



Office of
the Prime Minister

REMARKS ON THE COMMEMORATION OF THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF HURRICANE DORIAN

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PRIME MINISTER & MINISTER OF FINANCE
OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS**

1ST SEPTEMBER 2022

Good morning, everyone.

For many of you, today, and the next few days, are likely to be especially difficult. Our hearts are very heavy still heavy.

This first week of September has become a sobering time in our nation's calendar.

While many people throughout The Bahamas were impacted one way or another, by the events of September 2019, it is you Abaconians and Grand Bahamians who are front and centre in our thoughts today.

One of the most difficult things about grief is feeling alone – feeling the world has moved on, while you are still mourning.

So it is very important to me to tell you that you are not alone. That we are with you. Bahamians across our country are right now praying with you, and for you, and for your loved ones.

It is a cruel irony that the origin of the name 'Dorian' signifies 'a gift'. Dorian was certainly a most unwelcome gift.

But it is not the name Dorian that matters.

It is YOUR names that we hold dear, the names of those of you who survived to tell the story of those terrible days.

And it is the names of those who were lost, or perished, that we hold in our hearts.

Each first name reminds us of that individual.

Their surname reminds us of their family, of who their people are.

And each act of remembrance hopefully brings some comfort, and some healing.

From the many conversations that I've had with you these past few years, I understand how difficult it can be to move forward, especially for those who are left without certainty about what happened to family and friends.

Not knowing makes it so much harder to move on, harder to rebuild our homes, our businesses. and our lives.

Without closure, good mental health is hard to regain.

During the past year, we have made strenuous efforts to give an account for each person, to say what happened to every individual.

But the task has been made near-impossible.

Since 2019, the record-keeping has been extremely poor.

We do not know for certain, the names of those who are in those mass graves.

We do not know for certain the fate of those we have not seen since the storm.

We do not know for certain how all the donations and pledges have been used.

What we do know is that you deserve better.

Since coming into office last year, we have done the best we can to ensure that the national response is driven by compassion. But there is still so much more to do.

In the Old Testament, whenever we are told that 'God remembered', we are then told of the action which followed.

God remembered Noah, then made the water recede.

God remembered Rachel, and gave her wish for a child.

And when the Hebrew people cried out to be rescued from slavery, we are told that 'God remembered' his covenant with their ancestors, and then delivered them.

And so the lesson for all of us, especially those of Christian faith, is that 'remembering' requires more than recollection.

We must not only bring someone to mind, but we must then act on that person's behalf.

So today, as we remember, we are also mindful of the need to act.

And there is still much to do.

We need to support you in getting closure for your loss, and at the same time do far more to help you to rebuild.

We have changed the law, in relation to the presumption of death, to facilitate quicker settlement of insurance, banking and other commercial claims.

We have completed the Technical Phase of the new Abaco Hurricane Shelter.

We have helped people begin to move out of the domes, to cleaner, safer homes.

It has not been easy, or perfect, but it is an important step in moving forward.

Where the domes stand now, there will soon be new housing, which is so badly needed.

We have just launched a revamped 'Homeowner Assistance and Relief Programme', to provide real, urgent help to people, and do away with the chaos, confusion and unnecessary bureaucracy which came before.

I want to say to you today that if you think progress has not unfolded quickly enough, I agree.

I could detail the budgetary and bureaucratic obstacles we faced over the last year, but these kinds of explanations are of no use to you – you need action.

And I am glad to say, that with the changes we've put in place, you will be able to see, touch and feel the results very soon, especially in the housing programme.

For far too many of you, this is still so desperately needed.

We are going to do our best to help bring relief and comfort in rebuilding your communities.

Today, my friends, as part of this act of remembrance, and as an act of respect, I have ordered that all national flags be flown at half-mast.

What you experienced in Abaco and Grand Bahama, changed the Story of The Bahamas. I have shared your stories with leaders around the world.

It's important to me that they know the true cost of climate change.

Carbon emissions from burning fossil fuels made many big countries very wealthy, but they also made hurricanes more frequent and more intense.

Those same countries need to live up to their pledges to countries like ours – we who have contributed almost nothing to this crisis – so that we can adapt and become more resilient.

Just last month, we hosted regional leaders, so that the small island nations who are on the frontlines of climate change, can speak with a stronger, more unified voice.

Thank you, for allowing me to tell the story of what happened here.

At the same time, I know that the full story, your story, our story, cannot finally be told until we can say all the names.

At the very least, we must do the best that we can, that we might be able to begin a new chapter.

Each person lost in the storm, was made in God's image.

Each life was special, is special, and part of God's Purpose and Plan.

She was my mother.

Let me say her name.

He was my son.

Let me say his name.

And let us forever tell the story: that once there came a great storm named Dorian...

That we still do not know exactly how many lives were lost...

But my sister, my brother, my cousin, my uncle, my child...

They all perished.

Here are their names.

Let me say their name!

And we will remember them, each one.

And in doing so, we commit to act positively in their memory.

Shakespeare advises us to "give sorrow words".

And so each year on this day, we continue to speak, that the pain might be made easier.

The Apostle Luke encourages us to "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven!"

And even as we do so, we remember.

On behalf of the Government and People of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas, I offer you this blessing.

May the Lord bless you and keep you,

May the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious unto you,

May the Lord turn his face toward you,

And give you peace.

Amen, and amen, and amen!

END