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**GOVERNOR MAPP PROCLAIMS MARCH 21st,
WORLD DOWN SYNDROME DAY**

(St. Croix, USVI, March 13, 2015) This year marks the 10th anniversary of World Down Syndrome Day and each year the voices of people with Down syndrome, those that nurture them, live and work with them grow louder. This year the focus is on *My Opportunities, My Choices' – Enjoying Full and Equal Rights and the Role of Families*. The Virgin Islands of the United States joins the United Nations and over 191 countries in celebrating and valuing the lives and equality of people with Down Syndrome. This is a day to celebrate those individuals who were born with an extra chromosome. It is a day to raise awareness of what life looks like for someone with Down Syndrome.

Virgin Islanders born with Down syndrome possess a wide range of abilities and are active participants in our community and deserve fundamental rights afforded to all. Persons with Down Syndrome are *Persons First*, who may require additional support, but should not be discriminated on the basis of their disability.

Specifically within the United States Virgin Islands, efforts are ongoing to ensure students living with Down Syndrome are included as part of the regularly scheduled school curriculum. In addition, the United States Virgin Islands Little League Baseball has similarly included those living with Down Syndrome as part of its league. With the purpose of bringing about increased consciousness of the occurrence of Down Syndrome within the Territory, there are several organizations within the Territory whose respective missions include. These missions include advocating for change in the manner in which children are diagnosed, further educating and assisting parents and caregivers of those living with special needs, including Down Syndrome, and enhancing the quality of life for individuals with disabilities and their families in order to provide them with tools necessary for a productive and inclusive community life.

The date of was chosen with a purpose. Down Syndrome is also known as Trisomy 21. Trisomy is 3 copies of the 21st chromosome, hence March 21, or 3-21. Down Syndrome is the most common chromosomal disorder, affecting between 3 and 4 million residents worldwide, including 400,000 residents in the United States. It occurs in approximately 1 in every 700 births. While the incidence of Down Syndrome increases with maternal age, 80% of children with Down Syndrome are born to women under the age of 35 due to the increased birth rate for this age group.

The incidence of Down Syndrome is not related to race, nationality or socio-economic status. It is important to spread awareness of the reality of this condition and thereby promote understanding and acceptance of those who live with it. It is also important to recognize recent revolutionary advances being made to empower individuals with Down Syndrome.

Kenneth E. Mapp, Governor of the United States Virgin Islands, by virtue of the authority vested in him by the Revised Organic Act of 1954, as amended, proclaimed March 21, 2015, as World Down Syndrome Day in the United States Virgin Islands and called upon the residents of the Virgin Islands to join him and the administration in observing this day by educating themselves about Down Syndrome, especially the importance of early identification and treatment of associated health problems in order to include those living with the disorder in educational, work and community life.

“To commemorate and celebrate the strides and developmental milestones that have been reached, I encourage all residents of the Territory to wear ***LOTS OF COLORFUL SOCKS*** on March 21, 2015 to raise awareness on World Down Syndrome Day in the United States Virgin Islands.” Stated Governor Mapp.

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