



The Bahamas

Statement by

**The Honourable Frankie Alfred Campbell, M.P.
Minister of Social Services and Urban Development**

on the occasion of the

71st Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

**Presenting the
Sixth periodic State Report of The Bahamas under the Convention on the
Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**

**25 October, 2018
Geneva, Switzerland**

Please check against delivery

Madam Chair,

Distinguished Members of the CEDAW Committee,

Representatives of civil society,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, I offer my gratitude for the opportunity to present to you, today, the celebrated achievements, challenges, and commitments we have undertaken toward the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). These efforts have been ongoing since The Bahamas last appeared before this Committee in July 2012.

Madam Chair,

Allow me now to introduce the **delegation of The Bahamas**: Mr. Frank Davis, Chargé d'affaires/Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of The Bahamas here in Geneva; Dr. Jacinta Higgs, Director, and Miss Melvelyn Symonette, First Assistant Secretary, both of the Department of Gender and Family Affairs; Ms. Jewel Major, Chief Counsel, and Miss Alicia Gibson, Assistant Counsel, both of the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs; Ms. Sherry Armbrister, Senior Nursing Officer, Ministry of Health; Ms. Sharmaine Sinclair, Assistant Director, Ministry of Education; Ms. Sasha Dixon, Second Secretary, Permanent Mission of The Bahamas in Geneva and Mr. Celsus Williams Assistant Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

We are very pleased that Mrs. Kathryn Campbell, Senior Information Officer, Bahamas Information Services, Ms. Virginia Hall-Campbell, and Miss Dwina Higgs, Project Manager, have also joined us. I thank my fellow delegates and the extended set of diverse representatives from all the government departments and civil society who made presentations and contributions toward the preparation of our sixth Periodic Report, the responses to the list of issues and today's review.

Additionally Madam Chair,

Distinguished Committee,

I am especially pleased to have witnessed the presence and presentations of Erin Greene, Noelle Nicolls and Alicia Wallace who represented various civil society organisations from The Bahamas. Their contributions and recommendations were well received, as during the past 90 days we have endeavoured to strengthen our partnerships with Civil Society Bahamas.

Finally, it is with esteemed honour that we congratulate, salute and acknowledge **Ms. Marion Bethel**, expert member of this honourable CEDAW Committee. Ms. Bethel is a well-respected Bahamian and we revere her passion and high expectations for the mandates of CEDAW which have been a source of motivation for us to do our best, in fulfilling the obligations of The Commonwealth of the Bahamas in the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

Madam Chair,

In 1999, American astronaut Scott Kelly told the world that, "the most beautiful view from space is

the aquamarine waters of The Bahamas.” We celebrate this powerful endorsement of the natural beauty of our islands and, as a government, we are quite aware that when the telescope is zoomed closer on our vast archipelagic paradise, the task of governance is equally one of enormity. We have seven hundred islands and cays, 100,000 square miles of sea, 5,300 square miles of land, 380,000 people, 5 hospitals, 61 clinics, 169 schools, 42 airports, and 1,650 registered ships comprising one of the largest shipping registries in the world.

The priorities of promoting and protecting the economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights of Bahamians and visitors within this archipelago, with equality and equity, continue to be a challenge for successive administrations. Moreover, these compounding challenges are exacerbated by the economic and financial crisis, unemployment, crime, increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters, namely hurricanes, resulting from climate change, the cost of accessing remote islands, known to you as rural areas and to us as Family Islands; undocumented migration, and the challenge of protecting our porous borders. Nevertheless, the desire to overcome these challenges and achieve sustainable development for our people is the main impetus that drives the collective force of our government. We have not wearied even in the face of significant hurdles. Indeed our momentum is increasing. I therefore reaffirm that the commitment of the Government of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas toward this important objective, is as steadfast and unwavering as ever.

As a clear demonstration, The Bahamas sought election to the Human Rights Council and was successfully elected for the term 2019 to 2021. As a result, The Bahamas will be the first Commonwealth Caribbean Country to serve on the Council. We have already pledged, as a member of the Council, to contribute to the advancements of women's rights, at the national and international levels.

The achievement of the sustainable development agenda is inextricably linked to the promotion and protection of human rights. As the Minister of Social Services and Urban Development, with responsibility for the Department of Gender and Family Affairs, I am fully committed to the further advancement and protection of the rights of women. I am the father of three daughters and my desire for their economic, political and social empowerment is as noble as that of all good fathers.

