

As written

COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS

COUNTRY PAPER

UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND

HAGUE FORUM

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SALUTATIONS:

Mr. **President**, Distinguished Colleagues, **Ladies** and Gentlemen.

My **country**, the Commonwealth of The Bahamas has made significant **strides** towards implementation of the recommendations of the **1994 Cairo** International Conference on Population and **Development**.

We have **established** the Bureau of Women's Affairs, and enacted the Sexual **Offences** and Domestic Violence Act. Day Care

Legislation for the protection of infants and young children, legislation to allow all children to inherit equally and a National Family Planning Policy is expected to be placed before Parliament in the upcoming session.

We have received significant International and Regional support from **CARICOM**, WHO, **PAHO**, UNFPA and the IDB.

Partnerships were formed with **NGO's** in pursuance of chapter 15 of the **Programme** of action.

In 1994, through the Ministry of Social Development, the **Government** of The Bahamas, formally and **officially** invited the non **governmental** sector to become active partners in the development process.

A Health and Family Life Education programme has been implemented in the schools and is a mandatory part of the curriculum. This programme promotes responsible parenthood and teaches adolescents about sexuality and appropriate behaviour.

Also the School Health Program has been greatly improved.

Adolescent girls who become pregnant while in school, continue to receive education services throughout their pregnancy in the (PACE) program. We are especially proud of this program that provides comprehensive medical, social and psychological services in the antenatal and postnatal periods. It has taken great effort from many dedicated persons to change the negative attitudes toward pregnant school attendees. We recognize that girls have a very dim future if they are not allowed to continue with their education.

In late **1995**, **under the** portfolio of the Ministry of Youth, a youth Enterprise Programme was initiated to teach vocational skills to our youth. **The Ministry** of Health continues to **work** closely with the Ministries of **Education** and Youth in promoting peer leadership training, **parent** youth encounters (anti-drug initiative) and **the development** of a violence prevention curriculum for primary schools.

In 1996, the government introduced free antenatal and postnatal services.

In 1997, a **major** accomplishment was the **institutionalization** of the national **record** keeping system using the CLAP forms. This system was **developed** by the Latin American Center for Perinatology and data **generated** have **already** provided **valuable** insights into the **underlying causes** of stillbirths, infant and **maternal** deaths. It also allows for the monitoring of other critical vital events.

ACHIEVEMENT, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESS STORIES:

We have **taken** measures to address the needs **of** adolescents in **reproductive** health services. Additionally, reproductive health services, **including** family planning, have **been successfully** integrated **into** the primary health care system.

Comprehensive Family Planning Clinical Services are now available within clinic;; throughout our archipelago. **These** clinics are available **to** everyone and **all clients** are **offered counselling, educational information** and a physical assessment including cervical **smears**, breast examinations, urine testing and screening for specific **sexually** transmitted diseases (**STD's**). **A** full range of contraceptive methods and supplies are also **available**. A minimal fee is **requested** but no individual is refused care because of inability to pay. **Similar** services are also provided by **the** Bahamas Family Planning **Association (BFPA)**, a leading NGO which is allotted funds **annually by** Government.

Mr. President, we have achieved much: a **reduction in infant** mortality, **maternal** mortality and fertility **rates**, but we have also been **greatly challenged**.

We are **faced** with:

The **spread of** HIV/AIDS

AIDS in **Adolescents**

Teenage **pregnancy**

Under- **achievement** of male **students in primary and secondary** schools.

Gangs in schools and the recruitment of **young** girls into these gangs.

The need **for** culturally sensitive and **relevant reproductive** health materials.

Mr. President, we are appreciative of the **support** given to The Bahamas **Family** Planning Association from **the** Government of

Japan to address unwanted adolescent pregnancy and the control and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. This program includes the training of teachers, community and church leaders to promote positive lifestyles and postponement of early sexual activities in both boys and girls.

A major constraint we face, is that of a relatively young population with a median age of 26 and approximately one third under age 15.

Statistics (2000 census data) show that the population 65 and over is also increasing and accounted for 4.7% in 1997, and is estimated to reach 5.2% by the year 2000. Therefore, we are faced with addressing issues relating to the elderly and challenged with providing them with needed services, while at the same time having to meet the demands of a young population. Mr. President, you will appreciate the challenges this presents for a small country with limited resources

In conclusion, from 1994-present we have made great strides. Emphasis has been placed on decreasing the infant mortality rate, universal access to family planning services, promotion of healthy lifestyles particularly among adolescents, care of the elderly, the prevention and control of sexually transmitted diseases and the development of gender sensitive services. Our continued success will depend on team work, community partnerships and international support.