—it was an official U.S. foreign policy stance, binding the United States to respect Denmark's sovereignty over Greenland. Its language was clear:

"The Government of the United States will not object to the Danish Government extending their political and economic interests to the whole of Greenland."

Full stop. That's it! The language is both comprehensible and indisputable. For over a century, this commitment remained unchallenged, serving as the foundation of U.S.-Danish relations regarding Greenland. Yet today, President Trump's renewed territorial ambitions expose an overlooked contradiction in U.S. foreign policy—one that threatens to undo America's own legitimacy over its territories.

If Trump moves forward with acquiring Greenland, he would be directly violating the very treaty that justified America's acquisition of the U.S. Virgin Islands. In doing so, he would not only trample over international agreements but also raise legal questions about the validity of America's own sovereignty over the Virgin Islands.

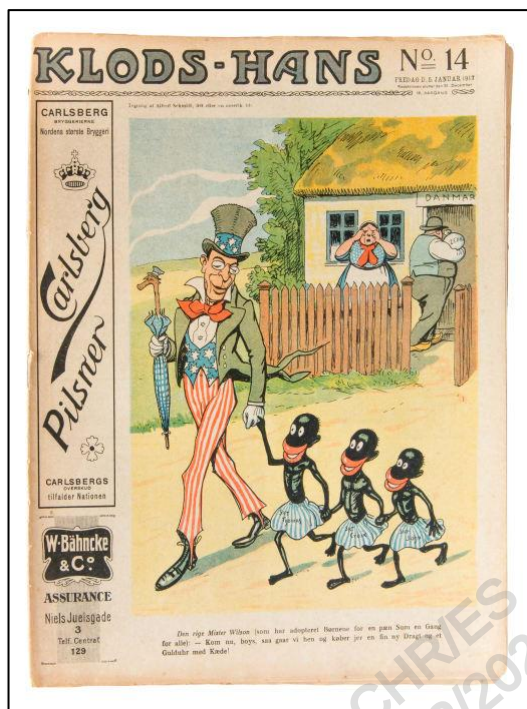
If Greenland's status is up for renegotiation, then so is the 1917 transfer of the Virgin Islands. The United States cannot rewrite one part of the treaty while expecting the other half to remain unchallenged.

For Trump to force a deal on Greenland, he would have to run roughshod over long-standing U.S. treaty commitments, setting a dangerous precedent that threatens the very legitimacy of America's territorial claims elsewhere—including the Virgin Islands.





Like Chickens Coming Home to Roost: Denmark's Colonial Morass



This international debacle places Denmark in a uniquely peculiar, colonial morass. Being the only European colonial power to sell its former slave colony, Denmark has for more than 100 years now used the Treaty of the Danish West Indies and the transfer of the islands to the U.S. as the legal basis upon which to avoid the responsibility of reparations, seeking instead to abdicate the responsibility of development to the United States.

With the validity of the treaty now under scrutiny, and with the sovereignty of Greenland in question and being challenged, Denmark's international image and reputation as a bastion for human rights is certainly taking a hit and remains no longer unblemished.

The sale of the Danish West Indies was the most expensive U.S. land acquisition per acre. This raises a critical question: Was it just land that was sold and purchased? Or was the 1917 transfer of

the Danish West Indies the largest, most expensive sale of people in contemporary times—occurring not in the 17th, 18th, or 19th centuries, but in a modern era that prided itself on progress and human rights?

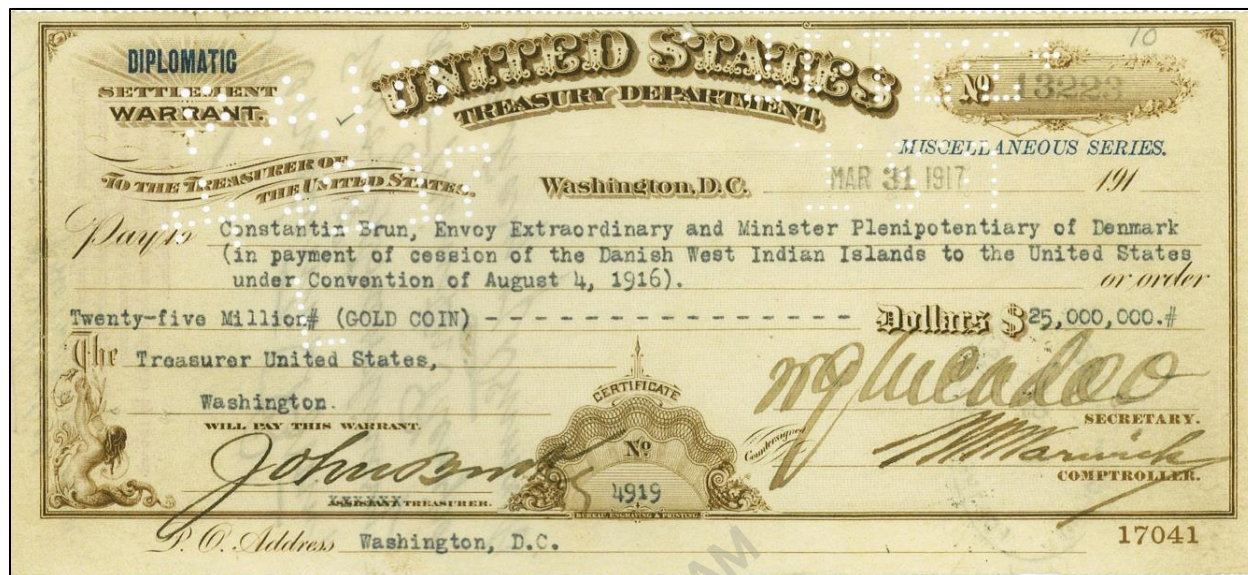
For Denmark, this was no insignificant transaction. The \$25 million in gold represented no less than 2% of Denmark's Gross National Product (GNP) in 1917, an economic windfall for a nation grappling with the decline of its Caribbean sugar economy, labor uprisings in the Danish West Indies, and the broader economic instability of World War I.

