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NATIONAL REPORT FOR THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS ON
ADHERENCE TO THE DECLARATION OF COMMITMENT OF PORT-OF-SPAIN

(The Bahamas, 2012)



National Report

FOR THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS

On Adherence to the Declaration of Commitment of Port-of-Spain

Fifth (5th) Summit of The Americas

Port-of-Spain, Trinidad 2009

**"Securing Our Citizens' Future by Promoting Human Prosperity,
Energy Security and Environmental Sustainability"**

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Executive Summary

Genesis of Summit Process

The Summits of the Americas are institutionalized gatherings of Heads of State and Government of the Member States of the Western Hemisphere where leaders discuss common policy issues, affirm shared values and commit to concerted actions at the national and regional levels to address continuing and new challenges faced by Countries in the Americas.

Since the beginning of the Summits' Process, the Heads of State and Government have established a vast array of priorities that appropriately respond to the major necessities of the People of the Hemisphere. Democracy has always been a central subject in the Summits despite the heterogeneity of Summit themes. Growth, employment, poverty, environmental sustainability, energy security, discrimination and crime are all issues that can be resolved with a functioning democracy and the implementation of effective and efficient public policies. The Summit Process, therefore, pursues a multidimensional approach to strengthening democracy and governance, helping to reduce poverty and increasing opportunities in the Americas.

The First Summit was held in 1994 in Miami, Florida. Since then there have been four additional Summits, with the most recent being hosted in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, in 2009. To date, each Summit has produced a Declaration which guides Inter-American policymakers on objectives pertinent to the Americas.

Significance of 2009 Fifth Summit, Trinidad and Tobago

The Fifth Summit of the Americas, hosted in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, between April 17th to 19th, 2009, focused on "Securing Our Citizens' Future by Promoting Human Prosperity, Energy Security and Environmental Sustainability". Convened during the height of the global recession, economic issues dominated discussions. However, the Declaration of Commitment of Port-of-Spain only broadly referenced the Recession. Instead, the Ministers of Finance of the Western Hemisphere were directed, in preparation for their Meeting in Chile in July, 2009: to work towards effective and domestically tailored stimulus measures; to report results; and seek enhanced regional cooperation. The Summit Declaration also strongly emphasised the need to sustainably pursue the promotion of human prosperity, energy security and environmental sustainability.

Other topics that dominated the discussion included: strong support for reintegration of Cuba into the inter-American System, which was bolstered by an open and conciliatory stance from President Obama; and, further support for the development of Haiti. With regards to Haiti, it was concluded that the issue of funding for development programmes would be addressed at the OAS General Assembly in San Pedro Sula, Honduras in June, 2009.

National Findings Pursuant to the Fifth Summit

The Government of The Bahamas has made significant moves to bolster the:

Social Safety Net –

- Launch in September 2010 of the National Prescription Drug Plan.
- Unemployment Insurance for 13 weeks.
- Unemployment Work Programmes - Jump Start, Work Placement & Employment Exposure, National Job Readiness and Training.

Youth –

- Launch of “VOLUNTEER BAHAMAS” Programme in October 2011.

Health –

- Major expansion and renovation of Government owned tertiary health care facilities; completion of plans for the introduction of new “mini-hospitals” in three of the more populated rural Islands (Family Islands).
- Draft Food and Nutrition Policy in 2008.
- In 2011, the Department of Public Health Primary Health Care clinics began routinely managing HIV infected patients to allow increased access to health care services.

Culture -

- SelfStarters Programme resulted in 28% of recipients of business grants producing businesses that reflected and promoted Bahamian craft, foods, arts, promotions and entertainment.

Environment –

- The Government of The Bahamas launched in April 2011, its National Programme to Promote Sustainable Energy and Energy Conservation with compact fluorescent light bulbs, solar water heaters, and photovoltaic systems.
- Participation at the 17th UN Durban Conference (COP 17) on Climate Change held in South Africa.
- Participation in the Global Environment Facility Full Size Project (GEF FSP) focused on incorporating climate change impact and mangrove conservation into conservation planning, in The Exuma Cays’ Land and Sea Park.

- Participation in Caribbean Challenge (goal to protect 20% of marine and coastal resources by 2020).
- Newly enacted Forestry Act of 2010 established the Forestry Unit.
- Hosted the UNESCO Experts Meeting on the Effects of Climate Change in September 2011.
- Accession to the Protocol Concerning Protected Areas and Wildlife to the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region, 1990.
- Ban on shark fishing in territorial waters.

Public Security –

- Introduced national legislation, The Trafficking in Persons (Prevention and Suppression) Act 2008, to satisfy obligations under the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Democratic Governance –

- The establishment of an Internal Monitoring Unit for Local Government.
- The introduction of a Local Government Junior Council.
- The systematic general and specific training of elected Local Government Practitioners.

Prospective Challenges

The most challenging area for The Bahamas, with respect to the OAS Summit Process, has been coordination at the national level to formulate Bahamian positions on instruments and initiatives being negotiated, and to execute commitments agreed to at Summits. Going forward, more effort will be needed to ensure harmonization of views of all stakeholders to impact the Summit negotiations process and to implement commitments, in order to capitalize on the OAS Summit process for greatest national benefit.

Introduction

The Fifth Summit of the Americas was hosted in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, during April 17th to 19th, 2009. It was held under the Theme: "Securing Our Citizens' Future by Promoting Human Prosperity, Energy Security and Environmental Sustainability". The outcome document of the Summit was the Declaration of Commitment of Port-of-Spain which broadly outlined the principles and ideal goals of the Inter-American System as it navigated the global recession.

The 2009 Declaration of Commitment of Port-of-Spain

The Declaration is divided into a preamble and six substantive areas. The preamble of the Declaration espouses a renewed spirit of cooperation in the Hemisphere, an affirmation of principles of the OAS and the wider United Nations, and recognition of the importance of gender analysis in creating a more inclusive hemispheric, regional and local development policy. The Declaration's six (6) substantive areas focused on:

1. Promoting Human Prosperity
2. Promoting Energy Security
3. Promoting Environmental Sustainability
4. Strengthening Public Security
5. Strengthening Democratic Governance
6. Strengthening the Summit of the Americas

Summary of Summit Commitments

- *Promoting Human Prosperity*
 - Strengthening the Social Safety Net – Review of national social protection, inclusion, and poverty eradication programmes to increase efficiency; share experiences and best practices at Second Meeting of Ministers on High Level Development in Colombia, 2010.
 - Use of Information Communication Technology – Promote Sustainable Development in small and vulnerable economies by enhancing their competitiveness, human and institutional capacity-building, financial capacity, physical infrastructure, ICT and productive economic sectors such as tourism; support middle-income Countries in achieving the UN Millennium Declaration with a focus on poverty; and, improve the effectiveness of aid and development cooperation.
 - Business Climate – Promote diversified economic activity in energy, transport, tourism, communications, services, financial services and in the agricultural sector; facilitate investment and public-private partnerships in infrastructure and other relevant sectors to promote growth; promote increased corporate responsibility.
 - Protect Rights of Children and Adolescents – Protect rights of children including the rights to education, the highest standard of physical and mental health, and entitlement to special care and assistance to promote social well-being, protection and integral development.
 - Agriculture and Food Availability - Providing citizens with adequate and timely access to 'safe and nutritious' food; supporting the promotion of investment in agriculture to address issues affecting access and availability that lead to chronic malnutrition; supporting efforts of repositioning agriculture and rural issues as priorities in our national strategies.
 - Health-Related Issues - Strategies to advance toward universal access to Quality Comprehensive Health Care; reducing maternal mortality; reducing mortality in infants and children under 5 years; reducing the burden of Non-Communicable Diseases; and, increasing surveillance and reporting systems of the same; implementation of the PAHO Regional Strategy on Nutrition and Health Development 2006 to 2015; supporting efforts to address malnutrition; health regulations to prevent the spread of

