



NATIONAL STATEMENT

High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Transformation towards Sustainable and Resilient Societies
Localizing the SDGs

United Nations Headquarters, New York, New York

18 July 2018

The Most Honourable Dr. Hubert Minnis
Prime Minister
The Commonwealth of The Bahamas



Chair,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen.

I am pleased to be here today, and to make The Bahamas' first presentation at the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

As a small island developing state, located in an increasingly **volatile hurricane zone**, The Bahamas identifies strongly with the theme for this year's Forum, *"Transformation towards Sustainable and Resilient Societies"*.

As a people, we have been made more resilient by the necessity of having to rebound after being thrashed by hurricanes each year. Being unable to respond as efficiently and effectively as required, however, has made our need to transform into a more sustainable and resilient country even more urgent.

Since gaining independence 45 years ago, The Bahamas has enjoyed a stable political climate and significant economic success. We have witnessed a rise in life expectancy; attained widespread literacy; ensured greater access to preventative and curative healthcare; and expanded educational opportunities for all.

That said, challenges remain. Approximately 12.5% of our population resides in poverty; economic opportunities and sound infrastructure are unevenly distributed. Youth unemployment rates are consistently high. There are too many persons without access to clean water piped to their homes. Many face poor educational and health outcomes. In a country surrounded by water and bathed in sunlight, we have made insufficient progress to becoming energy efficient and coastally resilient.



What I have just shared sounds bleak. However, be assured, the Government of The Bahamas is determined to move its national development agenda forward in a manner that aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals to enhance the quality of life for all in The Bahamas.

Chair, I would like to tell the story of a proud, warm people, preserving the richness of our country today and for generations to come. We are a caring people, endeavoring to nurture our children, cherish our elderly and protect our vulnerable. We are a people that honour our culture and preserve our heritage, while being welcoming of others. We are an industrious people – saving our resources to create our own businesses and build communities. We are stewards of our land and oceans. We are a people who understand that no one is above the law.

Chair, these are some of the sentiments from the Vision Statement of our National Development Agenda – our long term strategic planning and reform agenda which has directly mainstreamed and effectively mapped the 17 Sustainable Development Goals into virtually every relevant aspect of the 16 national development goals.

Chair, I would like to focus on a new initiative of the Government of The Bahamas, which focuses on all of the key themes of this year's High Level Political Forum.

In 2017, my Government launched the **Over-the-Hill Community Development Partnership Initiative**. The Over-the-Hill Community sits on the southern side of a major ridge that runs across the primary island of New Providence. Historically, this ridge separated the wealthy merchant class from the working masses. Over the years, as prosperity came to The Bahamas, many of the original residents moved out to the newly built suburbs. Many who remained, or moved in, were left behind with dilapidated housing



and struggling infrastructure. It is a community where high levels of poverty, unemployment, crime and environmental degradation have become too rampant. Nevertheless, this was and remains a historic town and a proud town.

The **Over-the-Hill Community Development Partnership Initiative** seeks to improve the living conditions within this community. The focus of the partnership with the private sector, civil society and academia includes: establishing programmes which tackle the underlying causes of poverty, such as the lack of training, soft and hard skills for job opportunities, childhood trauma and victimization and access to affordable childcare, so that parents can work. The Initiative also addresses the manifestations of poverty such as hunger, substandard housing, and inequitable access to quality health. **Chair, this is Sustainable Development Goal 1, in Action.**

The Initiative will introduce green energy to the community. Chair, many residents of this area do not have electricity. We are seeking to provide them, as a first step, with small-scale alternative energy solutions such as solar lamps. However, broader sustainable energy solutions are proposed and we look forward to piloting community solar projects in this area. This is in line with our target to increasing the share of renewable energy resources to 30% by 2030. **This is Sustainable Development Goal 7 in action.**

Chair, water and sanitation are also challenges. Approximately half of the 4,000 households in this community do not have access to piped water to their homes. This may be because of disconnections for non-payment or the lack of modern plumbing infrastructure within the household. The alternative for many is the public water pump that provides clean, safe water. However, as a Government, we feel that we can do better



and we have committed to providing water for all within this community by 2025. This will include improvements to the sewerage infrastructure; the upgrading of homes to accommodate piped water; addressing issues of land reform, so that persons who have been living in the community can make the necessary investments in their homes after they have clear property title. **This is Sustainable Development Goal 6 in action in The Bahamas.**

Chair, one of the elements that is striking about the Over-the-Hill community is its greenery. Imagine a dense landscape of towering silk cotton trees with their substantial root systems and abundant fruit trees. In contrast, we also have the blight of uncollected garbage, household and industrial waste.

My Government has already launched one of the largest clean up campaigns in our history in this community and is investing in bulky waste and more frequent trash collection.

We are supporting the value of trees in this area, by turning fruit into earnings as we promote backyard farming and encourage fruit vendors. We are also providing additional support for a wetland just adjacent to the Over-the-Hill area called Big Pond, which is already fitted with a boardwalk through the mangroves to support an appreciation for the bio-diversity of the community. **This is Sustainable Development Goal 15 in action.**

Chair, the Over-the-Hill Initiative reimagines the relationships between downtown Nassau, which is the hub of economic activity and tourism, and the community of workers who live Over-the-Hill. It looks to improve the key infrastructural issues of transportation, drainage, and affordable housing. It seeks to create a community that is socially



empowering for both the young and the elderly. Indeed, one of the key features is a restored system of parks.

The Government has committed to the rejuvenation of all of Over-the-Hill's 15 parks, in particular its central park – the Southern Recreation Grounds. We will break ground imminently on two of these park projects, and the tender process for the Southern Recreation Grounds is underway. We will make these parks more inviting and useable, and include access to WiFi services. **This is Sustainable Development Goal 11 in action for The Bahamas.**

Chair, beyond the Over-the-Hill project, our work towards fulfilling sustainable development for our people continues. The Bahamas has amplified its efforts to reintroduce and restore greenery to our country. Additionally, as a big ocean nation, we seek to protect our seas. As such, we have made a commitment to banning single-use plastics and Styrofoam by 2020. In the immediate term, for the 2018/2019 fiscal year, we have committed \$5 million for LED street lighting. Additionally, one of our power companies is undertaking a \$5 million solar energy park, capable of generating 4.5 million kilowatt hours annually of clean, renewable energy, on Grand Bahama Island, home to our shipping, industrial and technology hubs.

We are also pursuing the modernization and digitization of our public institutions, so that they may better meet our development needs and provide enhance services to our citizens and residents.

Chair, we realize that our efforts will be a costly investment. However, we know that the dividends in the long run, will make investing in these goals worthwhile for the people of The Bahamas.



To conclude, Chair, much of our work is being done in partnership with others, not only to secure technical expertise, but because the challenges we face today are increasingly collective. We therefore seek to strengthen these partnerships, at all levels

– local, national, regional, and international.

The Bahamas reiterates its commitment to localizing the Sustainable Development Goals into its National Planning processes.

Thank you.