Denmark, in finalizing this sale, not only transferred sovereignty but also relinquished all obligations to the people it had governed for 250 years—washing its hands of any future responsibility. By selling its colony and the people within it for gold, Denmark engaged in what may be the largest recorded commercial transaction of human beings in the history of the world in the 20th century—made legal by the Doctrine of Discovery and the Law of Nations.

The \$25 Million in Gold: Its Modern Value, Beneficiaries, and Reparative Justice Implications

To fully grasp the scale of this transaction, we must consider what \$25 million in gold was worth than today.

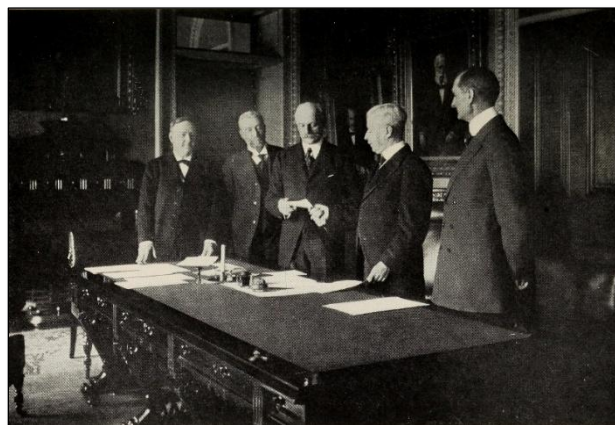




In 1917, the price of gold was approximately \$20.67 per ounce. At that rate, \$25 million in gold equals roughly 1.21 million ounces of gold.

Today, with gold trading at around \$2,100 per ounce (as of 2025), the modern equivalent value of that gold would exceed \$2.5 billion.

But this wealth did not go to the people of the Virgin Islands. The Danish government received this payment in full—a final act of colonial profiteering before washing its hands of the islands.



Instead of reinvesting in the lives of those who had worked and suffered under Danish rule, Denmark took the gold and left, never making any provisions for the people who had built its wealth through generations of forced labor.

While former slave masters received compensation from the Danish government for their loss of property after emancipation, the U.S. Virgin Islanders received no compensation, no reparations, and no consideration. They were merely transferred—without rights, without a say, and without a share in the wealth their homeland generated.

Reparative Justice Implications

The [purchase of the U.S. Virgin Islands was not just an economic transaction](#). It was a denial of self-determination. A forced transfer of a people without their input. A deal conducted without any provision for their rights, development, or political future.





Contrast this with Greenland: Denmark allows Greenland to vote on its political status, including potential independence. The U.S. Virgin Islands have never been granted such a right. Instead, Virgin Islanders—whose homeland was sold for gold—have remained in colonial limbo, disenfranchised, and without full representation in the U.S. government.

Given this historical reality, the logical next step would be:

- A Congressional review of the economic and political consequences of the 1917 sale.
- A reassessment of the financial obligations the U.S. and Denmark owe to the Virgin Islands.
- A framework for reparative justice, including economic investment and formal acknowledgment of historical injustice.

If \$2.5 billion worth of gold was taken in exchange for the Virgin Islands, yet Virgin Islanders still face economic hardship, lack full representation, and have never been consulted on their political future, then what was that money truly for—and who was it truly for?

And perhaps the more urgent question:

If Greenland can renegotiate its relationship with Denmark, why can't the U.S. Virgin Islands renegotiate its status with the United States?

The Time for Action is Now

Greenland has the right to vote on its political future. Why doesn't the U.S. Virgin Islands? The time for self-determination is now.