- Culture - Increase efforts to promote and support culturally creative industries and activities as a part of national policies for promotion of sustainable job creation and income generation, especially for young adults; ensure child protection systems facilitate family, community and social environments that are free from violence and abuse and promote the comprehensive development of the child; in reaffirming commitment to the 2008 Declaration of Medellin on Youth and Democratic Values, expand economic opportunities, provide access to comprehensive education and training for in-demand skills, opening avenues for leadership and promoting healthy lifestyles in local youth.
- *Promoting Energy Security*
 - Aim to develop cleaner, more affordable and sustainable energy systems; promote efficient and transparent energy resource management; foster energy efficiency and conservation in public and private sectors; encourage sustainable development and production of biofuels; encourage regional energy integration projects and cross-border transportation and distribution systems; promote cleaner energy through research and development; public education campaigns.
- *Promoting Environmental Sustainability*
 - Affirm commitment to international agreements regarding sustainable development such as the Rio Declaration, the Barbados Programme Of Action (BPOA) and Mauritius Strategy; reaffirm commitment to United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); “commit to improving regional cooperation and strengthening our national technical and institutional capacity for disaster reduction, prevention, preparedness, response, rehabilitation, resilience, risk reduction, impact mitigation, and evaluation”; strengthening monitoring, surveillance, communications and early warning systems; encourage strengthening of domestic planning and zoning measures and building codes; regional cooperation in human and institutional capacity building; note efforts to consider concept of the Caribbean Sea as a Special Area, and, support for work of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).
- *Strengthening Public Security*
 - Protection from Trafficking and Sexual and Economic Exploitation – Reaffirm commitment to protecting citizens from trafficking, sexual and economic exploitation; Reaffirm will to implement the Commitment to Public Security in the Americas and 2006 Hemispheric Plan of Action against Transnational Organised Crime; continue making financial contributions and other assistance to achieve the objectives of public security in the Americas.

- Fighting Transnational Organized Crime and Illicit Trafficking in Drugs – continue to fight illicit trafficking of drugs, strengthen national capacities and will to implement the recommendations of the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism(MEM); continue to combat illicit manufacture of, and trafficking in, firearms, ammunition, explosives by among other things marking and tracing firearms, destroying excess stocks of firearms, securing and managing stockpiles and regulating firearms brokering; redouble efforts to identify, track, freeze, seize or forfeit the funds/assets that are proceeds of criminal activity; encourage OAS efforts to prepare a comprehensive hemispheric strategy on dealing with criminal gangs.
- *Strengthening Democratic Governance*
 - Renew commitment to fight poverty, inequality, hunger and social exclusion; enhance decentralization, local government and citizen participation; strengthen the fight against all forms of corruption, fraudulent practices and unethical behavior in public and private sectors and support ratification and effective enforcement of the UN Convention against Corruption; progress regarding citizens access to public information, particularly government revenues, expenditures and budgets; support drafting of a Social Charter of the Americas and its Plan of Action; conclude negotiations on draft Inter-American Convention Against Racism and all Forms of Discrimination and Tolerance; promote successful conclusion of negotiations on the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People; encourage efforts to ensure child protection systems promote the comprehensive development of the child.
- *Strengthening the Summit of the Americas*
 - Commit to convening Summit of Americas on a regular basis and no later than every three years; continue to provide annual National Reports to the OAS on the progress on mandates; continue to strengthen the mechanisms to build strategic alliances within our Countries among relevant Ministries with responsibility for implementing Summit mandates.

National Reporting on
Specific Commitments

Promoting Human Prosperity

Strengthening the Social Safety Net (Paragraph 10)

1. The **Ministry of Finance** and **Ministry of Labour and Social Development** have overseen the introduction of Unemployment Insurance in The Bahamas for the first time along with increasing budgetary allowance in 2010/2011 for social programmes. Unemployment insurance, a response to the negative externalities of the global recession, is payable up to a maximum of \$200 per week for a period of 13 weeks while a qualified individual is searching for a job.
2. The Bahamas has launched on the 20th September, 2010, the National Prescription Drug Plan which provides, free-of-charge, over 160 prescription drugs and supplies to individuals suffering from one or more of eleven chronic diseases, including breast cancer, hyper tension, heart disease and high cholesterol.
3. The Government of The Bahamas has also focused on easing the burden of persistent unemployment, which has burgeoned due to the global recession, by implementing three policies:

I. A Jump Start Programme

4. This Programme was designed to encourage and assist young persons (under thirty years) seeking to start their own small business. One and a half million (**\$1.5 million**) was earmarked to fund what is now a very successful Youth Self-Starter Programme. Additionally, seventy five hundred dollars (**\$7500.00**) was granted to qualified citizens, over thirty years of age, to launch a business on the same premise and basic procedures as the Youth Self-Starter Programme.

II. A Work Placement & Employment Exposure Programme

5. In this Programme, private sector employers were encouraged to hire unemployed persons. These persons were given the unique opportunity to gain work experience, as well as on-the-job training and skills that would enhance their employability. The Bahamas Government provided the funding for this Programme in the private sector in the form of a direct wage subsidy. All employers who engaged new employees, referred to them by the Ministry of Labour and Social Development, were entitled to a wage subsidy of a percentage of that employee's wages up to \$210.00 per week for a period of fifty two (52) weeks. The employers were required to satisfy the requirement of the Ministry that new employment was created by presenting certified proof of NIB contributions in writing from the National Insurance Board.

III. A National Job Readiness and Training Programme

6. In recent times, the Ministry of Labour and Social Development introduced A National Job Readiness and Training Programme. The budget that was allocated for this Programme was twenty five million dollars (\$25,000,000). This comprehensive and inclusive Programme helped stimulate the economy during the recession period. The Programme was designed to promote:-
 - A Service and Productivity Improvement Thrust;
 - A Retraining Thrust; and,
 - An Apprenticeship Thrust.
7. The ***Service and Productivity Improvement Thrust*** of this Programme targeted one thousand (1000) young unemployed persons. This phase was designed to equip young citizens for job interviews, with good work attitudes, and advise them on how they should present themselves in the workplace. The lack of literacy and tradable skills were also targeted during these sessions. The fifty two (52) weeks Programme included both recent graduates and persons out of high school for one year.
8. The ***Retraining Thrust*** of the Job Programme enrolled one thousand (1000) more mature citizens for a period of fifty two (52) weeks. The goal of this Programme was to upgrade and improve existing skills which these citizens may have already possessed. This thrust also encouraged persons to acquire new skills to enable them to make the transition into new fields of employment. The success of this retraining thrust was evident in the way these persons exhibited pride and dignity in their work.
9. The ***Apprenticeship Thrust*** which represented the third prong assisted one thousand (1000) persons with acquiring both basic and advance technical skills on the job. These persons were able to develop these skills by working in specified areas in the private and public sector where shortage of workers existed. These fields included but were not limited to:
 - Teachers' aide
 - After school and playground monitors
 - Neighbourhood watch workers
 - Medical technicians
 - Health assistants
 - Data entry personnel
 - Construction workers
 - Landscaping technicians
 - Information technology technicians
 - Elderly care providers

Use of Information Communication Technology (Paragraph 12)

10. The **Ministry of Finance** has orchestrated the introduction of E-Government in all Bahamian Government Ministries along with developing a centralized Department of Information Technology (DIT).
11. In an attempt to make it easier to access information and prepare the **Department of Social Services** for an electronic-based system, data bases were created in its Registry for client and administrative files and the various types of reports prepared by staff members. All clients visiting the Department were placed in a database prepared by the Receptionist. Additionally, efforts are underway for the Juvenile Unit to enter its statistics into a database.