My aspiration is to increase every effort to achieve the full implementation of the Convention as well as the recommendations, as set out by the Committee, toward the promotion and protection of the rights of women and girls, in and of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

Madam Chair,

The goals, mandates and articles our country signed onto in 1993 are honorable and just. I must note that the process toward the elimination of discrimination against women, is a journey and not a destination. The Bahamas celebrates only 45 years as an independent nation and whilst our collective hope and political will for national equality and equity of resources as well as opportunities

for all Bahamians, are pure, the democratic process required to do so is sometimes slow. It is often said that, “Rome was not built in one day” and so our skills of strategic wisdom will be critical as our people embrace the constructive dialogue of national gender equality. We will continue to educate and, one day, we will be able to lift the reservation from Articles 2(a) and 9 (2).

The Government of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas held two Constitutional Referenda, in 2002 and in 2016, in an effort to amend fundamental rights and provisions for women. Despite an aggressive, multi-stakeholder public awareness campaign, and many town hall meetings, Bahamians overwhelmingly voted no. Fifty-three (53) per cent of the persons eligible to vote were women. Whilst the votes and voices of the people rang astoundingly clear, in the absence of a Constitutional right, the Government of The Bahamas is drafting an amendment to The Bahamas Nationality Act, with the goal of promoting gender equality. It will provide a mechanism for all minor children of Bahamian males and females, born anywhere in the world and regardless of their marital status, to be granted Bahamian nationality upon application. This applies to the extent that the same does not derogate from the existing Constitutional provisions.

Madam Chair,

We are pleased to inform the Committee of **additional legislation** that has been enacted which ensures the protection of females, including:

1. The Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2014; and

2. The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act 2014

Additional international agreements ratified during the reporting period include:

1. Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (Ratification: 28 September 2015)
2. Optional Protocol to the Convention on the rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (Ratification: 28 September 2015)
3. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Ratification Date: 28 September 2015)

and the

4. Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or punishment (Ratification: 31 May 2018)

Madam Chair,

As evidence of the enabling environment that has been created for the empowerment of women in The Bahamas, I wish to share several of the notable achievements of Bahamian women in public

life.

- Bahamasair, the national airline of The Bahamas, promoted for the first time, three women to the post of captain making aviation history.
- The Bahamas Development Bank (BDB) appointed the first female Managing Director.
- Glenys Hanna-Martin served as regional chair of the Caribbean Americas and Atlantic Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. She is also the first woman to run for leader of the Progressive Liberal Party.
- Loretta Butler Turner was the first female leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition and first woman to run for leader of the Free National Movement.
- The Hon. Lanisha T. Rolle, serves as regional chair of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians and was the first woman Minister of Sports.
- Katherine Forbes-Smith was the first female President of the Senate appointed from a Family Island.

- Shonel Ferguson serves as the Whip for the House of Assembly.

- Marion Bethel became the 11th CARICOM Triennial Award Winner, in the category of gender development. She is also the first Bahamian female elected expert to serve on the CEDAW Committee.

- Betty Roberts is the recipient of the Bahamas Financial Services Board's Lifetime Achievement Award.

- Natasha Walton Woman Sub-Lieutenant of The Royal Bahamas Defence Force is the first female officer to have led a platoon in the Changing of the Guard at Government House.

- Corporal 2713 Desiree Bodie is a female captain and ground instructor of flight in the Aviation Air wing in the Royal Bahamas Police Force. She is also an active member of Women in Aviation International.

- Rev. Dr. Eileen Johnson is the first female Chaplain of the Senate and Rev. Angela Palacios is the first female chaplain of the House of Assembly.

Women have also occupied positions including Justices of the Supreme Court, Speaker of the House of the Assembly, President of the Court of Appeal, Attorney General, Deputy Prime Minister, Chief Justice and Governor General.

Madam Chair,

I can go on and on, singing the powerful accomplishments of Bahamian women.

We have also achieved major strides to strengthen **our National Machinery for the Advancement of Women.**

In keeping with our commitment, The Government of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas has expanded the Bureau of Women's Affairs, into the Department of Gender and Family Affairs (DGFA) to promote the rights of women in The Bahamas. This includes a budgetary allocation increase of 250%. The Department has a number of specific objectives including:

- implementing the Strategic plan to improve gender equality in The Bahamas;

- implementing initiatives from the National Strategic Plan for Ending Gender-Based Violence in The Bahamas;

- strengthening relationships with NGOS in our monthly meetings;
- updating the National Gender Equality Policy, which will soon be submitted to Cabinet;

and

- coordinating events to commemorate international and national women's observances and also to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in The Bahamas.