For Virgin Islanders the stakes are high. With the 6th Constitutional Convention currently underway, Virgin Islanders are once again seeking to define their political future. Yet, history has shown that Washington's approval—not the will of the people—has ultimately determined the fate of past constitutional efforts. Will this moment be different? Or will the same imperial mindset that justified the 1917 sale continue to deny Virgin Islanders the right to chart their own destiny?

These political decisions have ramifications far beyond the limited vision of the president's current international advisors—advisors who, despite their modern titles, seem to be operating on the same archaic principles that guided colonial empires. For Christ's sake, this is 2025, not 1492!

What Must Be Done

- 1. Honor U.S. Treaty Obligations and Recognize Virgin Islanders' Right to Self-Determination**
 - Acknowledge that the 1917 transfer violated Virgin Islanders' right to self-determination and commit to rectifying this historic injustice.





2. Establish a Reparative Justice Framework

- Direct the U.S. government to reexamine the [\\$25 million in gold exchanged for the Virgin Islands](#) and its modern-day equivalent.
- Implement economic investments, structural development, and historical recognition to address over a century of political neglect and economic disparity.

3. Order a Congressional Inquiry into the 1916 Treaty and Lansing Declaration

- Direct Congress to investigate whether the acquisition of Greenland voids U.S. sovereignty over the Virgin Islands.

Perhaps a Virgin Islander Holds the Key

President Trump has been unrelenting in his assertion that, when it comes to Greenland and Denmark, “*we have to make a deal.*” But perhaps what this impasse truly requires is the wisdom that Republican President Ronald Reagan once demonstrated. In 1983, Reagan, with his signature diplomatic prowess and geopolitical intuition, appointed U.S. Career Diplomat Terence Todman—a native Virgin Islander and one of only five men to achieve this prestigious Foreign Service distinction—as U.S. Ambassador to Denmark.

Todman, a fierce advocate for self-determination, was uniquely suited to navigate the complexities of U.S.-Denmark relations, bridging historical injustices with modern diplomatic strategy. Perhaps what this deal truly needs is the voice of those long ignored—the voice of a Virgin Islander.



About the Author

Shelley Moorhead is the former U.S. Virgin Islands Minister of State for External Affairs, former Secretary General of the Inter-Virgin Islands Council (IVIC), and Chairman of its Standing Committee. An expert on U.S. Virgin Islands-Denmark relations, he is the founder and president of the African-Caribbean Reparations and Resettlement Alliance (ACRRA) and has long been engaged in advancing reparative justice and self-determination for the U.S. Virgin Islands.



This is a column. It expresses the opinion of the writer or writers. Click [here](#) if you want to send a debate piece to Berlingske.

CHRONICLES

Former Secretary of State: Trump's gamble with Greenland is a treaty violation that could undermine America's status in the Virgin Islands



If Trump decides to send soldiers from The Virgin Islands to Greenland to establish American sovereignty, he is sending men and women to war who do not have the right to vote in the country they are defending.
Photo: Chris Kleponis/EPA/Ritzau Scanpix

CHRONICLE

Sunday, March 30, 2025, 3:37 p.m.

Share this article

Shelley Moorhead, Founder and President of the African-Caribbean Reparations and Resettlement Alliance | ACRRA

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" A boat came up there 200 years ago or so, and now the Danes say they have the right to own Greenland. I don't know if that's right. But I actually don't think so. "

With these words, President Trump, during a [press conference](#) at the White House, once again reignited the controversy over Greenland and openly questioned Denmark's sovereignty, disregarding treaties and ignoring over a hundred years of diplomatic recognition.

Dette er en kronik. Den udtrykker skribentens eller skribenternes holdning. Klik [her](#), hvis du ønsker at sende et debatindlæg til Berlingske.

KRONIKKER

Tidligere udenrigsminister: Trumps gamble med Grønland er et traktatbrud, der kan underminere Amerikas status på Virgin Islands



Hvis Trump finder på at sende soldater fra The Virgin Islands til Grønland for at etablere amerikansk suverænitet, sender han mænd og kvinder i krig, som ikke har stemmeret i det land, de forsvarer.
Foto: Chris Kleponis/EPA/Ritzau Scanpix

KRONIK

Søndag d. 30. marts 2025, kl. 15.37

Del denne artikel

Shelley Moorhead, stifter og præsident for African-Caribbean Reparations and Resettlement Alliance | ACRRA

 Lyt  Kø  Gem artikel

»En båd kom derop for 200 år siden eller deromkring, og nu siger danskerne, at de har ret til at eje Grønland. Jeg ved ikke, om det er rigtigt. Men jeg tror det faktisk ikke.«

Med disse ord satte præsident Trump, under et [pressemøde](#) i Det Hvide Hus, endnu en gang liv i kontroversen om Grønland og betvivlede åbenlyst Danmarks suverænitet, så bort fra traktater og ignorerede over hundrede års diplomatisk anerkendelse.



