



Government of the
Commonwealth of The Bahamas

National Policy Framework:

Immigration

February 2023

Introduction

The Government of The Bahamas is implementing a National Policy Framework on Immigration to address various challenges related to migration, border control, and international cooperation. The framework is based on three main pillars: **enforcement of laws, protecting our borders, and international cooperation.**

The first pillar of the policy framework emphasizes the importance of enforcing immigration laws in unregulated and unlawful communities. Anchoring the framework is **Operation Secure**, a joint security operation between the Royal Bahamas Police Force and the Department of Immigration to address security and migration-related issues in these areas. The operation aims to identify irregular migrants, documented migrants, and Bahamians living in these communities and address their status. This will help reduce the risk of exploitation of migrants and ensure compliance with immigration regulations.

The second pillar focuses on protecting the country's borders. The framework highlights the decentralization of the Royal Bahamas Defence Force to increase the presence of defence forces in the Southern Bahamas, which is considered an area of strategic importance. The framework also emphasizes the need to enhance cooperation and intelligence sharing with international partners, increase border protection operations, and recruit additional Royal Bahamas Defence Force officers. These measures will help prevent illegal migration and human trafficking and enhance the security of the borders.

The third pillar of the framework emphasizes the importance of international cooperation. The Bahamian government has established cooperation agreements and mechanisms with international partners to address regional security and economic stability issues. The government is advocating for lifting the U.S. economic embargo on Cuba and collaborating with CARICOM to improve economic and political stability in Haiti. The framework also recognizes the need for collaboration with non-governmental organizations to support Operation Secure and enhance public safety and combat crime.

In conclusion, the National Policy Framework on Immigration presents a comprehensive approach to address migration-related challenges in The Bahamas. The framework emphasizes the importance of enforcing immigration laws, protecting the country's borders, and promoting international cooperation. These measures will help create a safer and more stable environment for all residents of The Bahamas, and ensure

compliance with immigration regulations, prevent illegal migration, and improve regional security and economic stability.

ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS

- i. **The Objective of Operation Secure:** Operation Secure is a joint security operation between the Royal Bahamas Police Force and the Department of Immigration to address security and migration-related issues in unregulated and unlawful communities. The operation is focused on identifying irregular migrants, documented migrants, and Bahamians living in these communities and addressing their status in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.
- ii. **Handling of Irregular Migrants:** Irregular migrants living in unregulated and unlawful communities will be detained and charged before the courts. If found guilty, they will be subject to deportation from the country. This is aimed at addressing the issue of irregular migration and reducing the risk of exploitation of migrants.
- iii. **Handling of Documented Migrants:** Documented migrants living in unregulated and unlawful communities who breach their work permits will be required to relocate at their employer's expense or face having their work permit revoked and deportation. This aims to ensure that all migrants comply with immigration regulations and are not participating in illegal or unregulated activities.
- iv. **Handling of Bahamians:** Bahamians living in unregulated and unlawful communities will be required to relocate, and special assistance may be provided through the Department of Social Services, if needed. This aims to address the issue of unregulated communities and ensure that all Bahamians have access to essential services and alternative living accommodations.
- v. **Consequences for those leasing or occupying government-owned Crown Land:** Individuals or entities leasing or occupying government-owned Crown land and providing unlawful accommodation will be subject to criminal liability and having their government-issued permission to occupy revoked. This aims to ensure that all occupants of government-owned land comply with laws and regulations.
- vi. **Additional Immigration Officers:** The Department of Immigration will recruit additional immigration officers to support Operation Secure and ensure that the operation is carried out effectively and efficiently.
- vii. **Construction of a Detention Centre:** A detention centre will be constructed

in Inagua to accommodate those detained, ensuring that migrants and other individuals are held in appropriate and safe facilities and eliminating the need for persons to be transported to New Providence for processing.

- viii. **Vacation of Interim Court Injunction:** The government will seek to vacate the interim court injunction on unregulated and unlawful communities, enabling a demolition order to vacate and demolish illegal structures. This is aimed at addressing the issue of unregulated communities and ensuring that all residents comply with laws and regulations.
- ix. **Tackling Organised Crime:** Operation Secure will involve multiple law enforcement agencies and international action to tackle organised human smuggling crime rings. This will be done through more robust intelligence-sharing, aimed at disrupting the activities of criminal organisations.
- x. **Targeted Focus:** Operation Secure will focus on employers illegally employing cheap labour, landowners providing illegal housing, organised criminals, and other human traffickers. The objective of this focus is to identify and protect those who are most vulnerable to exploitation and to address the root causes of migration-related issues. The ultimate goal of Operation Secure is to create a safer and more stable environment for all country residents.