The Department has also undertaken a number of initiatives including:

- conducting school and community awareness raising seminars about CEDAW, throughout the islands of The Bahamas;
- collaborating with the National Women's Advisory Council to host an education forum on CEDAW for Government, Civil Society organizations and the media;
- launching a National Gender-Based Violence Awareness Campaign with presentations on Sexual Harassment to high school students;
- conducting a Family Islands Women Survey to assess the needs and challenges of women and girls in our Family Islands;

- partnering with the Cat Island Farmers' Association to provide water tanks and generators to 8 Family Islands women farmers;

and

- forging financial partnerships with a number of civil society organizations including
 - i. Bahamas Girl Guides Association on New Providence and Bahamas Girl Guides Association on Family Islands
 - ii. Zonta Clubs
 - iii. Pilot Clubs
 - iv. Families of all Murdered Victims (FOAM)
 - v. Governor General's Youth Award (GGYA)
 - vi. STRAW
 - vii. Civil Society Bahamas
 - viii. Teen Life Skills
 - ix. Bahamas Against Crime
 - x. Save Our Daughters
 - xi. Reclaiming our Boys
 - xii. Bahamas Crisis Centre
 - xiii. Girl Con (Grand Bahama)

Additionally:

- we have sponsored the South Andros Jam Preservative Production, and Acklins and Crooked Island Straw Plaiting Project for women and girls.

and

- facilitated fifteen (15) training sessions in New Providence and the Family Islands which promoted Women in Political Leadership. These were held in partnership with the University of The Bahamas and the Caribbean Institute of Women in Leadership

Madam Chair,

The Bahamas will also strive to eliminate cultural and traditional practices that perpetuate discrimination and gender stereotyping of women by:

- educating students about the many gender stereotypes through the Ministry of Education's Health and Family Life Education Curriculum;
- reducing the stereotypes of the roles of husbands and wives through public education and the media;

- utilizing the Domestic Violence and Counselling Unit of the Ministry of Social Services to help victims of violence and their children through direct intervention and services;
 - reducing the spread of sexually transmitted diseases through the HIV/AIDS Secretariat by conducting condom social marketing. This Prevention Programme targets vulnerable groups including female sex workers;
 - continuing ongoing Trafficking In Persons trainings for new recruits on the police and Defense Forces, Immigration Officers, Education, Health and Social Services Officers. During the past four years The Bahamas was ranked as a tier one country in a United States' Trafficking in Persons report. This rank is seen as an acknowledgement of the effectiveness of our Anti Trafficking Efforts.
 - Partnering with UN Women to participate in a government and community Action for Ending Violence against Women Project;
- and
- attending National and International workshops and training for the advancement of the department.

The first national Mock CEDAW event was also held in partnership with the University of The Bahamas in September 2018.

Madam Chair,

The Bahamas continues to forge financial partnerships with non-governmental and religious organizations to facilitate their work in support of victims of violence through shelters and counselling services. Some of the recipients of these grants include: The Crisis Centre, The Links Safe House, The Salvation Army, Great Commission Ministries and The Bahamas African Methodist Episcopal Conference.

We continue to partner with the Royal Bahamas Police Force to provide training of police officers who help victims of gender-based violence. More than eighty (80) officers plus Urban Renewal Staff, completed training titled "*Educating Men and Women to Stop Domestic Violence*". This was sponsored by the Pan American Development Fund and others.

Madam Chair,

We will work to increase women participation in political and public leadership. Meanwhile the current data reveal:

In the Judiciary, 68% of the positions of Justices, Registrars and Magistrates are women

In Politics, 5% of Cabinet Ministers, 12% of parliamentarians and 43% of Senators are women

In the Public Service, women represent 78% of our Directors, Women hold 57% representation

in Local Government; 31% of our local Family Island Administrators and 9% of our Chief Councillors are women. Moreover, 65% of our Permanent Secretaries are women, and the Secretary to the Cabinet is a woman

In Education: 64% of the professors at the University of The Bahamas are female; and 65% of our school principals are women

In Health: 45% of our physicians and 75% of our Hospital Administrators are women

In Trade Unions: 53% of the presidents of the National Congress of Trade Unions are women

In Law Enforcement Agencies: 23% of Police officers, including an Assistant Commissioner, 22% of Defence Force officers, 4% of Prison officers and 50% of Immigration Officers are women

According to The **Parliamentary Commissioner**, in the May 2017 elections, of the one hundred and ninety-four (194) nominated candidates, forty (40) or 21% were women.

