



NATIONAL STATEMENT

**THE MOST HON. DR. HUBERT MINNIS
PRIME MINISTER
COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS**

**74TH SESSION UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
NEW YORK, N.Y.**

FRIDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER 2019

Mr. President:

I congratulate you on your election to the Presidency of the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

I assure you and the members of the Bureau of the support of the Government of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas during your tenure.

I also extend congratulations to your predecessor for her leadership of the 73rd Session.

It is my privilege to speak in this Assembly on behalf of the people of The Bahamas.

In the context of the global climate emergency, it is also my responsibility as a citizen of a vulnerable state to speak:

- on behalf of the community of Small Island Developing States;
- on behalf of the peoples of the Caribbean and CARICOM;
- on behalf of coastal communities and others around the world, who

are especially vulnerable from rising sea levels and from increasingly powerful storms.

I commend Secretary-General His Excellency António Guterres for his extraordinary leadership in focusing the international community on the global climate emergency.

This global emergency poses myriad and dire effects for all of humanity,

especially the poorest in the global commons.

I thank His Excellency for his visit to The Bahamas in the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian, which was one of the most destructive hurricanes the Atlantic has ever generated.

It is a generational tragedy for The Bahamas.

Hurricane Dorian decimated or devastated swathes of Grand Bahama Island, Abaco, and the Abaco Cays,

respectively our second and third most populated centers.

I also thank Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, for his visit in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Dorian.

Mr. President:

The Bahamas is an archipelago of many islands and cays stretching over approximately 750 miles from off the southeast coast of Florida in the United

States of America to the southeastern tip of the Republic of Cuba.

We inhabit approximately 180,000 square miles of ocean, with 16 principal islands with cities, towns, and settlements, with names like Marsh Harbour, Hope Town, Eight Mile Rock, West End and Sweeting's Cay, reflecting the rich and diverse heritage of our country.

Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield once noted: “From space, the Bahamas is the most beautiful place on Earth.”

He went on to say: “The Bahamas are gorgeous. The deep trench in the ocean floor called the Tongue of the Ocean, which comes between the islands, is the most beautiful deep indigo colour.”

With great pride we delight in sharing our archipelago, our vibrant culture and our natural wonders with millions of visitors from around the world.

Tourism is our primary industry.

We are stewards of this natural treasury for ourselves and for humanity.

But this surpassing beauty and our very existence as a country of many low-lying islands and over 2,400 cays are under grave threat.

It is a threat which we did not cause.

It is a threat which we cannot survive on our own.

While many countries have coastal cities or zones, the entire Bahamas is a

coastal zone of many cays and islands in an extensive archipelago.

Over the last three decades, hurricanes have grown increasingly lethal throughout our region.

In the words of the Secretary-General, they have become: “turbocharged”.

The Bahamas experienced major hurricanes in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

But on the first of this month of September, we experienced something

way beyond anything we have seen before.

Hurricane Dorian, an unprecedented destructive force of wind, and rain and sea surge, ripped into the islands of the northern Bahamas.

The naturally warm aquamarine and jade waters of The Bahamas, made even warmer by the emission of earth-warming carbon gases, were rapidly forged and mobilized into instruments of death and destruction.

With unrelenting fury, Hurricane Dorian lingered for painful hours on end with its deadly force laying waste to communities, where children were preparing for the beginning of a new school year.

It remained stationary over Grand Bahama and North Abaco, with destructive winds, storm surge and rain, hazards exacerbated by the 30-hour fixed position of the storm's eye wall on some communities.

At its peak, Hurricane Dorian had maximum sustained winds of 185 mph and gusts of over 220 mph.

There were storm surges of 18 to 23 feet above normal tide levels, roughly three times my height of six feet.

There are officially 56 lives lost.

But we know that there are considerably more lives lost because there are still 600 missing because the

rising then receding ocean water swept away young and old with their homes.

The picturesque and industrious principal town of Marsh Harbour on Abaco has disappeared.

There is nothing left of it but heaps of rubble.

East End, Grand Bahama is in ruins.

The hurricane was a physical apocalypse for some communities.

Mr. President:

Our hearts still ache as I address you here this morning.

Thousands in our country still suffer and face great difficulties in the future as we struggle to recover and to rebuild our broken towns and settlements and mend our spirits.

Nevertheless, our hearts are filled with gratitude to so many of our friends and neighbors who came to our assistance

even while the wind and the water were still threatening.

And we thank those who continue to support us through these trying times.

In addition to the brave men and women of our Royal Bahamas Defence Force, and the Royal Bahamas Police Force, we were aided by officers from the U.S. Coast Guard; by our CARICOM friends and partners, including security personnel from Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, the Canadian Royal Air Force,

the British Royal Navy, and the Royal Netherlands Navy, which carried troops from Germany, France and Belgium on its ship.

