



Office of
the Prime Minister

OPENING REMARKS

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PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF FINANCE

COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS

SUSTAINABLE GRAND BAHAMA VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

"DIVERSIFYING AND EXPANDING OUR ECONOMY"

DELPHINE ROOM, PELICAN BAY RESORT

7TH APRIL 2022

Ladies and Gentlemen Good Morning!

Congratulations on convening a conference, the theme of which goes right to the heart of the strategic challenges facing Grand Bahama.

We need bold, fearless thinking, and bold, fearless people to think it.

Whilst some of us might look back nostalgically on the glory days of the past, a sober and courageous plan for the future, has to go the fundamentals of what the people of Grand Bahama need:

An economy with sufficient long-term potential of growth to sustain future generations;

And an economy sufficiently diversified, which is able to create opportunities for our people from across all sections of the Grand Bahamian community.

While good ideas, great ideas, come from anywhere, it is from communities of thinkers such as this, that some of the greatest ideas have emerged.

And now, more than ever, we need your best ideas.

But know too, that it is in their application, that ideas gain force and become reality.

Ladies and gentlemen:

Do not under-estimate how the force of your ideas can inspire grassroot movements, drive popular culture, inform public policy and opinion, and transform nations.

And so much of the genesis of all of it lies in the animated discussions and heated debates which take place within communities such as this.

That said, I appreciate that the task is not easy.

From a political perspective, I am confident that the range of policy interventions we have proposed in our 'Blueprint For Change' will certainly make a positive difference to the lives of people of Grand Bahama.

But I know that these interventions are not the whole answer.

Beyond our own ideas and plans, there is still scope for additional ideas and plans, in order to fully achieve the potential of the vision of growth and diversification for Grand Bahama.

And friends, if we are serious about finding and defining solutions, we have to be unflinching at looking at and answering the hard questions.

Are the economic frameworks on the island still fit for purpose?

And within those frameworks, what is to be role of the Grand Bahama Port Authority?

Is there a role for the Grand Bahama Port Authority?

For an island which is clearly susceptible to annual hurricanes, what levels of resilience must be inherent in a Development Plan for Grand Bahama, to ensure that not only the natural and man-made structures can withstand them, but also the safety and security of our people can be secured?

And is there an ideal role for Grand Bahama to occupy in our archipelago?

Then there are the questions of how best to support the people of Grand Bahama.

How do we best support them to move forward from the trauma of the recent past, to live healthier, wealthier and better lives?

These are just some of the fundamental questions which I hope your discussion embraces today.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In recent months, my Administration has actively raised a number of issues surrounding climate change, both locally and internationally.

In my address to the General Assembly of the United Nations last September, I challenged any leader who believes that we still have plenty of time to address climate change to visit Grand Bahama and Abaco.

What these islands endured in 2019, and the after-effects which remain today, offer lessons for the whole world.

You are living with a reality which is fast-becoming the global future.

Today I also therefore challenge you to also face head-on, the question of how best to embrace ideas of sustainability within the context of national development?

This is a delicate balancing act, akin to walking a suspended tight rope.

The needs and demands of the three broad components of economic, environmental and social sustainability must all be satisfied.

So how best should we do it?

As discuss and deliberate and debate, I urge you to be mindful of the some of the painful lessons and memories of the past.

Though the short-term economic benefits were significant, some of the negative impacts of the large scale industrial operations of BORCO and Syntex, are still being experienced in communities like Hunters, and Lewis Yard.

Unfortunately some of the social, cultural and environmental drawbacks still persist today.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I can think of no better institution to lead this charge than the University of The Bahamas.

Full consideration of these issues are exactly the kind of platform upon which your legacy of scholarship should continue to be built.

We also need you to continue to produce, as you have done in the past, the kind of consequential leaders who will help to shape our national life in the future.

And this is ultimately where I hope your focus will remain today.

Firmly on the people of Grand Bahama: the individuals and families who anxiously await the arrival of something better.

How can we best expand and diversify this economy to improve the lives of our people?

With some of the best minds gathered here, I very much look forward to hearing and reading the results of your deliberations.

I pray God's blessings on your conference.

Thank you and good morning.

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