

AS WRITTEN



The
Bahamas

**TWENTY-FIRST SPECIAL SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ON THE REVIEW AND APPRAISAL
OF THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION
OF THE
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND
DEVELOPMENT**

STATEMENT BY

**SENATOR THE HONOURABLE DR. RONALD KNOWLES
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COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS**

1 JULY, 1999

UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK

(PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

MR. PRESIDENT,

DISTINGUISHED HEADS OF DELEGATIONS AND OTHER DELEGATES,

I AM PLEASED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS AUGUST FORUM AND I WELCOME THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE WITH YOU SOME OF THE POST CAIRO INITIATIVES THAT HAVE BEEN UNDERTAKEN BY MY COUNTRY, THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS. BUT FIRST, PERMIT ME TO EXPRESS MY APPRECIATION TO THE RELEVANT UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES FOR THEIR LEADERSHIP OF THIS REVIEW, AND FOR THEIR ONGOING EFFORTS TO INCLUDE NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGOS) AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THIS PROCESS.

MY COUNTRY, THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS, HAS MADE SIGNIFICANT STRIDES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 1994 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT HELD IN CAIRO. THE ARCHIPELAGIC NATURE OF THE BAHAMAS PRESENTS SPECIAL CHALLENGES FOR THE DELIVERY OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES AND CONTRIBUTES TO THE INCREASING COSTS OF HEALTH CARE. THE GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, REMAINS COMMITTED TO PROVIDING ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY.

MR. PRESIDENT,

IN THE BAHAMAS, INDEED AS IN THE WIDER CARIBBEAN, THE POPULATION IS RELATIVELY YOUNG WITH A MEDIAN AGE OF 26 AND APPROXIMATELY ONE THIRD UNDER FIFTEEN YEARS OF AGE. WE HAVE SEEN AN INCREASE IN THE AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY TO 74 YEARS AND A DECREASE IN THE INFANT MORTALITY RATE FROM 43 PER 1,000 LIVE BIRTHS IN 1965 TO 14.0 IN 1998.

CONCOMITANT WITH INCREASED LIFE EXPECTANCY, AND DECREASED INFANT MORTALITY, IS A PREDICTED INCREASE IN THE POPULATION OF OLDER PERSONS. IN THE BAHAMAS, PERSONS AGED 60 YEARS AND OVER WILL INCREASE TO 17.2% OF OUR TOTAL POPULATION BY THE YEAR 2025.

THE ELDERLY

MR. PRESIDENT,

IN KEEPING WITH THE CAIRO PLAN OF ACTION, THE GOVERNMENT HAS INITIATED PROGRAMMES FOR THE ELDERLY THAT WILL ENSURE THEIR INCREASED ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE, IMPROVED HOUSING, GREATER ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND PARTICIPAION IN INTERGENERATIONAL AND CULTURALLY-SPECIFIC EDUCATIONAL A N D RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES.

IN MAY L998, IN COLLABORATION WITH THE PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION, THE BAHAMAS HOSTED THE FIRST CARIBBEAN FORUM ON HEALTH AND AGING WHICH RESULTED IN THE DRAFTING OF A CARIBBEAN CHARTER ON HEALTH AND AGING. THIS DOCUMENT WAS DEVELOPED TO GUIDE ALL COUNTRIES IN THE REGION IN THE FORMULATION OF PLANS AND PROGRAMMES FOR OLDER PERSONS. OUR CHALLENGE IS TO DEVISE STRATEGIES THAT WILL ENHANCE THE SELF-RELIANCE OF OLDER PERSONS AND PROMOTE THEIR QUALITY OF LIFE. TO THIS END, A NATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR THE HEALTH OF OLDER PERSONS IS BEING FORMULATED AND A BILL FOR THE LICENSING OF RESIDENTIAL CARE FACILITIES FOR THE ELDERLY HAS BEEN DRAFTED.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING

MR. PRESIDENT,

THE BAHAMAS IS TOTALLY COMMITTED TO ENSURING THE REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND HEALTH OF ITS PEOPLE AND WE BELIEVE THAT FREEDOM TO MAKE REPRODUCTIVE CHOICES IS A CORNERSTONE FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. WE FURTHER BELIEVE THAT AN ESSENTIAL PART OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IS BETTER REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, INCLUDING ACCESS TO MODERN, SAFE, AFFORDABLE AND EFFECTIVE FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES.

