



Office of
the Prime Minister

**Remarks to The 2022 UN/BDB Inaugural SDG Partnership Forum'
Transformational Partnerships for a Sustainable Future'**

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THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS**

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Distinguished Guests...

Ladies and Gentlemen...

Good Afternoon.

Back in 2015, when The Bahamas joined other members of the United Nations in signing the 'Sustainable Development Goals Agenda', the underlying vision was to agree a "shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future".

The SDGs were specific, tangible expressions of what 'peace and prosperity' would look like in each signatory country around the world.

The range and breadth of those goals, admirably reflected in your agenda today, also demonstrate the scale of the task.

These are not easy things to achieve.

And even if we suppose that there is sufficient political will to do so, fulfilling the Goals will be challenging.

Since 2015, here in The Bahamas there has been progress towards fulfilling a number of the SDGs.

But there are goals that have remained stagnant or indeed have regressed.

I understand that, it is for this reason, the Resident Coordinator's Office has organised today's Forum.

By bringing together a number of interested parties, it is hoped that a number of multi-stakeholder partnerships will be developed, in

an effort to advance progress of the SDGs in

The Bahamas

I wholeheartedly support and endorse this initiative.

When I received my Instruments of Office as Prime Minister, and in the Speech From The Throne which followed, I committed my Administration to working in partnership with the Bahamian people.

This was not an empty promise.

Over the course of the past year, many of our achievements in office have only been possible because of that partnership.

That said, it is unfortunate that too many of the institutional arrangements of government, are designed for people to work in silos.

While that may encourage specialisation, and reinforce lines of internal accountability, it does not work well when working towards goals that span several ministries or government departments.

For example, when we articulate our wish to empower young people, we clearly don't expect that effort to be solely made by the Ministry of Youth.

Education, Housing, Transport, Finance, Immigration, Labour, National Security, for example, will all play key roles in helping to fulfil that Goal.

By formalising and structuring partnerships appropriately, especially when they include the private sector and the non-governmental

sector, we create a better foundation for success.

The irony is, of course, that the more organisations and people that become involved, the more likely it is that bureaucracies and cultures and personalities will get in the way.

This is not to condemn the challenges, merely to observe that this is what human structures are like.

So what else can we do in order to promote success?

A key tool, is to ensure that we are all absolutely clear as to what the Priorities are.

If we try to do everything all at once, or if we have differing ideas of what they are, then chaos and confusion is the more likely result.

To be clear, other SDGs are not being abandoned.

The Priorities are just that: an ordering of the things we currently consider most urgent and most important.

In the Office of The Prime Minister, we have set out the 8 Priorities which my administration wishes to focus on.

Firstly 'Health and National Health Insurance', with an emphasis on guaranteeing universal access to healthcare.

Secondly, 'Energy', with an emphasis on reducing the cost of energy and oil imports, and transitioning to renewable energies.

Thirdly, 'Education'. A specific focus is to empower Bahamians through mentoring and life-long training.

Fourthly, 'The Economy'.

At this point I should make clear that these Priorities are not in sequencing order.

So we are not going to deal with Health and Education before we turn our attention to the Economy.

They all sit together as National Priorities.

In respect of The Economy, we seek to grow and the economy, whilst reducing the tax burden on Bahamians.

Our Fifth Priority is to Empower The Youth of The Bahamas.

The Sixth is to greatly improve the Digitization of the country, and enhance the Ease of Doing Business.

Seventh, we seek to strengthen our mitigation, adaptation and recovery from the impact of climate change.

And finally Eighth, to develop the national infrastructure to make it more resilient.

I trust that these Priorities do not come as a shock to any of you.

And I invite you to consider how closely your current efforts align with these Priorities.

As I said at the beginning, progress has been made in some areas.

Many of them have benefitted from the efforts of sustained partnerships.

Take the economy.

A fundamental priority which needs to be addressed is the rescuing and strengthening of the economy.

Between 2018 – 2019, there was a serious contraction in the economy, in great part because of the shock rise in VAT, and

extremely rapid and high growth in government debt.

