



Office of
the Prime Minister

REMARKS

BY

PRIME MINISTER HON. PHILIP E. DAVIS

QC, MP

GROUNDBREAKING FOR

ABACO AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROJECT

24 February 2022

Good morning.

It's been nearly two and a half years since

Hurricane Dorian made landfall on Abaco.

Surviving the storm required extraordinary

courage and fortitude, but when the winds and

rains and flooding ended, the challenges for

Abaconians were only beginning.

The years since have featured too much

uncertainty and suffering.

Big promises were plentiful from the start, but the things that mattered -- electricity, water, healthcare, jobs, and housing -- have been in short supply.

It's long past time to prioritise rebuilding the communities ravaged by Dorian.

In our Blueprint for Change, our administration committed to moving swiftly to provide housing solutions for the people of Abaco. Our commitment grew out of conversations with Abaconians who said housing was their most

urgent need – without enough permanent housing, it is harder for people to rebuild their lives, harder for people to return home, harder to recruit teachers, and harder to build a more robust economy.

I have seen for myself Abaconians working together under the most difficult and demanding conditions to salvage their lives, businesses, schools and neighbourhoods. Even when the walls had literally come down around you, you never gave up. “Abaco Strong” is

more than an expression or a social media hashtag; it's an apt description of your extraordinary strength and spirit.

The very least you deserve from your government is an effective and supportive partner. It's the government's job to facilitate rebuilding, guide recovery, and help you restore Abaco to a place of strength as a central pillar of the economy of the northern Bahamas.

To ensure that we can get work done swiftly, we are fixing the operational issues and

inefficiencies that have acted as obstacles and slowed progress.

During our assessment, we found that the affordable homes programme in the Central Pines Subdivision, which the previous Government introduced, had only partially built 5 of the 53 homes planned for that subdivision with the Disaster Reconstruction Authority at the helm.

It took two years to build fewer than 10% of the promised homes.

Many excuses were offered, but excuses can't put a roof over a family's head at night. Excuse can't protect our children from the elements.

We are moving the responsibility for those lots from the DRA to the Minister responsible for Housing. I am confident that we will see efficiency and progress under her leadership. Minister Coleby-Davis is a woman of action –

and that's what people here need and deserve:

action.

In addition to sharing your sense of urgency, we also share your desire to build a stronger Abaco than the one we lost. In this case, that means paying attention to the details that matter to homeowners and the wider community.

We discovered that not only were homes being built at a snail's pace, but plans had been redeveloped so that multiple homes would

occupy a single lot, and the materials did not live up to the quality and style of the neighbourhood.

There were understandable concerns that this approach would lead to a devaluation of homes and lots in the subdivision.

We could not allow this policy to continue.

Our partnership with local small contractors will lead to the building of 48 homes in this subdivision, consistent with the standards envisioned for this neighbourhood while also being offered at a relatively low cost. We will

create opportunities for local contractors through public-private partnerships while providing quality, affordable housing to dozens of families.

You see, we don't believe that just because the people of Abaco urgently need housing, we can build any old structures.

People deserve to live with dignity.

Short-sighted solutions based only on the need to "do something" are not really solutions at all.

Instead, we envision an Abaco whose best days are ahead, and today, we are here to break ground on that vision for the future.

I encourage all interested residents of Abaco to visit the Open House where teams from the Department of Housing, the Bahamas Mortgage Corporation, and private financial institutions are present to process your applications and pre-approve them on-site. We want to make this process as fast and straightforward as possible for all interested parties.

Accessibility is one of our main priorities. We won't be satisfied until everyone in Abaco who needs housing support can access the housing and home repairs they need.

Today's groundbreaking is an important step in the right direction, but it will only count if we come through for you on all the days that follow.

We are committed to swift progress, and what you see today is only part of our plan for the restoration and development of the Abacos., which also includes a renewal of the Small

Home Repairs programme; a new phase of debris removal; completion of the main shelter in Abaco; more solutions for those currently in temporary housing; and establishing a solution for much-needed rental units.

I understand how the lack of progress in the years since the hurricane has made many of you sceptical of the government's resolve to help. I'm determined to show you that Abaco's recovery – and Grand Bahama's as well -- are indeed national priorities, and I'm looking forward to showing residents of your islands

what a resolute and purposeful government can accomplish.

I know you will judge us not by what we say, but by what we do, and I wouldn't have it any other way!

Our impact will be the barometer for our success.

I have been thinking lately that the trials of the last few years have taught us something important: we are stronger than we know. With God's grace, we have survived the unthinkable. We see our children playing and learning, our

congregations and communities coming together, and we know hope. We know that Bahamians have a spirit that is stronger than any storm.

May God Bless You, And May God Bless The Bahamas.

END