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Commentary Organizations USVI Living

A Demand for Standing: Challenging the Colonial Exclusion of the United States Virgin Islands under the 1916 Treaty of the Danish West Indies

March 30, 2025

On March 28, 2025, Shelley Moorhead, acting on behalf of the politically disenfranchised people of the United States Virgin Islands, formally submitted a petition to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague. The filing requests procedural reform and recognition of third-party standing in treaty arbitration related to the 1916 Treaty of the Danish West Indies (DWI)—the agreement through which Denmark sold the Virgin Islands to the United States for \$25 million in gold.

This submission marks the first time in PCA history that a non-sovereign people has formally challenged their exclusion from arbitration under a colonial-era treaty based on the legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery and structural discrimination embedded in international legal norms. This submission marks the first time in PCA history that a non-sovereign people has formally challenged their exclusion from arbitration under a colonial-era treaty based on the legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery and structural discrimination embedded in international legal norms.

Key Arguments:

1. Structural Exclusion under Article XII:



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- The 1916 Treaty recognizes only Denmark and the United States as “High Contracting Parties,” excluding the United States Virgin Islands (USVI) population—who remain directly affected by its terms and consequences—from any role in its interpretation or enforcement.

2. Colonial Designation of “Inhabitants”:

- Article VI reduced the people of the USVI to mere “Inhabitants,” denying them legal personhood or the right to Self-Determination. This reflects a legal framework inherited from the Doctrine of Discovery, which historically stripped non-European peoples of sovereignty and standing.

3. Violation of International Law:

- The continued exclusion violates international legal principles, including:
- Article 1 of the UN Charter (right to Self-Determination),
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and
- Precedents such as the ICJ’s Chagos Archipelago (2019) and Western Sahara (1975) rulings, affirming peoples’ rights under Decolonization.

4. Call for Procedural Reform at the PCA:

- The petition urges the PCA to revise its internal protocols to:
- Recognize third-party standing where treaty obligations materially affect nonstate peoples;
- Permit amicus curiae filings and consultative hearings from historically disenfranchised populations;
- Rethink the exclusionary application of the term “High Contracting Parties.”



Why This Matters:

This case exposes a significant gap in the international legal system: treaty arbitration mechanisms that deny the very people subjected to those treaties any right to participate. More than a century after the sale of the Danish West Indies, U.S. Virgin Islanders remain without a voice in determining how their historical and legal legacy is interpreted at the highest levels of international law.

As ACRRA Vice President and Legal Counsel Mr. Devin Carrington states: “This isn’t just about legal paperwork or history books. It’s about ending colonial crumbs and claiming our rightful seat at the table—not just to cut slices of the bread, but to now have a say in how the loaf is made, who must share in it, and what everyone’s portion should rightfully be.” —Devin Carrington, ACRRA VP & Legal Counsel

Conclusion:

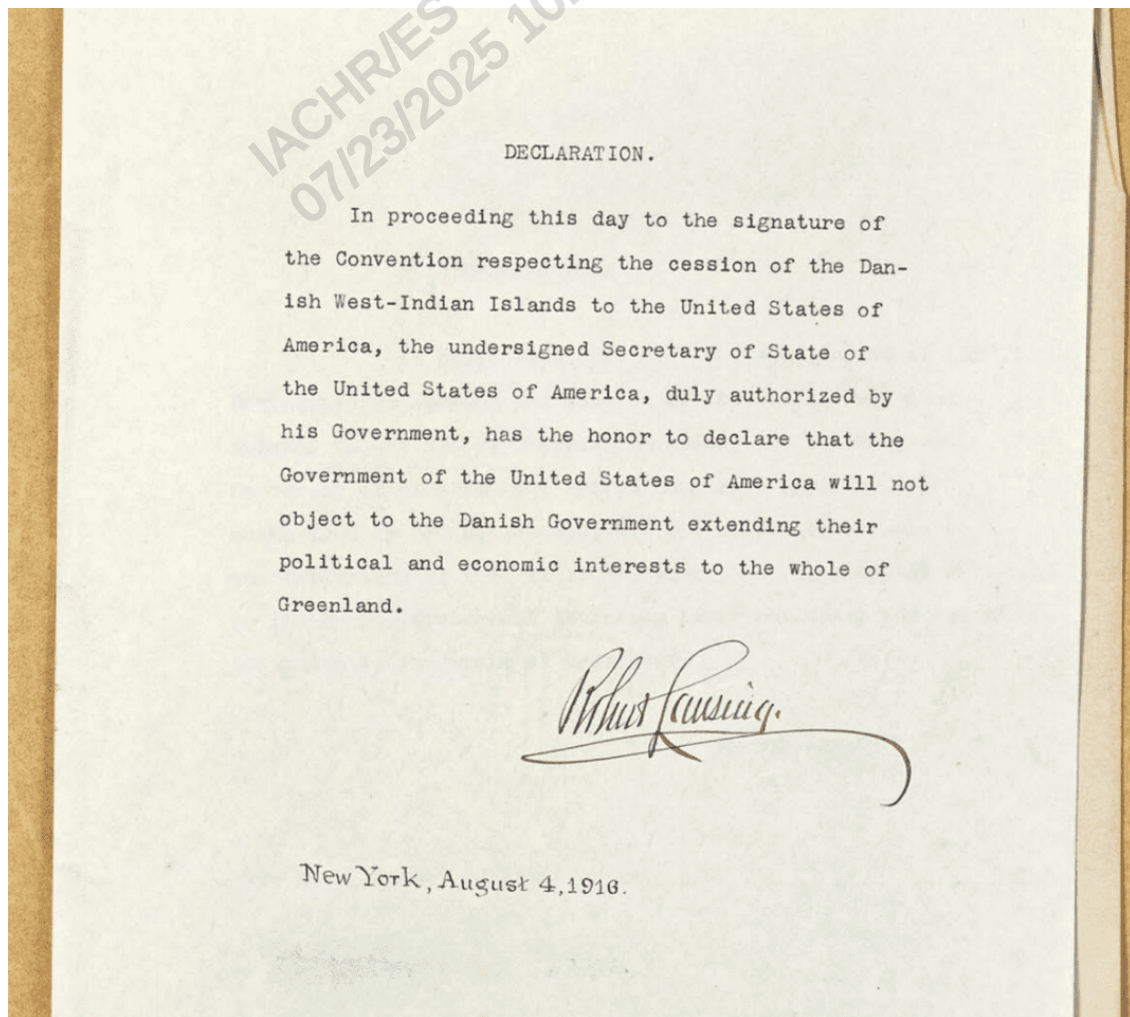
The ACRRA submission urges the PCA to confront the legal architecture that enables structural exclusion. It seeks not only recognition for the people of the USVI—but also a broader precedent for how non-sovereign and formerly colonized peoples can engage international legal bodies that have long refused them entry.

