



NATIONAL STATEMENT

BY

**THE HON. FREDERICK A. MITCHELL, M.P.
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND IMMIGRATION
OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS**

AT THE

**SIXTY-NINTH REGULAR SESSION OF
THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**30TH SEPTEMBER, 2014
NEW YORK**

UNGA Theme: "Delivering on and Implementing a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda"

Please check against delivery

Mr. President,

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Kamalesh Sharma, said this a few days ago: "Don't be demoralised by your income; be inspired by your outcome".

That should be a driving principle, as all countries, particularly the Small Island Developing States, seek to determine what the post-2015 Development Agenda will be. The obstacles are many. The lip service is evident. We have hope and our moral case is strong. We are inspired by the potential possible outcomes of this new development agenda.

We must be people focused and, in this connection, I remember a story told by one of our Colleague Ministers from the Far East who explained his absence from home as dealing with many of the world's problems. Yes, said the constituent, but the water pump in the village has not been fixed. It is a reminder of who we really work for in this body: not we ourselves, but for that villager who needs the pump fixed at home.

During this session, our Prime Minister gave a comprehensive statement on climate change and the need for developed countries to honour their financial commitments in that regard. Secondly, we deposited the instrument for the Arms Trade Treaty, which helped to bring the number of countries to fifty (50) and so caused the Treaty to enter into force. Thirdly, in the margins of the meeting, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the International Organization for Migration.

There are no higher priorities for The Bahamas: the environment, fighting crime and containing illegal immigration. These matters for The Bahamas go to the very root of our existence.

If we do not resolve the climate change issues, there will be no Bahamas. Solving the crime problem in The Bahamas is central to our domestic peace and economic survivability. No Bahamian doubts that the control of illegal immigration is central to our survivability as a country, central to our national identity, and central to our national security. We have only to see today how it drains our financial resources, and we do not have to look far to see how unchecked immigration in other countries has been a recipe for civil strife within their borders. We do not intend for that to happen to us.

All of the efforts around the three main themes are buttressed by our work to ensure that we have a robust, strong and sustainable economy.

Mr. President,

Tourism is by far the number one economic activity for The Bahamas. The environment is central to that business.

It should, therefore, be no surprise that The Bahamas has decided upon the following:

The National Environmental Policy, 2005 (Draft);
The National Environmental Management and Action Plan for The Bahamas, 2005;
The Bahamas National Wetland Policy, 2007; and
The Bahamas Protected Areas Fund, 2013; and
The Forestry Amendment Act, 2014.

We believe that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change. We believe that this should be completed with dispatch.

The Bahamas is committed to the Small Island Developing States processes here at the United Nations.

The Bahamas welcomes the convening of the World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction next year in Japan.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas is appalled by the practice of killing sharks simply for their fins. We must make the fishing of sharks a sustainable practice, as these fierce creatures are a vital part of the global ecosystem. The Bahamas, therefore, assumed the chairmanship of the Save Our Shark Coalition in December 2013. The aims of the Coalition resonate with us and we believe that we can help save the shark from extinction.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas has been grappling with serious crimes in our society, related, in large measure, to the inability of young males to settle disputes without regard to violence, and the resultant proliferation of gang activity and illicit drugs, small arms and light weapons, and ammunition trafficking.

The Bahamas was, therefore, actively involved in the negotiations leading to the successful adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty and considered its adoption a landmark accomplishment of the UN.

The Government believes the entry into force of the ATT will contribute to peace and security in The Bahamas. We deposited the Instrument of Ratification of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas to the Arms Trade Treaty on 25th September, 2014.

We continue to fight the illegal drug trade, to fight trafficking in persons, and investing in social intervention programmes, like the award-winning Urban Renewal programme, in order to fight crime.

Mr. President,

I spoke earlier of the MOU signed with the International Organization for Migration.

This is one part of a multi-faceted strategy to stop the flow of undocumented non-nationals into Bahamian territory. New policies are now in place and there will be stricter adherence in the future to these measures to stop it.

A new fleet of vessels has been purchased to support our work in this area.

In the last few months, The Bahamas has entered into important agreements with our immediate neighbours – Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Haiti – to come to terms with vexing situations that impact our good relations. This includes accords on fishing and on migration.

Let there be no doubt that we mean to bring illegal migration under control.

Nevertheless, relations with our neighbouring countries remain good. This is all the more reason why we believe that the continued economic embargo by one neighbour against another in our region is counterproductive to the peace and good order of the region. We continue to keep matters with regard to the governance issues in our neighbour, the Turks and Caicos Islands, under review.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas anticipates the forthcoming launch of the International Decade for Peoples of African Descent to be held under the theme, “People of African Descent: Recognition, Justice and Development”. The theme of the Decade is also closely linked to the efforts of CARICOM Member-States in seeking the restorative justice due to the legacy of 400 years of slavery.

We were heartened by the unveiling of the winning design of the Permanent Memorial in honour of the victims of slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. We reaffirm our support for this important project.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas welcomes the convening of the “Third International Conference on Financing for Development”, to be held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 13th-16th July, 2015. We plan to participate in that conference. We consider that the Conference will provide a forum to address the need to demystify the belief of, and go beyond gross domestic product as a sole indicator of sustainable development, as well as the matter of international co-operation in tax matters.

In this connection, The Bahamas reaffirms the important role of the United Nations in addressing matters related to international tax co-operation, given its universality and legitimacy.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas reaffirms its commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. These are neither negotiable nor peripheral. As a demonstration of its commitment to human rights, I am pleased to report that The Bahamas has passed its own complementary national legislation, the *Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act*, which will ensure The Bahamas’ ratification of the Convention in due course.

In addition, four bills have been introduced in Parliament to amend the Constitution of The Bahamas to bring about full equality between men and women in law. This moment places a significant opportunity in the hands of the people of The Bahamas to usher in a new era of equality for men and women.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas looks forward to the process of elaborating the Post-2015 Development Agenda, and we look forward to actively participating in the intergovernmental process that will lead to the adoption of this Post-2015 Development Agenda in September 2015. Our vision for the Post-2015 Development Agenda is one that is creative, inclusive and transformative.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas supports UN Security Council reform. As we look around at the tens of millions being spent to bring this physical structure up to code and into the Twenty-first Century, why can't the organs of the UN, and especially the Security Council, not reflect 21st Century realities?

Mr. President,

Last year, The Bahamas celebrated its Fortieth Year of Independence. In addressing the General Assembly last year, the Honourable Perry Christie, Prime Minister of The Bahamas, renewed the commitment of The Bahamas to playing its part in making our planet a more peaceful and prosperous place, characterised by co-operation and mutual respect support. We believe that each country has primary responsibility for its own development, and throughout my statement, I have indicated the achievements and challenges of The Bahamas in this regard. I repeat that what we face in the environment, with crime, and with illegal migration, is existential for our country.

We are inspired however, despite the challenges by the possible outcomes.

We, therefore, exhort the Members of this august organisation to stay motivated and committed; for each new effort undertaken and each achievement garnered bring us nearer to our development goals.

Now, more than ever, we need the United Nations.

Thank you, Mr. President.