Madam Chair,

Successive governments have eliminated many forms of discrimination against women in **education**.

1. In the 2017-2018 school year, a total of 480 Scholarships were awarded in the categories of Merit, Academic, Technical and Grants. Of these, 63% were granted to females.

2. The distribution of grants and scholarships for the year 2015 at the University of The Bahamas was 754 males and 2,144 females.

3. The Government Public Schools Scholarship Program, in 2015, awarded funding to eighteen students for tertiary level education; 12 of which were females.

Madam Chair,

Our government will continue its efforts to guarantee the rights of **women in the workplace and in health care**. The Government of the Bahamas has led by example in ensuring equality in pay for men and women, incorporating the principle of “equal pay for work of equal value”. We believe that once the National Gender Equality Policy is implemented, any such disparities that may exist in the private sector will be addressed.

In 2017, the Government of The Bahamas allocated in excess of three hundred (300) million dollars to the Health Care Sector. This money provides emergency care, hospitalization, outpatient clinics, some laboratory and imaging services at the Princess Margaret Hospital, Rand Memorial Hospital and the Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre. Additionally, free Ante-natal and Post-natal care and other Sexual and Reproductive Health care is offered. Various types of birth control methods are provided free of charge throughout the country. We recognise the disparity in laws regarding age of sexual consent and age to access birth control without permission from parents or guardians. The major causes of **female mortality** include, Heart Disease, Breast cancer, and Diabetes.

Madam Chair,

Economic and social empowerment for our women is a most critical goal of my Ministry. Women need to have equal access to family benefits, loans, resources, and credit to achieve a better quality of life. The Bahamas Development Bank (BDB) is the Government corporation established to promote economic development, through financing sustainable projects sponsored by Bahamians.

The Department of Social Services provides assistance for women of The Bahamas, including financial, health, temporary accommodation and food. Referrals are made to legal aid services on behalf of all Family Island women who are unable to afford the services of a lawyer.

Madam Chair,

We will ensure that the particular needs of Family Island women are met in relation to access to services, training, employment opportunities and social equity schemes. According to the Department of Agriculture, it is estimated that 28% of women who are involved in agriculture are in the rural areas of the country. The Bahamas Agricultural and Industrial Corporation (BAIC), in collaboration with The Bahamas National Crafts Association, offer training in the production of hand-and-craft items and other Bahamian products.

The Government of the Bahamas has allocated over \$25 million dollars to support micro, small and medium-sized businesses.

The Department of Gender and Family Affairs and the Bahamas Network for Rural Women Producers created a **video documentary** showcasing female farmers in their agricultural and other entrepreneurial pursuits.

Madam Chair,

The Department of Cooperatives reports that **rural women** are taking a renewed interest in Cooperatives. There are several groups finalizing registration, including, 'The Bahamas Rural Women's Cooperative Society Limited', which is based on Grand Bahama, and 'The Young Bahamian Women Agri-Business Cooperative Society Limited'.

Madam Chair,

Women in The Bahamas share many **equal opportunities with men before the law**, including rights to enter bids for government contracts, administer property, to appear in court or before tribunals, and to purchase a home.

The Eugene Dupuch Law School Legal Aid Clinic is operated for the benefit of members of the public in need. Many cases involving protecting the rights and privileges of women and children are

achieved as female clients outnumber males 2:1. Women are treated equally with men with respect to their legal capacity to conclude contracts and administer property.

Madam Chair,

In The Bahamas women and men do have equal rights to choose a spouse and to marry; the same rights and responsibilities within marriage and on divorce, and equal rights in all matters relating to the adoption and raising of children. Currently, there are specific Magistrate's Courts and Supreme Courts assigned to address family matters including *inter alia*, Child Maintenance and Custody, Domestic Violence Protection Orders, Guardianship and Adoptions.

In conclusion Madam Chair,

Committee Members,

Representatives of civil society,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have presented a synopsis of the current situation on the status of women in The Bahamas. On behalf of the Government and the friendly people of the 700 sunny isles, I take this opportunity to invite you to come and see what the astronauts saw. Come and see why so many people say, "It is Better in The Bahamas".

While there have been many notable successes, there is much work to be done. We look forward to partnering with all stakeholders to achieve the progressive realization of women's rights in the

Commonwealth of The Bahamas. It is in this in vein, Madam Chair, that we acknowledge that the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women is a journey, and not a destination.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this Committee and our delegation looks forward to today's open, positive interaction and dialogue.