Business Climate (Paragraph 13)

12. The **Ministry of Finance** has also introduced a New Business License Act and a New Framework for Regulating Communications in The Bahamas.

Protect Rights of Children and Adolescents (Paragraph 19)

13. The **Department of Social Services** offers parenting training to parents who are referred by the Courts or social workers.
14. While the **Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture** does not bear the brunt of responsibility for children and child protective policy and services, or child development, which rests with the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Education respectively, it has been mandated to facilitate programme(s) that provide some level of support for children.
15. Currently, this Ministry is developing a number of community centers that would provide alternative activities for children who are marginalized, unattached or generally not appropriately cared for during non-school periods. These centers are to be based in communities, and while they will be facilitated by volunteers, professional services will be provided at these sites, i.e., counseling services, community medical services, tutoring and after school programmes, recreational facilities, computer labs, etc.
16. The **Department of Youth** is prioritising the implementation of this community Programme through the appointment of an Officer to coordinate its effective development and execution. At present, a number of venues have been identified, and development programming is being scheduled.
17. One of the vehicles to ensuring the success of this Programme is the Government's recently launched "VOLUNTEER BAHAMAS" Programme. As a means of mitigating criminal and anti-social activity, the Right Honourable Prime Minister during a National Address, admonished Bahamians to volunteer their time, and to get involved in any way they could to be a mentor. During his Address, he called for the creation of a National Volunteers Register. So far, there are more than 800 persons registered, and these persons, based on their availability, will be placed at various community centers following the completion of an official vetting process.
18. While the **Ministry of Youth, Sports & Culture** does not have the legislative and policy development lead on matters related to the child, community and family matters, it is actively engaged in providing

services that foster communities that are “free from violence and abuse and [are] promoting the comprehensive development of the child”.

Agriculture and Food Availability

19. The **Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources** has indicated that with respect to:

I. Providing citizens with adequate and timely access to ‘safe and nutritious’ food (Paragraph 23)

20. The **Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources** is working with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) through a technical assistance programme to improve food safety in The Bahamas. The Project has completed several activities which include an assessment of the food safety system in The Bahamas and the drafting of a modern, *Food Safety and Quality Bill* which will replace the Food Act, 1985.

21. Additionally, the **Ministry of Labour and Social Development** has indicated that the residents of **Simpson Penn Centre for Boys** cultivate products on a small scale that allows the Government to save on spending for some vegetables.

II. Supporting the promotion of investment in agriculture to tackle issues affecting access and availability that lead to chronic malnutrition (Paragraph 24)

22. The most significant investment has been the Tree Planting Programme, which sought to increase the availability of citrus, particularly limes and tropical fruit like mango and avocado. The Ministry has also sought to improve the Packing House and Produce Exchange facilities to allow greater access to locally grown produce.

III. Supporting efforts of repositioning agriculture and rural issues as priorities in our national strategies (Paragraph 25)

23. The **Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources** has prepared a Five Year Plan for the agricultural sector which has been endorsed by the Cabinet of The Bahamas.

Health-Related Issues

24. The **Ministry of Health** has indicated that with respect to:

I. Strategies to advance toward universal access to Quality Comprehensive Health Care (Paragraph 26)

25. The Government of The Bahamas has made serious commitments through infrastructural improvements and financial support, as well as provisions for human resources to improve the health of the population while increasing access to high quality comprehensive health care.

26. Through a series of primary health care clinics located throughout the Country, residents on all of the major populated Islands (approximately 30 Islands) have direct access to primary health care services. Secondary and tertiary health care facilities are located in the major population centres of New Providence and Grand Bahama, with the major referral facility being located in the Capital City of Nassau. The Bahamas has recently embarked on a major expansion and renovation of its Government-owned tertiary health care facilities and completed plans for the introduction of new “mini-hospitals” in three of the more populated rural Islands (Family Islands). These improvements are designed to increase access to more specialised services for a greater proportion of the population.
27. The Government has maintained policies that increase access to health care, including the provision of free health care for all children and the provision of free ante-natal care for all pregnant women through Government-owned health care facilities, as well as the recent introduction of the stated National Prescription Drug Plan, designed to allow patients with select chronic conditions to procure their prescription medications, free of charge, from Government-owned as well as private-owned pharmacies throughout the Country. Antiretroviral medications have also been provided free of charge to all HIV-infected individuals since 2003 as part of a programme to decrease the mortality associated with this disease.

II. Reducing maternal mortality and mortality in infants and children under 5 years (Paragraph 27)

28. Deaths due to maternal mortality occur infrequently in The Bahamas, with numbers ranging from 1 to 4 per annum. This is as a result of the policy that all deliveries take place in a health care institution under the supervision of trained health care personnel, which is the case in approximately 99% of all deliveries. Those mortalities that do occur are reviewed to determine if processes were in place that could have prevented them.
29. The low mortality rate for those under 5 years is primarily due to conditions associated with the neo-natal period. This is a result of the increasing number of infants that are born at earlier gestational ages and very low birth weight who are surviving, in large part, due to increasingly complex technologies which act to mitigate the increased risk of complications, particularly neo-natal sepsis. While this remains a focus at the level of the tertiary health care facility, there is also increased attention being given to deaths in children under 5 years as a result of motor vehicles accidents and other causes of external injuries. In recent years, The Bahamas has instituted several initiatives aimed at decreasing injuries and deaths associated with motor vehicle accidents, including the introduction of new seat belt laws and laws that prevent children from riding unrestrained in trucks and other open vehicles. Monitoring the trends in these death rates assists in identifying further interventions to prevent these and other preventable deaths.
30. Deaths due to infectious diseases in children under 5 years are largely a thing of the past. The Expanded Programme on Immunizations (EPI) has been very successful in attaining immunization rates approaching 100% (97.5% in 2009) for infants by their first birthday. This has had an impact on not only infant deaths, but has also resulted in decreasing numbers of cases of vaccine-preventable diseases in children and adults.