The support The Bahamas has received from fellow- Member States, from global and local non-governmental organizations, religious institutions and from individuals, including school children, is a powerful demonstration of what it means to be united as nations.

To help to coordinate and to focus recovery, reconstruction and development assistance, we have created a new ministry of Disaster Preparedness, Management and Reconstruction.

Mr. President:

The small island countries in the Caribbean, in the Atlantic, in the Pacific, and in the Indian Ocean and around the world, are on the frontlines of being swallowed into an abyss, created initially

by human activity and increasingly by inaction.

Our vulnerabilities as states on the frontline are profound.

Because of the geographic distribution of The Bahamas, extending from Cuba and parallel to Florida, any number of hurricane trajectories may result in dire and protracted implications for our inhabited islands.

Our heating climate results in the increased severity and frequency of hurricanes for our archipelago, and also destroys our natural defenses against such storms.

Coral and mangrove degradation, land erosion, increased tidal movements and the myriad other consequences of global warming, increase our vulnerability and handicap our ability to develop and to establish effective resilience measures.

We cannot make meaningful progress toward or achieve sustainable development goals, if, as forecasters are predicting, that recent cyclonic and other extreme climate events are poised to become the new normal, and may worsen.

When one storm can obliterate an island-state or a number of states in one hurricane season: how will we survive, how can we develop, how will we continue to exist?

So, I add my urgent plea to the cries and voices of many other leaders and citizens of the global commons urging the nations of the world here assembled to treat the global climate emergency as the greatest challenge facing humanity.

It is a challenge that, if not treated with the greatest urgency, will continue to ravage small island states such as the Bahamas, and will also have a devastating impact on more developed states.

The Bahamas fully supports the Secretary General's comprehensive strategy to address a global emergency which will eventually devastate the entire planet.

This includes his plea to international financial institutions to provide concessionary financing to countries severely impacted by the external shocks occasioned by climate change.

The UN Development Program is already working with three of our Caribbean neighbours – St Lucia, Dominica, and Antigua & Barbuda – on various measures. The Bahamas encourages an expansion of this, to include The Bahamas.

We urge the full -implementation of the SAMOA Pathway and enhanced financing for sustainable development.

We support the coalition for disaster-resilient infrastructure promoted by the Government of India, which I also thank for its recent assistance.

The Bahamas, especially with many islands and cays requiring basic infrastructure, has major vulnerabilities and resilience deficiencies.

We must urgently address these vulnerabilities in order to secure our citizens and to protect vital public and private infrastructure.

Mr. President:

For many years, The Bahamas and countries with similar characteristics have urged an alternative to per capita Gross National Income as the sole indicator of a country's level of development and eligibility for concessionary financing.

When we call for consideration of a country's unique local circumstances when determining financial worthiness, this is also a condition and requirement for our resilience.

The Bahamas is a testament to the ability of SIDS to manage debt, despite such external setbacks.

Mr. President:

May I also make this invitation and request to potential travelers from throughout the world:

Please come and visit one or more of the 14 other major islands in The Bahamas not affected by Hurricane

Dorian, including Nassau on the island of New Providence.

The revenue from tourists visiting The Bahamas will play a vital in reconstructing and rebuilding the affected areas.

To help rebuild and to restore Abaco, the Abaco Cays, and East Grand Bahama, the Government of The Bahamas has announced that these areas will be designated as special economic recovery zones for an initial period of three years.

This designation will enable these communities impacted by Hurricane Dorian to benefit from an extensive range of tax breaks and incentives for Bahamians, and international investors.

Mr. President:

Amidst the decimation and devastation, there is a symbol of hope and resilience at Abaco from which we may draw inspiration and renewed energy and hope.

The red and white striped iconic lighthouse at Hope Town on Elbow Cay, Abaco, which is featured on the back of the Bahamas \$10 bill, survived Hurricane Dorian.

The 89-foot lighthouse was built in 1863, helping to warn mariners of dangerous reefs.

The lighthouse is a symbol of pride for Abaconians and Bahamians.

Soon after Hurricane Dorian, some of the residents of Hope Town, placed within the lighthouse a temporary light that shone in the darkness, with few other sources of light on the horizon.

The Bahamas will restore the Hope Town Lighthouse as a symbol of resilience, as a source of unity and as a beacon of hope.

Mr. President:

May it also serve as a symbol of resilience, of unity and of hope for a global

commons willing to summons the courage
and the imagination to act with justice and
urgency to save our shared home.

Thank you, Mr. President.