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Local news

Trump, Vance Violating Greenland-DWI Agreement, Virgin Islanders Say

March 30, 2025



Signed Aug. 4, 1916, the Lansing Declaration was a promise that the United States would not oppose Denmark's control of Greenland in exchange for control of what is now called the U.S. Virgin Islands. President Donald Trump appears poised to break the vow, St. Croix civil rights activists say. (Photo courtesy Danish National Archives)

The White House is violating a 109-year-old agreement to not interfere with Denmark's rule over Greenland, a vital precursor to the United States acquiring the Danish West Indies, St. Croix civil rights activists said Sunday. Violating the treaty could have real implications for the U.S. Virgin Islands.

President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance made numerous statements in recent months expressing interest in sovereignty over the rapidly-thawing, mineral-rich island. The U.S. leaders' statements crossed the line from bluster to overt intent Friday, according to memoranda filed with the [Permanent Court of Arbitration](#) in The Hague, Netherlands by Shelley Moorhead, president of the African-Caribbean Reparations and Resettlement Alliance.

Trump said from the White House: "We have to have Greenland. It's not a question of, 'Do you think we can do without it?' We can't."

Vance, visiting a U.S. military base in Greenland, criticized Denmark's care for Greenlandic people and pledged the United States would make a "Trump-style deal" for the world's largest island.

These statements were in direct violation of the historic Lansing Declaration, which paved the way for the [1916 treaty](#) that led to 1917's Transfer Day, Moorhead wrote to the international court.

"The treaty was a package. The logic that threatens Denmark's claim to Greenland now threatens America's rule in the Caribbean," Moorhead wrote to the court Sunday.

Secretary of State Robert Lansing's August 1916 declaration said the United States would not oppose Denmark's claim on Greenland in exchange for the Danish-controlled Antilles.

"In proceeding this day to the signature of the Convention respecting the cession of the Danish West-Indian Islands to the United States of America, the undersigned Secretary of State of the United States of America, duly authorized by his Government, has the honor to declare that the Government of the United States of America will not object to the Danish Government extending their political and economic interests to the whole of Greenland," Lansing wrote.

President Woodrow Wilson also sent Denmark \$25 million in gold to ensure the Danish West Indies did not fall into German hands during World War I.

Moorhead urged the international court to fully [recognize colonized Virgin Islands inhabitants](#) as a party to the agreement.

"The 1916 Treaty recognizes only Denmark and the United States as 'High Contracting Parties,' excluding the United States Virgin Islands (USVI) population — who remain directly affected by its terms and consequences — from any role in its interpretation or enforcement," Moorhead wrote to The Hague court. "Because the Lansing Declaration and the 1916 Treaty formed a single diplomatic framework, this breach calls into question the legal validity of U.S. sovereignty in the Virgin Islands, and further justifies the request for third-party standing and treaty review."