III. Reducing the burden of Non-Communicable Diseases and increasing surveillance and reporting systems of the same (Paragraph 28)

31. The Bahamas began monitoring the presence and impact of Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases (CNCD) in 2005 with the first CNCD Risk Factor Survey revealing that approximately 70% of the population was overweight or obese, 7% of the population reported having been diagnosed with diabetes, and 22.9% reported being diagnosed with high blood pressure.
32. The CNCD Unit in the **Department of Public Health** is responsible for the monitoring of CNCDs in the Primary Health Care Clinics and coordinating the surveillance and reporting of CNCDs for The Bahamas. In 2010, a CNCD register was developed which is designed to gather CNCD data across all of the clinics and provide a single repository for data for analysis and decision-making purposes, as well as to assist in meeting international and regional reporting requirements. This has resulted in improved and more efficient data capture of information relating to CNCDs, the monitoring of the use of best practice protocols to provide outcome data for clinicians, and provide data and reports to improve decision-making for programme changes and implementation.
33. In 2009, The Bahamas joined the CARMEN network, a regional body aimed at increasing surveillance and networking to improve the identification of best practices in CNCD management.

IV. Implementation of the PAHO Regional Strategy on Nutrition and Health Development 2006-2015 (Paragraph 29)

34. The Nutrition Unit in the **Ministry of Health** has been actively engaged in responding to the Regional Strategy on Nutrition and Health in Development since the PAHO Directing Council passed the resolution accepting the strategy in 2006. By 2008, the Unit, key stakeholders and strategic partners had drafted a Food and Nutrition Policy that was diverse in nature and incorporated not only nutrition issues at the agricultural level, but spanned education and health issues and also brought forth policy issues at the governmental level.
35. Through consultations with strategic partners, The Bahamas has been working to strengthen the health care system, inclusive of primary and preventative health and nutrition care. The Nutrition Unit in the **Ministry of Health** is an integral part of the primary health care system and interacts with key stakeholders such as the **Ministries of Agriculture and Education**. The Unit also collaborates with the National AIDS Programme, and addresses maternal and child health care, and chronic non-communicable diseases. In addition, the Nutrition Unit provides education to the public, and assists in providing technical advice to develop health policy.
36. The Bahamas continues to work towards a strengthened information management system across the health care sector, but remains challenged at the present time with data separated by different technical platforms and limited knowledge of applying data for effective decision-making. Furthermore, surveillance for nutritional information remains limited by financial and human resource constraints.
37. The Food and Nutrition Policy, which was drafted in 2008, addresses diverse areas such as physical activity, food quality and security, nutrition related programmes and Partner Agency activities and programmes. This policy includes an action plan and a monitoring and evaluation framework to determine the effectiveness of the policy. This policy aligns with the Regional Strategy on Nutrition and Health Development.
38. Further, this Food and Nutrition Policy is designed to build and/or strengthen existing partnerships and networks to improve the nutritional status of the residents of The Bahamas. The Caribbean Food and

Nutrition Institute (CFNI) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) sub regional networks have worked together to address nutritional issues and needs, and to promote research.

V. Supporting efforts to address malnutrition (Paragraph 33, 8)

39. The **Ministry of Health** monitors indices of malnutrition in various populations throughout the Country. School Health monitors indices in children in Grades 1, 6 and 10. The Maternal and Child Health Programme monitors indices in infants, children and ante-natal women. The chronic non-communicable disease Programme monitors indices in CNCD patients. The Programmes that address malnutrition span a number of national Programmes and involve key Partners and Agencies to correct nutritional problems in these populations.
40. Social programmes that address nutritional needs cover infants through to the elderly, including those in institutional settings. The School Lunch Programme brings healthy meals to children from poor and lower-income families. Of greater concern are the numbers of persons that are nutritionally challenged by the consumption of foods high in saturated fats and sugars with poor nutritional value, resulting in increasing levels of overweight and obesity. School health programmes have identified an increasing number of overweight and obese children upon entry into school, which is increasing yearly and proportionately within cohorts as they age through Grade 10. The focus on school gardens, by which to increase the intake of fresh fruit and vegetables by students, requires continued commitment and further integration into the school systems throughout the Country to expand their availability to all students.
41. The main national thrust to address malnutrition is undertaken by the **Ministry of Health**. However, the **Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources** has supported the Garden Based Learning Programme of the **Ministry of Education**, which was supported by the FAO. Additionally, some schools were provided with greenhouses to assist with agricultural programmes.
42. The **Ministry of Labour and Social Development** has indicated, concerning nutrition, that the chef at the Simpson Penn and Willie-Mae Pratt Centres has been able to revise the menus for the residents with the aid of the nutritionist at the Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre, thus providing more nutritious and balanced meals.

VI. Health regulations to prevent the spread of communicable and non-communicable diseases (Paragraph 34)

43. The Government of The Bahamas, through the **Ministry of Health**, the **Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources** and the **Ministry of the Environment**, along with other key partners and stakeholders, have strengthened the national response and core capacity to meet requirements for the implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005). The Country has met the challenges posed by the influenza pandemic in 2009, a dengue outbreak in 2011, and the risk of the importation of cholera in 2011.
44. Tuberculosis control has resulted in a decrease in the annual number of new cases and its reversal in connection with HIV/AIDS deaths. This has been as a result of a strengthened health care system that has come about partially as a response to the revised International Health Regulations.

45. The Bahamas continues to face unique challenges. The risk of importation of potentially contaminated food items remains ever present, as there is little local production of food and the Country relies almost exclusively on the importation of food items. Trans-shipment of containers will continue to pose a risk for the importation of dangerous substances. However, multi-Agency cooperation and programmes are addressing this risk, and thereby building capacity within the Country.

VII. Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of halting and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015 (Paragraph 35)

46. The Bahamas has been in the forefront of HIV/AIDS prevention since the onset of the epidemic. As early as 1985, The Bahamas focused on prevention messages as a means of combating transmission. While prevalence rates in this small Island Nation approach 2% of the general population, The Bahamas has made great strides in reducing transmission rates in selected populations. The Bahamas began offering antiretroviral therapy to HIV-infected pregnant women, free of charge, in 1995, when the AZT studies demonstrated the benefits of ante-natal therapy. More recently, the transmission rate has dropped to 0 for women taking advantage of ante-natal antiretroviral therapy (ART). The challenges that we now face include pregnant women who opt not to receive ante-natal care and thus do not receive ART prior to delivery, and, a highly mobile migrant population that does not present for ante-natal care and also does not receive ART to prevent mother to child transmission.
47. The Bahamas has continued to see a decrease in deaths associated with HIV disease since the introduction of ART for all HIV infected individuals who require treatment. The occurrence of HIV-associated deaths has now shifted to a more mature population, with the largest percentage occurring in the 45 to 64 years age group, highlighting the benefits of ART for long-term survival with HIV disease.
48. With free universal access to ART, persons are living longer lives. The decentralization of HIV health care services has been in the planning stages for several years, and in 2011, the **Department of Public Health's** Primary Health Care clinics began routinely managing HIV infected patients. This shift from a more centralized to a more decentralized programme will allow for an increase in access to both health care services and ART.
49. The use of data to drive the design of new programmes and the refinement of existing programmes is essential in continuing to improve the outcomes for this select population. The **National AIDS Programme** is currently strengthening its information management strategy to improve patient care, monitor outcomes and use data to inform decisions and respond to regional and international reporting requirements.
50. The Bahamas has also recently hosted and cosponsored the *2011 Caribbean HIV Conference: Strengthening Evidence To Achieve Sustainable Action*, in November 2011, which was aimed at sharpening the regional focus on HIV, as the Caribbean has the world's second highest adult HIV prevalence.

Culture-related Issues

I. Increase efforts to promote and support cultural creative industries and activities as a part of national policies for promotion of sustainable job creation and income generation, especially for young adults (Paragraph 44).