SINCE CAIRO, WE HAVE MADE SIGNIFICANT ADVANCES IN THIS AREA, THE MOST NOTABLE BEING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL POLICY ON FAMILY PLANNING THAT IS EXPECTED TO BE PLACED BEFORE PARLIAMENT VERY SOON. TO DATE, MANY ASPECTS OF ITS PROPOSED PROGRAMMES HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED. WE WOULD LIKE TO REPORT THAT COMPREHENSIVE FAMILY -PLANNING SERVICES, INCLUDING COUNSELLING, PHYSICAL ASSESSMENTS, AND RELEVANT EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS ARE AVAILABLE AT ALL PRIMARY HEALTH CARE COMMUNITY CLINICS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

I NOTED EARLIER THAT THE INFANT MORTALITY RATE HAS STEADILY DECLINED. A FURTHER DECREASE TOGETHER WITH A REDUCTION IN MATERNAL MORTALITY, REMAIN PROMINENTLY PLACED ON OUR NATIONAL AGENDA. THE PROVISION OF ANTI-RETROVIRAL DRUG THERAPY TO ALL HIV POSITIVE PREGNANT WOMEN IS HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL IN SAVING LIVES. ADDITIONALLY, A STRONG PUBLIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGN AND INCREASED PUBLIC AWARENESS OF VACCINE PREVENTABLE DISEASES HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THIS REDUCTION IN INFANT MORBIDITY, MORTALITY AND IMPROVED CARE TO WOMEN AND THEIR

FAMILIES. SINCE DECEMBER 1996, ALL EXPECTANT WOMEN HAVE BEEN ELIGIBLE FOR FREE ANTENATAL AND POSTNATAL CARE AT PUBLIC HOSPITALS AND ALL COMMUNITY HEALTH CLINICS.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF MALES IN REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, IS PARAMOUNT TO THE SUCCESS OF NATIONAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH INITIATIVES! AN INITIATIVE FOCUSED ON RESPONSIBLE MANHOOD, QUALITY MALE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL WELLNESS WAS LAUNCHED IN 1998. MANY NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND IN PARTICULAR, THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY ARE PARTICIPANTS. WE ANTICIPATE THAT THIS PROGRAM WILL BE EXPANDED IN THE COMING YEARS.

ADOLESCENT HEALTH SERVICES

MR. PRESIDENT,

THE BAHAMAS, AND INDEED THE ENTIRE CARIBBEAN, ARE STRONG ADVOCATES OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE AND WE RECOGNIZE THESE RIGHTS WITH RESPECT TO FREE AND INFORMED CHOICES AND ACCESS TO SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES.

THE TEEN BIRTH RATE IN OUR COUNTRY IS 14% WHICH IS UNACCEPTABLY HIGH. ADOLESCENTS, AGES 14 TO 19 YEARS, ACCOUNT FOR THE FASTEST GROWING OF NEW HIV CASES, AND OTHER SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS.

ADOLESCENT ISSUES NEED ADOLESCENT SOLUTIONS. IN THIS REGARD, WE RECOGNIZE THE NEED FOR A

COMPREHENSIVE ADOLESCENT HEALTH POLICY THAT WILL INVOLVE THEM IN ITS DEVELOPMENT.

THE GOVERNMENT IS SUPPORTING A MAJOR ADOLESCENT REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH EDUCATION PROJECT WHICH IS BEING EXECUTED BY THE BAHAMAS FAMILY PLANNING ASSOCIATION AND SPONSORED BY A DONOR AGENCY.