Moorhead had previously scoffed at the idea Denmark was in some way mistreating Greenland residents. Greenlandic people had full representation in Denmark's governance — something neither the United States nor Denmark ever offered residents of their Caribbean territories.

St. Croix historian and former executive director of the Virgin Islands Republican Party, Edward L. Browne, said he had long sought the help of people in Denmark to petition the international court for



recognition. He's also asked the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate to address concerns about the 1916 treaty.

He feared, however, that Trump and Vance were either unaware or disinterested in the treaty.

"His speech gave the impression that the U.S. is moving to vacate treaties and agreements with Denmark over Greenland," Browne said of Vance.

Browne said it appeared Trump was sincere in his pursuit of Greenland.

"I'm concerned. I don't want to see war," Browne said. "Then we have a bigger problem than we have now."

More than a legal footnote, full rights for colonized people were vital to a just world, said Devin Carrington, ACRRRA vice president and legal counsel.

"This isn't just about legal paperwork or history books. It's about ending colonial crumbs and claiming our rightful seat at the table—not just to cut slices of the bread, but to now have a say in how the loaf is made, who must share in it, and what everyone's portion should rightfully be," Carrington wrote in the memorandum to the court.

The letter to The Hague Court asked that it recognize non-sovereign and formerly colonized people as fully entitled to international legal bodies that have long refused them entry.

Both Danish and Greenlandic leaders have rebuffed Trump's and Vance's advances. It was not clear what Vance meant by a "Trump-style deal." Businesses controlled by Trump have [filed bankruptcy six times](#) from 1991 to 2009, according to the American Bankruptcy Institute.



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U.S. Violation of the 1916 Lansing Declaration

March 30, 2025

Supplemental Legal Memorandum: U.S. Violation of the 1916 Lansing Declaration

Purpose of this Memorandum:

To document a public treaty breach by the United States, which materially affects the validity of the 1916 Treaty of the Danish West Indies and strengthens the petition for third-party standing on behalf of the people of the Virgin Islands before the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA).

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On March 28, 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance made public statements declaring intent to acquire Greenland, directly undermining Denmark's sovereignty. These statements were made:

- At the White House, and
- During a U.S. military visit to Greenland's Pituffik Base.

They included:

- Trump: "We have to have Greenland."
- Vance: "Denmark has not done a good job for the people of Greenland."
- Vance: "We're going to cut a Trump-style deal."

Why It Matters:

These statements breach the 1916 Lansing Declaration, which states:

"The Government of the United States will not object to the Danish Government extending their political and economic interests to the whole of Greenland."

This declaration was part of the same diplomatic agreement that transferred the Virgin Islands to U.S. control.



Legal Impact:

- The Lansing Declaration and the 1916 Treaty formed a single diplomatic framework.
- A public breach of one clause (Greenland) undermines the legitimacy of the entire treaty, including the U.S. acquisition of the Virgin Islands.
- The exclusion of Virgin Islanders from that treaty—and their ongoing political disenfranchisement—now demands urgent international review.

Conclusion:

This is not speculation. The U.S. has publicly repudiated its treaty obligations, confirming the core argument of the PCA petition:

Virgin Islanders were never parties to the treaty that governs them, and that treaty has now been broken.

We ask the PCA to recognize third-party standing and move forward with legal and moral review of the 1916 Treaty and its consequences.

Supplemental Legal Memorandum

Re: United States Violation of the 1916 Lansing Declaration Through Official Conduct in Greenland

Date: March 30, 2025

Submitted by: Shelley Moorhead

Founder & President, African-Caribbean Reparations and Resettlement Alliance (ACRRA)

Former Minister of State for External Affairs, U.S. Virgin Islands

Former Secretary-General, Inter-Virgin Islands Council

Former Chairman, Standing Committee, Inter-Virgin Islands Council

I. Introduction

This supplemental memorandum is submitted in support of the original filing made before the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) requesting recognition of third-party standing for the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands under the 1916 Treaty of the Danish West Indies. It provides urgent documentation of a material treaty breach by the United States, which has occurred subsequent to the filing.

II. Background: The Lansing Declaration and the 1916 Treaty

On August 4, 1916, U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing issued a formal diplomatic note affirming the United States would not interfere in Danish sovereignty over Greenland. The language was unequivocal:

"The Government of the United States will not object to the Danish Government extending their political and economic interests to the whole of Greenland."



This commitment, known as the Lansing Declaration, was a precondition to the 1916 Treaty of the Danish West Indies—whereby Denmark transferred sovereignty over the Danish West Indies (now the U.S. Virgin Islands) to the United States. The two agreements formed a diplomatic package, linking recognition of Danish sovereignty in the Arctic with U.S. acquisition of territory in the Caribbean.

III. New Development: Public Breach by U.S. President and Vice President

On March 28, 2025, during a high-profile visit to Greenland, Vice President JD Vance—accompanied by National Security Advisor Mike Waltz—made multiple public statements directly repudiating Denmark's political and economic interests in Greenland.