51. The Government of The Bahamas, in July 2007, envisioned a cadre of Bahamian young people as being a critical resource to achieve the socio-economic development through the establishment of a network of good business enterprises and contingency planning for sustainable development. To that end, the Self-Starters Programme was established as a mechanism for the creation and/or development of small and medium business enterprises through a mini-grant business programme for Bahamian youth, ages 18 to 30 years. The Government's initial budgetary commitment to this initiative was a capital fund of \$1 Million Dollars per annum.

52. The Programme's objectives are to:

- i. foster the concept of self-employment and the spirit of entrepreneurship, thus reducing unemployment among young Bahamians, 18 to 30 years;
- ii. encourage wealth creation and the increase of Bahamian business ownership;
- iii. promote small enterprise development among youth through the facilitation of easy-to-access start-up capital;
- iv. facilitate training in interpersonal development, business skills, management and marketing techniques and procedures; and,
- v. foster the further development of Bahamian businesses and Bahamian products necessary for a growing market.

53. Through the establishment of this Programme young Bahamians were encouraged to be innovative with their business development plans, and especially, were encouraged to develop businesses that produce authentic Bahamian craft goods. According to a recent report by the Self-Starter Unit of the **Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture**, some 28% (Crafts – 7%, Music and entertainment – 4%, Food – 13%, and Promotions – 4%) of recipients produced businesses that represented Bahamian craft, foods, arts, promotions and entertainment. As such, cultural creative industries by Bahamian youth, since 2007, to the present, have benefited from the Government's investment of \$1,192,887.80, out of a total investment of \$4,260,313.56 (Comprehensive Report, SelfStarters Programme, 2011).

54. Further, the Government is currently establishing ways to promote the sustainability of these types of businesses generally through the proper management of its cultural entities; i.e., the Nassau Straw Market which now has a new Management System. A part of the role of the new Management is to ensure that only authentic Bahamian crafts goods are allowed to be sold from the market.

II. In reaffirming commitment to the 2008 Declaration of Medellin on Youth and Democratic Values, expanding economic opportunities providing access to comprehensive education and training for in-demand skills, opening avenues for leadership and promoting healthy lifestyles in local youth (Paragraph 39).

55. **Economic Opportunities** – As aforementioned, the Government has developed the Self-Starter Programme, specifically developed for Bahamian Youth, ages 18 to 30 years.

56. **Opening Avenues for Leadership** - The Bahamas Government has always been open to providing opportunities for youth participation in Governance. Specifically, these opportunities are made available through the Government's National Youth Ambassador's Programme and the National Youth Parliament Initiative.

i. Youth Ambassadors Programme

57. The Mission of the National Youth Ambassadors Programme is to expose and showcase a cadre of Bahamian Youth through participation in international and local development strategies.

58. The Objectives of the Programme are to:

- a. Service the bilateral partnerships forged with international, hemispheric and regional organizations for the promotion of youth development agenda;
- b. Serve as an arm of Bahamian youth in "Youth-in-Governance" strategies;
- c. Serve as a personal development opportunity for Bahamian youth, ages 18 to 26 years;
- d. Foster the recognition of Bahamian youth perspectives in bilateral negotiations/talks;
- e. Secure technical and financial resources for youth development initiatives; and,
- f. Secure the presence of Bahamian youth in every aspect of Country development.

59. The Government of The Bahamas, every three years appoints six (6) deserving young persons to serve as Youth Ambassadors. There are four (4) designations to which these individuals are appointed. These include: National Youth Ambassador to the United Nations, National Youth Ambassador to the Organization of American States, Commonwealth Regional Youth Caucus Representatives, Deputy Commonwealth Regional Youth Caucus Representative, and National Youth Ambassador (one male and one female) to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

60. National Youth Ambassadors are young persons who are given instruments of appointment formalizing a partnership with The Bahamas Government. They have a responsibility to service the youth agenda of the relevant international, hemispheric and regional organizations to which they area accredited. In addition to having a mandate and platform, these Ambassadors are provided with financial and technical resources to coordinate specific programmes. Our current Youth Ambassadors are:

- a. **Mr. Demathio B. Forbes**, National Youth Ambassador to the Caribbean Community and Dean of the Bahamas National Youth Ambassador Corps;
- b. **Ms. Christina Smith**, National Youth Ambassador to the United Nations;

- c. **Ms. Crystal Alexander**, Commonwealth Regional Youth Caucus Representative;
- d. **Mr. Audirio V. Sears**, Commonwealth Deputy Regional Youth Caucus Representative;
- e. **Ms. DeAndra V. Cartwright**, National Youth Ambassador to the Organization of American States; and,
- f. **Ms. Ashley R. Sturup**, National Youth Ambassador to the Caribbean Community.

61. These Ambassadors were officially appointed by His Excellency, Sir. Arthur Foulkes, Governor General, at Government House on February 3, 2010. Currently our CARICOM and Commonwealth Youth Ambassadors have been accredited to their respective Organizations. The **Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture** is working towards establishing accreditation for our United Nations and Organization of American States representatives. In the mean time, they are working inline with the mandates of the development agendas of their Organizations, i.e. the United Nations and it's Millennium Development Goals; and, the Organisation of American States' 2008 Declaration of Medellin on Youth and Democratic Values.

ii. National Youth Parliament

62. Since 1997, the **Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture** has organised, on an annual basis, a National Youth Parliament which takes place in National Youth Month, in the House of Assembly (Lower House) of the Bahamas Parliament. Recently, an additional component of sessions of the Senate (Upper House) was implemented where young leaders (i.e. Youth Ambassadors, Civic Organization Leaders, Political Parties Youth Arm Leaders, etc.) are invited to discuss the topics debated by both Houses.

63. This initiative provides an opportunity for more than sixty (60) youths, ages 18 to 30 years, to have the opportunity to voice their concerns regarding any active agenda/topic in the Country. Unofficial discussions presently suggest Government endorsement of electing youth parliamentarians who would meet on a regular (monthly or quarterly) basis. The Ministry has undertaken a study of successful youth parliamentary systems in the Region to determine the form it should take in The Bahamas.

64. **Promoting Healthy Lifestyles in Local Youth** - While the Ministry of Youth does not have the legislative and policy development lead on matters related to health and lifestyle development and their promotion, they have been doing their part to ensure that sexual reproductive health and drug abuse education are promoted through an ongoing partnership with regional and local entities. Partnering with the Ministry of Health has been a key focus for the new Programmes during the fiscal year.

65. Some of the key initiatives of the Department of Youth, include:

- a. **The CARICOM Youth Ambassadors/Pan American Partnership against HIV/AIDS (PANCAP) Anti-HIV/AIDS Programme** for youth which has been taking place for the past six years. This Programme analyses proposals that are then executed by viable youth entities, who receive mini-grants for approved projects. A task force headed by

Youth Ambassadors and technocrats, manages, and guides programme implementation through the entire process. Programmes range from three (3) to eight (8) months, and are executed in rural and inner-city communities. This Programme, since 2008, has ran three (3) cycles, with seven (7) successful projects in the Bain and Grants Town, Fox Hill, the Market Street, Grove, and East Street Communities, impacting over 2,087 persons.

