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## Statsminister Lars Løkke Rasmussens tale ved Transfer Day, St. Croix, den 31. marts 2017

Det talte ord gælder

Your excellency, Governor Mapp.  
Your excellency, Secretary Zinke.  
Your excellencies.  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is an honour for me to be here today. And a great pleasure to visit your beautiful island for the third time.

My wife and I have been greeted by sincere hospitality from the moment we arrived. For this, I am truly grateful. We are very pleased to be back.

On this exact day – a hundred years ago – the Stars and Stripes of America replaced the Danish Dannebrog as the official flag for the Virgin Islands.

A hundred years. It is a long time ago.

But the preceding years under the Danish flag are not forgotten. Neither in Denmark nor at the Virgin Islands.

Still today city names such as Frederiksted and Christiansted remind us of our common past. And so do the many houses and buildings, that still bear the marks of Danish presence.

I'm pleased, that thousands of my fellow countrymen visit your beautiful island every year – and this year in particular.

They feel a special bond of friendship with you and your home. So do I, as I stand here on this historic day. A touch of common destiny that time cannot erase.

But although we share a common past – we have not always shared the same story about that past.

When I was a child – the popular Danish story about the West Indies, was a romantic one. Exotic islands. Peaceful coexistence.

I even remember the tales of the Danish king, who was the first in the world to ban slave trade. A pioneer of humanity, we were told. A hero.

But most of you were told and lived a different story. The true story.

A story of how slavery continued after the ban. How too often conditions only improved on paper. And of how many of your ancestors continued to suffer.

The true heroes were the men and women who stood up to the injustice.

Over the years our history has been explored and questioned.

And today we can study the millions of historic documents and pictures from the Virgin Islands. They are now available online thanks to the

Danish National Archives. Many of them so precious, they have been proclaimed as world heritage by UNESCO.

Sure, it is important to get the facts right.

But I suggest we also look somewhere else: In our hearts and minds.

I suggest we ask ourselves: Is there any justification for suppression? Any argument for treating people brutally?

We all know the answer.

The answer is no!

There is no justification – what so ever – for the exploitation of men, women and children that took place in these islands under Danish flag.

There is no justification for slavery. It is unforgiveable.

Unforgiveable.

It is a dark and disgraceful part of Danish history.

So when I search my heart. My mind. There is no doubt: The true heroes of the past are the men and women of the Virgin Islands who defied suppression.

They were not given their freedom. They took it back. Led by brave souls. Who risked their own lives to set their fellow countrymen free.

Men like General Buddhoe.

Who led the rebellion of 1848. Riding on a white horse. Fighting for emancipation. Imprisoned. Deported. But at the end successful – fulfilling his mission.

Fierce women like Queen Mary, Queen Agnes and Queen Mathilda.

Who rebelled against the appalling living conditions, healthcare, education and wages. Imprisoned in Denmark, right next to the Danish parliament!

Patriots like David Hamilton Jackson.

A teacher and idealist. Who dedicated his life to improve the conditions for the people of St. Croix. By peaceful but passionate means.

The story goes, that when David Hamilton Jackson once criticized the Danish Governor in a harsh tone, the Governor replied by calling Jackson a dreamer.

This was probably meant as an insult – but isn't it rather a badge of honor?

Only when we dare to dream of a brighter future will the beacons of freedom be at sight.

This was the case for Mr. Hamilton Jackson. And that is the case for us all.

Dear friends.

We must acknowledge that what happened in the past has affected where the islands are today. We cannot undo the past. What we can do is to improve the future.

Only by freeing ourselves from the nightmares of the past can we make our dreams of the future come true.

This is the lesson from the true heroes of the past. Despite overwhelming obstacles, their ideals of liberty, equality and dignity prevailed.

Today, the people of Denmark and the people of the Virgin Islands share common historic bonds.

Today, we share the same view of history.

And today, we share the same heroes.

And hopefully, we shall also share a bright future.

Tomorrow, I will make a visit to the University of the Virgin Islands, where I will launch a five year scholarship program.

It is my hope, that this new program will pave the way for further development in both our countries. And bring new hope and opportunities to young people in the Virgin Islands.

The youth of our countries are the future. They must keep their dreams alive. Take destiny into their own hands.

Just as the heroes of the past did. And this time around, we will not hold them back. We will push them forward.

I wish you all a meaningful and memorable Transfer Day.

Thank you.