The impact of Hurricane Dorian in 2019, and the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, brought additional adverse impacts on an economy that was already struggling.

Since coming into office last year in 2021, through various partnerships we have begun to introduce economic reforms, stabilize the public finances, address fiscal responsibility and debt management issues, and refocus The Bahamas' Investment Authority.

We have also begun to revamp the tourism model, as well as enhance the ease of doing business.

Of particular significance is the comprehensive review of the taxation regime of The Bahamas. This follows on from the successful reduction of VAT to 10%.

These are all essential steps that the government believes are necessary to strengthen the economy.

Another area I wish to highlight is the environmental, social and economic challenges that arise from being both a Small Island Developing State, as well as an archipelago.

A very significant partnership was created when The Bahamas came together with other countries of a similar makeup to co-create the Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action Pathway.

You may know it as the SAMOA Pathway.

This framework recognizes that Small Island Developing States have specific challenges and vulnerabilities.

These vulnerabilities include the high cost of infrastructure, transportation and energy. More existentially, they include increased vulnerability to the negative impacts of climate change, limited economic resources, and dependence on external markets.

All of these vulnerabilities increase these nations' susceptibility to external shocks.

The SAMOA Pathway creates a partnership between these states to create strength in numbers, by declaring their common challenges, and coming together to find ways to turn their challenges into shared integrated solutions and opportunities.

In November, my government will continue to advocate and negotiate on a range of economic, technical and geo-political issues at COP27, the United Nation's Conference on Climate Change.

Just last month, The Bahamas took the lead on convening an inaugural meeting of Regional Heads of Government, to build consensus on regional negotiating positions in advance of COP27.

This effort sits alongside other initiatives to engage the young people throughout the Caribbean and other regional countries, to learn, discuss and garner momentum for youth advocacy on climate change and climate mitigation methods.

These partnerships amplify not only our voice, but our level of influence on how the big decisions are made.

This is what effective partnership can yield.

At the local level, the push to address issues surrounding climate change is just as strong.

There is a 'Climate Change and Carbon Markets Initiative Act' to aid in the global response to climate change and create initiatives to offset carbon emissions.

Officers under the Climate Change Advisory Unit are a part of the international UN Carbon

Credits Committee that supports the Alliance of Small Island States, Climate Change Carbon Markets Co-ordination and the Adaptation Committee.

Some of the effective partnerships we have brokered also extend to the energy sector.

The government has formed partnerships with both the International Development Bank, and the European Union, to enhance infrastructural development to advance renewable energy.

The project will allow for the construction of solar energy panels projects throughout The Bahamas.

This initiative is expected to benefit 13,000 to 17,000 residents.

Abaco should benefit especially.

The installation of micro-grids should vastly improve the island's electricity infrastructure, which is still severely weakened from the impact of Hurricane Dorian.

On the digitization front, there will soon be the official launch of the Digi-Innovative Projects

Programme overseen by the Digital Transformation Unit, the Small Business Development Centre, and the Bahamas Development Bank.

This initiative seeks to promote information and communication technology ideas that will improve innovation in the public sector.

The programme will encourage people around The Bahamas to present their ideas on technology and innovation.

Ordinary people will have the opportunity to contribute directly to the advancement of technology in government.

Prizes will be awarded to successful submissions.

The SDGs are heavily incorporated into the Bahamas' National Development Plan.

The document provides a roadmap for the country's development, by creating a comprehensive policy framework to guide government decision-making.

In my Lecture to the University of The Bahamas in July, as part of the Independence Celebrations, I set out the principles and values

under which my administration will implement the National Development Plan.

If you have not already done so, I encourage you all to read it, that it might deepen and strengthen your own approach to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Finally, I wish to highlight the Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

The government has signed onto the Framework, and is thrilled to see the

commencement of the implementation of this instrument in the upcoming months.

This Framework will operate as an Accelerator for SDGs to facilitate partnerships between the various sectors in government, civil society, local and international non-governmental organizations.

With this, and every initiative that each of you is working on, I thank you for all that you are doing, and wish you every success.

What you are doing has the powerful capacity to transform our country for the better.

We all thank you!

END