- b. **CARICOM Second Chance Risk Reducing Workshop** is another initiative for youth that provides social development counseling and training, coupled with skills development workshops to provide an alternative to anti-social behavior. This is a three day workshop that is sponsored by the CARICOM Secretariat and facilitated by CARICOM Youth Ambassadors, and professionals in counseling and craft-making. Also involved with the execution of the Programme were the Bahamas Agricultural and Industrial Corporation, the Ministry of Education School Psychology Unit, the Adolescent Health Care Unit of the Ministry of Health, and the Royal Bahamas Police Force. Two sessions have already taken place, sponsored by the CARICOM Secretariat. The necessary partnerships and other structures are in place, and the Department of Youth proposes another cycle of this project in the 2012-2013 budget cycle, as an activity of the Youth Ambassador's Corps.
- c. **Commonwealth Youth Financial Literacy Programme** was designed by the Economic Affairs Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat to promote healthy money management lifestyles. This initiative has been supplied with relevant course material, and training modules and is conducted by the Secretariat twice annually. The Programme is volunteer-driven, and designed to be coordinated by Commonwealth Youth Caucus Representatives. The Programme is in its preparatory stage, and is proposed for execution in the new fiscal year, 2012 - 2013.

66. Other healthy lifestyles promotional programmes are implemented by: the Adolescent Health Education Division and the HIV/AIDS Secretariat of the Ministry of Health, The Bahamas Red Cross Society, The AIDS Foundation of The Bahamas, The School Psychological Unit of the Ministry of Education, the Drug Enforcement Unit of the Royal Bahamas Police Force, and the Bahamas Reef and Environmental Education Foundation among others. It is recommended that consultations amongst these Agencies, on this item, be institutionalised.

Promoting Energy Security (Paragraphs 45-56)

67. The Government of The Bahamas established the **National Energy Policy Committee (NEPC)** in 2008, consisting of both public and private sector stakeholders to achieve the desired multi-stakeholder approach to addressing the Country's need for energy.
68. To date the NEPC has produced two reports in efforts to finalise the National Energy Action Plan which will focus on the development and implementation of sustainable energy opportunities. The first report produced in 2008 proposed: redesigning low cost housing units to be more energy and water efficient; reducing public sector energy usage by 15%; developing indicators to monitor the economic impact of national energy expenditures; designing and implementing a nationwide education program on energy and water conservation; assessing use of Leadership in Environmental and Energy Design (LEED) for public buildings; and, review regulatory frameworks on energy security for The Bahamas.
69. The Bahamas has also implemented several initiatives which have led to the reduction of customs duties on energy efficient equipment and appliances; fuel efficient vehicles; and, renewable energy systems. The Plan proposes steps such as further reductions in customs duties to encourage the purchase of energy efficient building materials.
70. The Government of The Bahamas launched, in April 2011, its National Programme to promote sustainable energy and energy conservation, not only in local business, but also in Bahamian households via compact fluorescent light bulbs, solar water heaters and photovoltaic systems.

Promoting Environmental Sustainability (Paragraphs 57-67)

71. Internationally, The Bahamas actively participates in various climate change negotiations to advance the important objectives of stabilizing greenhouse gas emissions and protecting climate systems. Most recently, The Bahamas participated at the 17th UN Durban Conference (COP 17) on Climate Change held in South Africa where The Bahamas affirmed her commitment to capping global emissions and the necessity to increase funding to developing Countries for adaptation and mitigation efforts.
72. Locally, the National Climate Change Committee fosters public awareness on climate change and is currently preparing the Second National Communication.
73. The National Biodiversity Committee encourages public understanding of the importance of the conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity, and facilitates the maintenance and use of local knowledge.
74. The Bahamas is a participating Country in the Caribbean Challenge, which is a regional initiative that aims to meet the goals of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas under the Convention on Biological Diversity, by establishing 20% of coastal and marine habitats as protected areas by 2020. The Bahamas Government pledged \$2 million dollars for national efforts towards this initiative.
75. A newly enacted Forestry Act in 2010, established the Forestry Unit and focuses on the protection of trees, management of forest reserves and the conservation of forests in The Bahamas.
76. The Bahamas is strengthening measures for proper planning and zoning through the revamped Planning and Subdivisions Act. The Act attempts to assure that in approving development, key components of the environment such as wetlands, sand dunes, sensitive lands, and structures of public or culture interest, are protected.
77. The Bahamas has also engaged in sustainable infrastructure projects, enhanced her policies protecting fragile ecosystems and contributes to strengthening regional capacity on climate change adaptation and mitigation solutions for the Caribbean.
78. The Government of The Bahamas has undertaken the major task of further infrastructural development in the Country with the aim of sustaining natural resources. An example would be the Road Improvement Program, which was designed based on a sustainable approach and with a focus on helping New Providence Island withstand the impact of Climate Change, such as flooding, and costal erosion along the roads.
79. The Bahamas is also dealing with Climate Change, through partnerships, and education and awareness. Most recently, in July, 2011, The Bahamas hosted a Regional Workshop for Coral Reef Managers, in conjunction with the Australian Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA). The Workshop focused on the vulnerability of coral reefs to Climate Change, and aimed to answer questions about why and how they must be protected. Forty (40) reef managers from eleven (11) Caribbean Countries participated in the Workshop.
80. The **Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resource** has also joined other Countries like Palau, Honduras and the Maldives in banning shark fishing in their waters, along with the sale, import or

export of shark products. This in effect creates a more than 200,000 sq km sanctuary for sharks within The Bahamas territorial waters.

81. The Nature Conservancy, Bahamas Environment, Scientific, and Technology (BEST) Commission, Bahamas National Trust (BNT) and the Department of Marine Resources are participating in the Global Environment Facility Full Size Project (GEF FSP) focused on incorporating Climate Change and mangrove conservation into conservation planning, in The Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park. This GEF FSP is a five year Project, developed in part to help achieve The Bahamas' goal of twenty percent (20%) conservation of her near-shore marine resources by 2020. The Project will also focus on tourism impact on coral reef health.
82. In September, 2011, The Bahamas hosted the UNESCO Experts Meeting on the effects of Climate Change where approximately 85 participants, inclusive of five Heads of State, national education representatives, curriculum development experts, representatives of school and education networks, scientists and Climate Change experts focused on Climate Change education for sustainable development. A key goal of the conference was to develop a road map to guide and promote education as a vehicle to enhance adaptation to Climate Change in the context of sustainable development.
83. In 2008, The Bahamas acceded to the Protocol Concerning Protected Areas and Wildlife to the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region, 1990.

Strengthening Public Security

Protection from trafficking and sexual and economic exploitation (Paragraphs 18, 70)

84. The Government of The Bahamas has introduced national legislation – The Trafficking in Persons (Prevention and Suppression) Act 2008 - to satisfy obligations under the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The legislation provides for appropriate services for the victims of trafficking, including psychological counseling and medical and legal assistance.
85. From mid-2009 to the present, senior staff of the **Ministry of National Security, Social Development** and law enforcement Agencies participated jointly in conferences, workshops and seminars sponsored by international agencies concerned with human trafficking matters.
86. Furthermore, a staff member from the **Ministry of Labour and Social Development** attended a workshop on human trafficking in New Providence and assisted in the training that was held in Grand Bahama.
87. The **Ministry of National Security** has contributed information to the Government for the United States Annual Trafficking In Persons (TIP) Report and coordinated an Inter-Ministry Committee to review the report and make recommendations for consideration by the Government.