EARLIER THIS YEAR, WE COMMISSIONED IN NASSAU, THE CAPITAL, AN ADOLESCENT HEALTH CENTRE, A FACILITY WHICH PROVIDES MULTIDISCIPLINARY SERVICES WITH EMPHASIS ON PRENATAL AND POSTNATAL CARE, PSYCHO-SOCIAL COUNSELLING, VIOLENCE AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION AND OTHER HEALTH AND NUTRITION SERVICES. THE GOVERNMENT OF THE BAHAMAS INTENDS TO REPLICATE THIS MODEL OF SERVICE IN OTHER COMMUNITIES IN THE FUTURE..

BECAUSE WE RECOGNIZE THAT EDUCATION IS ANOTHER CORNERSTONE OF EMPOWERMENT, THERE ARE PLANS TO EXPAND THE INTERMINISTERIAL PROGRAMME "PROVIDING ACCESS TO CONTINUING EDUCATION" (PACE), WHICH ALLOWS PREGNANT TEENAGERS TO ATTEND SCHOOL DURING THEIR PREGNANCY. THIS PROGRAMME WHICH IS PROVIDED AT NO COST TO THE CLIENTS, HAS PROVEN TO BE VERY SUCCESSFUL IN TERMS OF RECIDIVISM, COMPLETION OF HIGH SCHOOL, AND EMPLOYMENT RECORD.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

MR. PRESIDENT,

THE BAHAMAS, IS COMMITTED TO PROVIDING OUR YOUTH WITH THE NECESSARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING TO ENABLE THEM TO BE PRODUCTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN OUR

SOCIETY IN THE NEW CENTURY. SUCCESSFUL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES HAVE A POSITIVE AND DIRECT IMPACT ON TEEN VIOLENCE, DRUG USE AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR. IN THE BAHAMAS, THERE IS UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION, COMPULSARY TO AGE SIXTEEN. TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL PROGRAMMES ARE RECEIVING FOCUSED ATTENTION AND FUNDING.

WE ARE OPTIMISTIC THAT THE PROPOSED REVISIONS TO THE HEALTH AND FAMILY LIFE PROGRAMME AND THE CURRICULUM IN OUR SCHOOLS WILL ADDRESS CONCERNS OF UNDER-ACHIEVEMENT OF MALE STUDENTS AND TEEN VIOLENCE.

MR. PRESIDENT,

OUR YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE AN ENORMOUS POTENTIAL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR COUNTRY. INDEED; THEY ARE OUR FUTURE AND WE MUST TAKE THE NECESSARY MEASURES TO EMPOWER THEM AND PROMOTE THEIR WELL-BEING. IN THIS REGARD, IN LATE 1995, A YOUTH ENTERPRISE PROGRAMME (YEP), WAS INITIATED TO TEACH VOCATIONAL SKILLS TO OUR YOUTH. WE ARE SUPPORTIVE OF THE YOUTH RESOLUTION AND DECLARATION WHICH WERE FORMULATED AT THE CARIBBEAN YOUTH SUMMIT LAST YEAR. WE HAVE EXPERIENCED AND SUPPORTED TWO 'YOUTH IN PARLIAMENT' SESSIONS.

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

MR PRESIDENT,

ANOTHER MAJOR CHALLENGE FOR OUR GOVERNMENT IS THE ISSUE OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS. THE

BAHAMAS, HAS FOR MANY YEARS, BEEN THE RECIPIENT OF UNPRECEDENTED NUMBERS OF UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS. THEIR PRESENCE HAS PLACED A SEVERE BURDEN ON THE LIMITED RESOURCES OF MY COUNTRY. THIS BURDEN IS FELT MORE SO IN THE HEALTH SECTOR FOR WHICH AS MINISTER OF HEALTH, I HAVE RESPONSIBILITY. THE GOVERNMENT HAS CONTINUALLY BROUGHT THIS MATTER TO THE ATTENTION OF THIS ASSEMBLY. I TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY NOW TO REITERATE THE CALL MADE BY THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE BAHAMAS AT LAST YEAR'S 53RD SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR INCREASED INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION OR ASSISTANCE TO ENABLE SMALL COUNTRIES LIKE OURS TO EFFECTIVELY AND ADEQUATELY DEAL WITH SUCH CHALLENGES.