Key statements include:

- "Denmark has not done a good job for the people of Greenland."
- "This is why Trump's policy is what it is."
- "We have to have Greenland." —President Donald Trump, March 28, 2025, White House press briefing
- "We're going to cut a Trump-style deal."
- "Greenlanders will choose the U.S. over Denmark."

These remarks were made at the U.S. Pituffik Space Base in northern Greenland, on foreign soil, and during an ongoing diplomatic dispute between the U.S. and Denmark over Arctic policy. The comments were broadcast globally, provoking immediate reaction from the Danish Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and members of the Greenlandic parliament.

IV. Legal Analysis: A Material Breach of the Lansing Declaration

The public and official nature of these statements constitutes a material breach of the Lansing Declaration. The United States, through its highest executive officials, has:

1. Publicly objected to Denmark's political leadership in Greenland;
2. Declared intent to pursue unilateral acquisition of Greenland;
3. Undermined the legal and diplomatic commitments made in 1916 in exchange for Denmark's transfer of the Virgin Islands.

This breach affects not only U.S.-Danish relations but the legal foundation of U.S. sovereignty in the Virgin Islands. As the Lansing Declaration and the 1916 Treaty formed a single diplomatic structure, repudiation of one element destabilizes the integrity of the whole.

V. Implications for Third-Party Standing and Treaty Review

The public breach reinforces the necessity of immediate procedural recognition of the people of the Virgin Islands before the PCA. It confirms:



- That the treaty continues to produce legal consequences today, despite excluding Virgin Islanders from the original agreement;
- That the United States no longer honors the original framework in its entirety;
- That Virgin Islanders are entitled to challenge the continued legal validity of their transfer and present political status under the doctrine of self-determination and post-colonial redress.

VI. Conclusion

This memorandum supplements the legal petition currently before the PCA and is submitted as part of the evidentiary record. The violation of the Lansing Declaration is not hypothetical—it has occurred. The time for recognition, review, and remedy is now.

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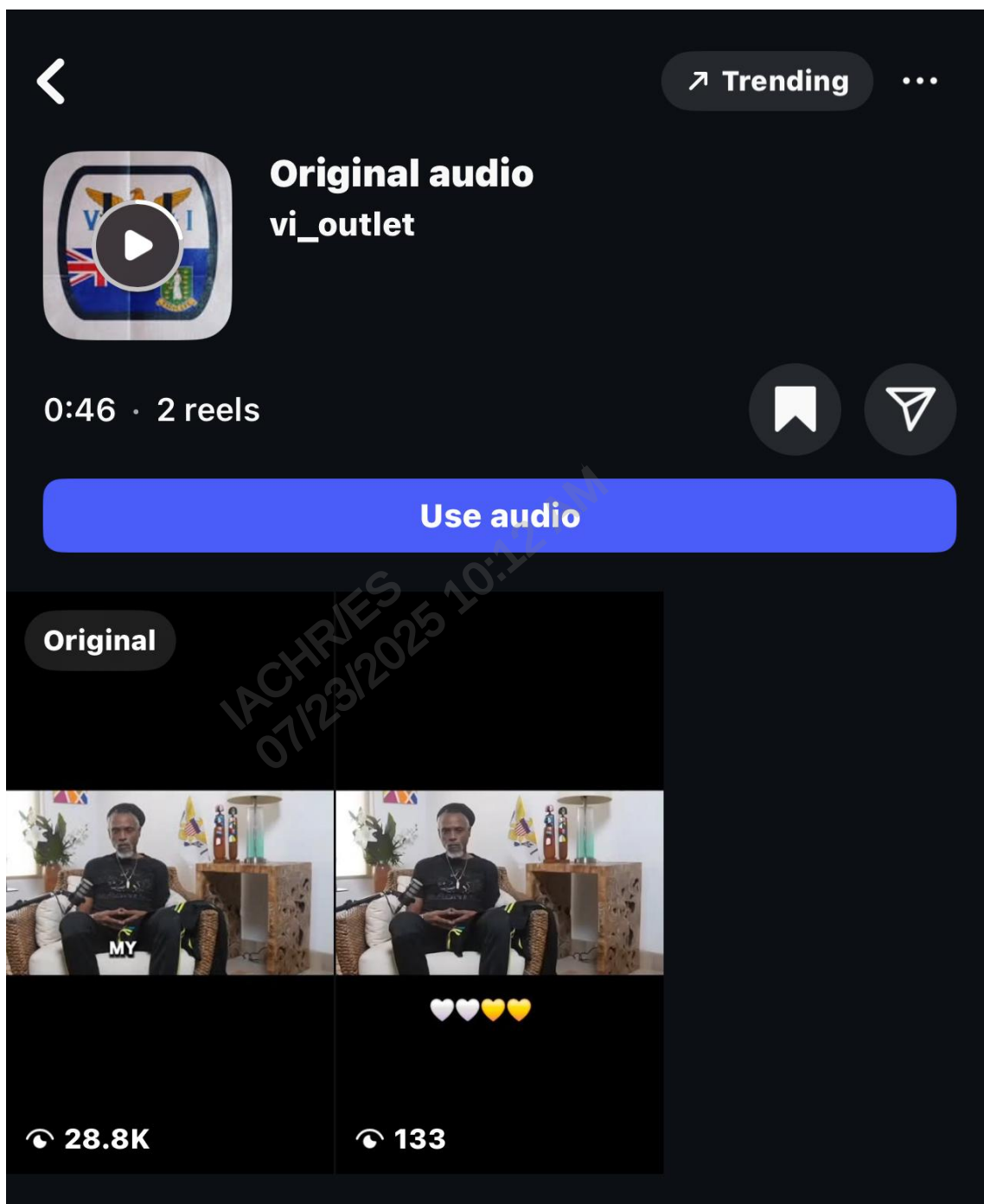
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March 31, 2025