Fighting transnational organized crime and illicit trafficking in drugs (Paragraphs 70-72, 30)

88. The Bahamas National Anti-Drugs Secretariat (NADs) has advised that The Bahamas fully supports the position taken by the OAS on transnational organized crime and the global drug trade.
89. The Government of The Bahamas continues to actively participate in regional and hemispheric Bodies such as CARICOM and OAS/CICAD where one of the primary objectives is to address the problem of drugs in all of the thematic areas.
90. The Government of The Bahamas has signed and/or ratified, and continues to adhere to all major Conventions relating to drugs, corruption, firearms trafficking, terrorism, etc.
91. The Government of The Bahamas established a national entity (National Anti – Drug Secretariat) to coordinate the efforts of all those Agencies and Organizations within the Country that are involved in drug control activities.
92. The Government of The Bahamas continues to conduct scientific studies aimed at determining the prevalence of drug use and abuse among key sectors of the population.
93. The Government of The Bahamas established a public/private sector Project (Inner City Transformation Project) with the objective of going into the inner cities to identify the root causes of the problems that create involvement in drugs trafficking, use and abuse, and criminality, with an aim to addressing the problem in a holistic manner.

94. The **Ministry of Labour and Social Services** has indicated that, until recently, the Staff at Her Majesty's Prison facilitated group sessions with males who have an association with or used illegal drugs. The staff in the Health Social Services Division of **the Department of Social Services** facilitates group sessions in drug rehabilitation on a needs basis for the residents at the Simpson Penn Center.

Strengthening Democratic Governance

Local Government (Paragraph 79)

95. An Act to make provisions for Local Government in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, the Local Government Act, was assented to on 5 March, 1996, and came into force on 25 June, 1996. The Act allows for the division of The Bahamas into a number of districts so that governmental services may be administered locally and thus improves effectiveness of the bureaucracy within the community.
96. Local Government, as a component of democracy within The Bahamas, is viewed as too important for unplanned growth. In the Family Islands it assists with the economic development, improves the quality of life of our citizens and encourages residents to participate in the decision-making at the community level.
97. According to the **Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs**, some of the Local Government services relate to general health and sanitation, including street cleaning, cleaning of drains, road verges and ditches, and collection and removal of refuse. To ensure compliance with The Business Licence Act, 2010, commenced 1 January, 2011 and The Planning and Subdivision Act, 2010, also commenced 1 January, 2011, the Local Government Act has been amended in order to enhance the level of governmental services for residents and visitors.
98. The **Department of Lands and Local Government** has undertaken a number of strategies aimed at strengthening democratic governance, namely, the establishment of an Internal Monitoring Unit, the introduction of a Local Government Junior Council and the systematic general and specific training of elected Local Government Practitioners.

I. Internal Monitoring Unit

99. The Internal Monitoring Unit (IMU) was established in January, 2009, to assist Local Government Councils in exercising the highest level of fiscal prudence.
100. The Auditor General conducts periodic audit of various districts' accounts and provides detailed reports of deficiencies and/or omissions. However, it was determined that an intermediary unit, created to assist with improving the management of the accounts, would decrease the number of audit queries.
101. The Internal Monitoring Unit's overarching goal of enhancing accountability, transparency and efficiency has the following objectives:
 - To oversee the execution of all budgetary and financial matters related to Local Government Districts;
 - To ensure that the District Council and Administrator's Office manage their financial and human resources and other assets under their control in a manner consistent with the Local Government Act and other established policies and guidelines for Local Government;

- To evaluate, on an ongoing and systematic basis, the performance of individual Districts in pursuit of their statutory and policy obligations;
- To regularly report on the collective and individual performance of Local Government Districts on matters related to the accountable use of public resources;
- To investigate and report immediately to relevant Authorities, any actual or perceived irregularities in the management of Local Government finances or breaches in administrative guidelines;
- To ensure that Local Government record keeping and reports are sufficient and appropriate to permit successful audits by the Auditor General and other external auditors; and
- To make recommendations to the relevant Authorities on methods for improving the administration of Local Government either in specific Districts or on a systematic basis.

102. The Unit's successes within the various Districts led to the Financial Secretary requesting that it become a Department within the Ministry of Finance. Hence, in February, 2012, the monitoring functions of the Department of Lands and Local Government's IMU, along with its assigned staff, became a part of the Ministry of Finance's Family Island Internal Audit Section.

II. Local Government Junior Council Programme

103. The introduction of the Local Government Junior Council Programme is viewed as a critical avenue through which Bahamian youth can be engaged to fully recognize the importance of their commitment and investment as leaders in a future Bahamas to influence our development.

104. The Programme's goal of building a strong cadre of young people with Local Government experience has the following objectives:

- a. Capacity building of potential candidates - Enhance the skills and talents of young people for leadership within their local communities to increase the pool of candidates for future Local Government Elections;
- b. Encourage citizens' participation in the decision-making process of government - Through civics and personal development instructions, students' (and their communities) understanding of governance in The Bahamas and what it means to be Bahamian will be improved; and,
- c. Encourage greater womens' participation in Local Government.

III. Training of Elected Local Government Practitioners

105. The goal of the various training interventions is to build capacity and provide practitioners with the skills and knowledge necessary to strengthen leadership roles within the various Districts. Objectives include, but are not limited to:

- Providing an opportunity to increase practitioners' understanding of new and amended legislation impacting upon the delivery of services in the Family Islands;

- Equipping practitioners with the knowledge and skills necessary to strengthen the participation in the various democratic processes, thereby providing more efficient services in a contracting economy;
- Making practitioners aware of the role of international and local Agencies in energizing economic development; and
- Providing the venue for networking of practitioners.

106. The **Department of Lands and Local Government** encouraged the establishment of the Bahamas Association of Local Government Authorities (BALGA). The Association is comprised of Chief and Deputy Chief Councilors from the thirty-two (32) Districts. It has a Constitution which identifies its purpose, mission statement and objectives, which are:

- **Purpose:** To make representation to the Central Government on behalf of Local Government Districts while enhancing the Council's delivery of effective services through best practices.
- **Mission Statement:** Building a Country through the empowerment of a people by the implementation of an orderly system of government and collective participation.
- **Objectives :**
 - To assist in strengthening the partnership between Central and Local Government and relationship between Local Government and its constituents;
 - To strengthen the partnership between the Department of Local Government, the Bahamas Association of Local Government Authorities (B.A.L.G.A), the Caribbean Association of Local Government Authorities (C.A.L.G.A), while promoting a system of orderly local governance;
 - To partner with regional Local Government Associations to develop a mutually beneficial regional policy and frame-work for co-operation;
 - To encourage the strictest adherence to the Financial Administration & Audit Act, 2010 and the Local Government Act, 1996 of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.
 - To have The Bahamas Association of Local Government Authorities registered with the Commonwealth Local Government Forum - London, England;
 - To assist in and promote the continued education of Local Government practitioners;
 - To maintain the capacity to influence the Central Government's implementation policies and legislative amendments regarding the continued development of Local Government throughout The Bahamas;
 - To assist and partner with Councils in the creation of social programs that promote the economic growth and development of Local Government Districts;
 - To liaise with Central Government on any and all matters impacting the Council's delivery of effective services to Local Government Districts;
 - To enlist, train, employ or make use of such personnel as are necessary for the purposes of accomplishing the objectives of the Association;
 - To embark on any number of fundraising drives for the purposes of conducting all financial transactions on behalf of the Association;

- To assist schools, youth and other social organizations through grants and other contributions in order to facilitate improvement to the social fiber of society at the local level; and,
- To encourage Island-specific associations in cases where there are multi-local Government Districts (i.e. Andros, Grand Bahama), so that regional strength is increased.