MR. PRESIDENT,

WE HAVE ACHIEVED MUCH. OVER THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS THERE HAS BEEN A SIGNIFICANT POSITIVE CHANGE IN THE PLIGHT OF WOMEN. LEGISLATION PERTAINING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, SEXUAL OFFENCES, AND MATERNITY LEAVE HAS BEEN ENACTED. IN EDUCATION, THEY ARE PARTICIPATING MORE AND PERFORMING WELL. THE NOTICEABLE IMPROVEMENT IN THEIR STATUS IS REFLECTED IN MOST SECTORS WITH THE EXCEPTION OF PARLIAMENT WHERE, THEY ARE UNDER REPRESENTED. A NUMBER OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS ARE ADDRESSING THIS THROUGH EMPOWERMENT SEMINARS AND AWARDING OF SCHOLARSHIPS TO WOMEN WITH LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL.

THE BAHAMAS AND CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY HAVE DEMONSTRATED THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL WILL TO ACHIEVE GENDER EQUITY AND SENSITIVITY, AS

DEMONSTRATED THROUGH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE WOMEN'S BUREAUX AND THE SIGNING OF THE CONVENTION FOR THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW).

MR. PRESIDENT,

OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE, WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE VITAL PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY. WE MUST, THEREFORE, STRENGTHEN THIS PARTNERSHIP BY DEEPENING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH EXISTING PARTNERS (FOR EXAMPLE, THE CARIBBEAN COOPERATION IN HEALTH PHASE II), AND BY DEVELOPING NEW ONES. THIS TEAM EFFORT, COUPLED WITH THE FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT FROM DONOR AGENCIES, ARE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS FOR FURTHERING THE GOALS OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION.

THE WAY FORWARD

MR. PRESIDENT,

WE HAVE COVERED MUCH TERRITORY SINCE CAIRO, BUT WE ARE QUITE AWARE THAT THERE IS MUCH TO BE ACCOMPLISHED. PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE EFFORTS WILL NOT ACHIEVE EXPECTED RESULTS OR WILL NOT BE EFFECTIVE IF APPROPRIATE MECHANISMS FOR MONITORING PROGRESS ARE NOT PUT IN PLACE. BENCHMARKS MUST BE ESTABLISHED, INDICATORS IDENTIFIED, AND DATA MUST BE COLLECTED, ANALYZED AND DISSEMINATED ON A TIMELY BASIS IN ORDER TO EVALUATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ALL PROGRAMMES. RESEARCH, THEREFORE, IS A KEY TO FUTURE SUCCESS AND MUST BE GIVEN PRIORITY. FURTHER, THERE IS A DEFINITE

NEED FOR A FOCAL POINT TO ADVISE, COORDINATE, MONITOR AND REPORT ON ALL ICPD ACTIVITIES. THIS WOULD ENSURE THAT POPULATION ISSUES ARE INTEGRATED INTO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO MAKING EVEN GREATER PROGRESS IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM AND WE RECOGNIZE THAT OUR CONTINUED SUCCESS WILL DEPEND ON TEAM EFFORT, COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT.

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE BAHAMAS REAFFIRMS ITS COMMITMENT TO THE CAIRO PROGRAMME OF ACTION AND WE ENCOURAGE OUR PARTNERS TO DO LIKEWISE BY MOBILIZING THE NECESSARY RESOURCES WHICH WILL CONTRIBUTE TO ITS SUSTAINABILITY AND VIABILITY.

T H A N K Y O U .