PROTECTING OUR BORDERS

- i. **Decentralisation of the Royal Bahamas Defence Operation:** This refers to the decentralisation of The Royal Bahamas Defence Force, moving away from a centralised command structure to a more distributed one. This will increase the presence of the defence forces in the southern Bahamas, which is considered an area of strategic importance. The decentralisation will allow a more flexible and effective response to security threats and improve patrol delivery to local communities.
- ii. **The further expansion of The Royal Bahamas Defence Force Fleet:** The Royal Bahamas Defence Force (RBDF) has initiated the Sandy Bottom Project, which involves the construction of new vessels to expand the RBDF fleet. The further expansion of the fleet will enhance the capabilities of the RBDF in carrying out its mandate to secure the territorial waters and borders of The Bahamas. This will improve the RBDF's ability to respond to security threats and enforce maritime laws, thereby safeguarding the country's vital interests in maritime security.

- iii. **Enhance cooperation and Intelligence Sharing:** The Bahamian government seeks to enhance cooperation and intelligence sharing with the United States, Cuba, Haiti, and the Turks and Caicos. This will involve exchanging information and best practices in border security, counter-terrorism, and maritime surveillance areas. In addition, the enhanced cooperation and intelligence sharing will help improve the region's security situation and strengthen the ability of the RBDF to respond to threats.

- iv. **Increased border Protection Operations:** The Bahamian government is increasing border protection operations with the United States, Cuba, Haiti, and the Turks and Caicos in response to the increased migration from these countries. The objective of these operations is to prevent illegal migration and human trafficking, as well as to enhance the security of the borders. The increased border protection operations will involve deploying additional personnel and resources and implementing new technologies and procedures to improve the effectiveness of border security.

- v. **Additional recruitment of Royal Bahamas Defence Force Officers:** The Bahamian government will recruit additional officers to the RBDF to increase its capacity to carry out its mandate. The additional personnel will enhance the capabilities of the RBDF in areas such as border security, maritime surveillance, and disaster response. In addition, recruiting new officers will also help ensure that the RBDF is adequately staffed and equipped to meet the challenges of an ever-changing security environment.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

- i. **Cooperation agreements and mechanisms for regional security and economic stability:** The Bahamian government has established cooperation agreements and mechanisms with several international partners to address regional security and economic stability issues. These agreements include those with the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Cuba, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and the United Nations. These agreements aim to enhance cooperation and coordination among partners on critical issues such as counter-terrorism, maritime security, disaster response, and economic development. The mechanisms established under these agreements are designed to facilitate the exchange of information and best practices and coordinate efforts to address regional security and stability challenges.

- ii. **Advocating for lifting the U.S. economic embargo on Cuba:** The Government is advocating for the United States to lift the economic embargo on Cuba. This embargo has been in place for several decades and has been criticised for having a negative impact on the Cuban economy and the well-being of its people. The Bahamian government believes that lifting the embargo would help promote economic and political stability in Cuba and improve regional security by fostering closer ties between Cuba and the rest of the region.

- iii. **Collaboration with CARICOM to improve economic and political stability in Haiti:** The Bahamian government is collaborating with CARICOM to advance a Haitian-led solution to enhance economic and political stability in Haiti. This collaboration aims to support the efforts of the Haitian government and people to address the complex challenges facing the country, including poverty, unemployment, and political instability. The Bahamian government is working with CARICOM to provide assistance and resources to help Haiti build a more stable and prosperous future.

- iv. **Inviting regional or international missions from NGOs:** The Bahamian government is asking regional or international missions from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to support Operation Secure, a security

initiative to enhance public safety and combat crime and inviting these missions to demonstrate transparency and allow for independent observation of the operation. The presence of NGOs will assure the public and the international community that Operation Secure is being carried out in a responsible and accountable manner. This will help to build confidence in the security forces, support their efforts to maintain law and order, and protect the people's safety and security.