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APRIL 12, 2025

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED, IN SOLIDARITY AND SERVICE OF MY
PEOPLE,

SHELLEY MOORHEAD

PRESIDENT, AFRICAN-CARIBBEAN REPARATIONS AND RESETTLEMENT
ALLIANCE

FORMER MINISTER OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, UNITED STATES
VIRGIN ISLANDS

FORMER SECRETARY-GENERAL, INTER-VIRGIN ISLANDS COUNCIL

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Mar 30 · 🌐



The White House is violating a 109-year-old agreement to not interfere with Denmark's rule over Greenland, a vital precursor to the United States acquiring the Danish West Indies, St. Croix civil rights activists said Sunday. Violating the treaty could have real implications for the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Click here:

<https://stthomassource.com/content/2025/03/30/trump-vance-violating-greenland-dwi-agreement-virgin-islanders-say/>

DECLARATION.

In proceeding this day to the signature of the Convention respecting the cession of the Danish West-Indian Islands to the United States of America, the undersigned Secretary of State of the United States of America, duly authorized by his Government, has the honor to declare that the Government of the United States of America will not object to the Danish Government extending their political and economic interests to the whole of Greenland.

New York, August 4, 1916.

LACK OF LEGAL REMEDIES FOR U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS RESIDENTS UNDER U.S. LAW

Submitted in support of ACRRA's request for precautionary measures before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

Date: April 12, 2025

Overview

Residents of the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) are legally and politically subordinated under a doctrine of U.S. territorial law that offers no enforceable path to full citizenship, political participation, or treaty enforcement. This document outlines the legal barriers that prevent Virgin Islanders from seeking redress or protection under domestic law, underscoring the necessity of international precautionary measures under Article 25 of the IACHR's Rules of Procedure.

1. No Standing to Enforce International Treaties

U.S. courts have consistently ruled that residents of unincorporated territories, including the USVI, lack standing to challenge federal policy or executive conduct related to international treaties. Courts defer to the political branches under the "political question doctrine," particularly in foreign affairs, making it impossible for affected





populations to contest treaty breaches (such as the March 28, 2025 violation of the Lansing Declaration).

See: Goldwater v. Carter, 444 U.S. 996 (1979) (plurality); *Sanchez-Espinoza v. Reagan*, 770 F.2d 202 (D.C. Cir. 1985)

2. Insular Cases Doctrine – Structural Exclusion

The U.S. Supreme Court’s “Insular Cases” (1901–1922) established the framework for “unincorporated territories,” where constitutional rights do not fully apply. This framework remains intact and has been repeatedly cited to deny the USVI full rights of citizenship and representation.

See: Downes v. Bidwell, 182 U.S. 244 (1901); *United States v. Verdugo-Urquidez*, 494 U.S. 259 (1990)

3. No Right to Vote for President or Senate Representation

Virgin Islanders:

- **Cannot vote for President**
- **Have no U.S. Senators**
- **Have only a non-voting Delegate to Congress**

This deprives them of meaningful access to the very political institutions responsible for the March 2025 treaty breach.





4. No Federal Human Rights Mechanism

The U.S. lacks a national human rights commission or administrative body capable of intervening in systemic, race-based or colonial-rights violations affecting territories.

Conclusion

Because Virgin Islanders are barred from treaty enforcement, excluded from equal political participation, and denied access to legal remedies in their own country, the precautionary measures requested by ACRRA are the only viable form of immediate protection. This submission affirms the absence of effective domestic remedy and the urgency of international intervention.

APRIL 12, 2025

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED, IN SOLIDARITY AND SERVICE OF MY
PEOPLE,

SHELLEY MOORHEAD

PRESIDENT, AFRICAN-CARIBBEAN REPARATIONS AND RESETTLEMENT
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