



Office of the
Prime Minister

**STATEMENT FROM
THE OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
CONCERNING THE
DEMOLITION OF THE DOMES IN ABACO**

Government is determined to help rebuild communities devastated by Hurricane Dorian

300 new affordable homes in Abaco within the next year

A major priority for the Government of The Bahamas is to rebuild communities devastated by Hurricane Dorian, and to provide relief to those individuals affected by the storm.

Until the change of administration last September, horrifyingly little had been done to provide permanent housing for those who had lost so much. This administration is determined to respond compassionately to those who need help.

The domes were designed to provide only temporary shelter, not long-term use. They were not designed for plumbing. The video accompanying this release shows the state of squalor to which the domes have been reduced.

Initially, the intention was to dismantle the domes in the hope that something might be salvaged. However, it was quickly determined that because the site is riddled with mold and conditions have deteriorated and are generally unsafe, a more assertive demolition process would be needed.

Additionally, some residents of the site are regularly engaging in activities which are illegal, and other activities which are not conducive to public health, or the public good.

The government has therefore worked carefully with each family, to move them out of the domes, and provided resources for a transition to more dignified housing.

Those who criticise these efforts must lack knowledge of the state of the domes site and the process that led to the beginning of the dismantling process yesterday.

It is astonishing, otherwise, that they would advocate for our fellow citizens to be left living in such squalid conditions.

The Leader of The Opposition surely does not believe that Bahamians should live permanently in this level of indignity; beset by his own internal political problems, he is using dome residents he never helped himself to score political points.

It is especially hypocritical and distasteful that those who effectively abandoned Abaconians when they were in government now pretend to care about their fate. The previous administration failed to build a single home during their time in office, for any Bahamian, anywhere.

Abaco desperately needs safe, affordable housing. We plan to build 300 new affordable homes in one year on that island alone. Where these domes stood, there will be new housing for Abaconians.

The unsafe, squalid and hazardous state of the dome site

Even the most cursory inspection revealed the dome site to be in a state of total squalor. The domes were not designed for long-term use. They were not designed to have plumbing inside. There was nothing to deal with moisture.

We understand that the initial plan was that the domes were only to be used as sleeping quarters. Another site was to be built for communal use of kitchen, showers and toilet facilities that would be shared by everyone.

That never happened.

So, through various methods, individuals installed small toilets and other water-based facilities.

Because domes are not manufactured to be used that way, a lot of moisture developed, causing the growth of a lot of dangerous mold.

Residents rightly complained loudly in the press and elsewhere about the mold.

Apart from the physical squalor, the site was being misused and abused in several ways by a number of residents.

There were cases where people were paying rent to the original recipients which was certainly unethical, if not illegal.

One dome was being used as a sex brothel, by a group of foreign nationals engaged in prostitution.

One was being used as an illegal bar.

Occupants complained that a lot of theft was taking place, with people going into domes and stealing personal items.

Many occupants reported not feeling safe.

There was lots of garbage and waste strewn around.

Derelict cars litter the site.

Because the domes were never designed to have toilets, the sewer system never functioned properly. When it rained, the hole where the waste lay would overflow with fecal matter.

This was and remains a hazardous, unsafe, and unhealthy environment for people to live in.

Furthermore, the government was extremely concerned about people being in those domes during hurricane season.

Support for the Dome Residents

The process to help dome residents transition to safer housing started in February 2022. Meetings were held with residents of the Dome Site to advise them of the plan to close the site, in order to make way for new housing.

A series of audits, meetings and interviews then continued over the following months.

In July, we announced that the Government, through the Department of Housing, was committed to commencing the construction of permanent homes in Abaco. We also announced Spring City had been selected as the location for the development of a new housing subdivision. In order to build the new homes, the existing Spring City Dome Community had to be closed.

Joint meetings and assessments were undertaken with the Ministry of Transport and Housing, the Ministry of Social Services, and the Disaster Reconstruction Authority in order to assist dome occupants.

The last week in July, the Disaster Reconstruction Authority, in collaboration with Ministry of Social Services, Ministry of Transport and Housing and the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, held individual meetings with dome occupants. In addition to receiving notice of the planned closure, they were offered help to transition out of the Spring City community.

To date most dome occupants have received assistance in the form of a \$4,000 cash stipend. Additional assistance beyond the stipend was rendered to each occupant that requested it. The assistance ranged from assessing damaged homes for upcoming repairs, connecting families to prospective landlords, assisting them with applications for new housing and expediting approvals. The team has even gone as far as assisting residents by transporting their belongings to their new accommodation.

We have kept at the forefront of this effort the wellbeing of the families affected.

We have treated them humanely and with the utmost dignity and compassion. Most of them can attest to these efforts.

Unfortunately, we also encountered a small handful of occupants who were reluctant to leave the domes. From the beginning, this small group of people made it clear that they were not going to co-operate, and not be a part of the process. They remain very vocal and continue to make demands for large amounts of money etc before they move.

We understand and share in the concerns from the public about the fact that the domes had to be demolished instead of disassembled individually and stored for future use. Unfortunately, the joint assessments conducted, concluded that the domes the previous administration erected in Spring City were not apt for relocation or future use due to their appalling state and deterioration. We cannot respond for the missteps of our predecessors and the funds wasted in this ill-fated dome project.

We stand firm in our commitment to rebuilding Abaco and Grand Bahama. We will soon announce detailed timelines for the Spring City subdivision development and opening.

Addressing the housing shortage for Bahamians will remain a priority for the Government as we rebuild our communities devastated by Dorian.

END

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