Civil Society (Paragraph 79) & Local Government (Paragraphs 80-85)

I. Civil Society access to governance structures

107. The Office of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Legal Affairs have indicated that, with respect to Civil Society, the following legislative reforms have been undertaken:

- The Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Act, 2011, commenced 29 July, 2011. Following the passage of the 2011 Act, the accessibility of Civil Society to governance structures has improved significantly. This Act allows citizens who are living overseas to engage in the paramount political process by having the ability to vote at a number of designated locations outside of The Bahamas.
- The Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Act, 2012, has completed the Parliamentary process but is in the final stages prior to Assent and publication. This Act will enable the participation of International Bodies to serve as observers during the electoral process.

II. Fighting corruption

108. In an effort to further strengthen the fight against crime particularly as it relates to the elimination of corruption, The Bahamas ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Convention), on 26 September, 2008. The Office of the Attorney General is reviewing the Penal Code in preparation to draft the necessary amendments in order to criminalize the participation in an organized criminal group, as required by the Palermo Convention.

109. To further strengthen the elimination of corruption, The Bahamas has ratified the following Protocols, on 26 September, 2008:

- a. Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air;
- b. Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components; and,
- c. Protocol against the Trafficking in Persons.

110. The Government of The Bahamas has strengthened the legislative agenda through the passage and amendment of several pieces of legislation in order to eliminate corruption in the public and private sectors.

- a. The Customs Management (Amendment) Act, 2009, became law 1 July, 2009, and The Customs Management (Amendment) Act, 2011, became law 5 December, 2011,

- b. The Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) (Amendment) Act, 2009, became law 4 January, 2010. This Act allows for ease of cooperation between The Bahamas and other jurisdictions, especially as it relates to the proceeds of crime, including elements of corruption, criminal enterprise and transnational crime.
- c. The Business Licence Act, 2010, which became law 1 January, 2011, and The Business Licence (Amendment) Act, 2011, which became law 1 January 2012, are model pieces of legislation which created an advanced system for conducting business throughout The Bahamas. These Acts incorporate the ‘Know Your Customer’ rules and hence have improved transparency within the business and economic market.

III. Enhancing human and political rights

111. The Government of The Bahamas has enhanced the human and political rights in society through its legislative agenda via passage of the following Acts:

- a. The Trafficking in Persons (Prevention and Suppression) Act, 2008, became law on 10 December, 2008. This Act seeks to prevent the illegal trafficking of persons and has created a criminal offence for persons contravening the law.
- b. The Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence (Amendment) Act, 2008, became law on 22 December, 2008, which seeks to assist victims of sexual offences and domestic violence by enhancing the punishment for offenders.
- c. The Mental Health (Amendment) Act, 2008, became law on 14 September, 2008, which seeks to assist persons with mental illness, especially as it relates to their personal care and the care of their assets.
- d. The Firearms (Amendment) Act, 2011, became law on 4 November, 2011. This legislation seeks to increase the penalties for illegal possession and control of firearms. It is anticipated that the legislation should assist in deterring persons from possessing and utilizing firearms, except for legitimate purposes.
- e. The Good Samaritan (Food Donation) Act, 2010, became law on 28 June, 2010, and allows for improvement in the donation of food for under-privileged people, hence enabling more donations and also improving the transparency of persons serving as donors. In this regard, conditions should be improved for persons to overcome poverty and minimize social exclusion.

Strengthening the Summit of the Americas (Paragraphs 89-91)

112. The Bahamas has participated in all Summits since the Miami Meeting in 1994. This continued participation has given The Bahamas, like many Member Countries, opportunities to assess areas where the Summit process can be strengthened. There remain factors that are both exogenous and endogenous to Member States which inhibit the success of the Summit of The Americas.
113. While the Summits are being held on a regular basis, every three years, Member States, including The Bahamas, are not meeting their commitment as it relates to providing annual National Reports to the OAS on progress made on mandates. Furthermore, the successful implementation of the gambit of Declaration commitments continues to remain tenuous. Within The Bahamas, these issues stem from the fact that inter-Ministerial coordination in policy implementation at the national level remains a major challenge.
114. With respect to exogenous factors, there has been insufficient accounting for the capacity and cost of implementing Summit commitments, particularly for smaller and less well-off Countries. In this regard, greater emphasis must be placed on the costing of commitments during negotiations in preparation for the Summit. Otherwise, the result may be Declarations that fail to move much beyond goal-setting. There must also be greater harmonization of interests during the negotiation process to ensure that the final Declaration serves the needs and respects the contexts of all Member States, as opposed to reflecting the wishes of some Member States.

Conclusion

I. Assessment of Bahamas' responses to implementation of the commitments

115. The Government of The Bahamas has made significant moves to implement commitments concerning a variety of policy areas:

Social Safety Net –

- Launched in September 2010 – the National Prescription Drug Plan
- Unemployment Insurance for 13 weeks.
- Unemployment Work Programmes - Jump Start, Work Placement & Employment Exposure, National Job Readiness and Training.

Youth –

- Launch of "VOLUNTEER BAHAMAS" Programme in October 2011.

Health –

- Major expansion and renovation of Government owned tertiary health care facilities and completed plans for the introduction of new "mini-hospitals" in three of the more populated rural Islands (Family Islands)
- Draft Food and Nutrition Policy in 2008
- In 2011 the Department of Public Health Primary Health Care clinics began routinely managing HIV infected patients to allow increased access to health care services.

Culture -

- SelfStarters Programme resulted in 28% of recipients of business grants producing businesses that reflected and promoted Bahamian craft, foods, arts, promotions and entertainment.

Environment –

- The Government of The Bahamas launched in April 2011, its National Programme to Promote Sustainable Energy and Energy Conservation with compact fluorescent light bulbs, solar water heaters and photovoltaic systems.
- Participation at the 17th UN Durban Conference (COP 17) on Climate Change held in South Africa.

- Participation in the Global Environment Facility Full Size Project (GEF FSP) focused on incorporating climate change impact and mangrove conservation into conservation planning, in The Exuma Cays' Land and Sea Park.
- Participation in the Caribbean Challenge (goal to protect 20% of marine and coastal resources by 2020).
- Newly enacted Forestry Act in 2010 established the Forestry Unit.
- Hosted the UNESCO Experts Meeting on the Effects of Climate Change in September, 2011.
- Accession to the Protocol Concerning Protected Areas and Wildlife to the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region, 1990
- Ban on shark fishing in territorial waters.

Public Security –

- Introduced national legislation - The Trafficking in Persons (Prevention and Suppression) Act 2008 - to satisfy obligations under the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Democratic Governance –

- the establishment of an Internal Monitoring Unit for Local Government.
- the introduction of a Local Government Junior Council.
- the systematic general and specific training of elected Local Government Practitioners.
- Ratification of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Convention).
- Amendments to the: Parliamentary Elections; Customs Management; Criminal Justice; Business Licence Act (s).
- Enacting of the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence, Mental Health, Firearms, Good Samaritan and The Trafficking in Persons (Prevention and Suppression) Act (s) in 2008.

II. Challenges The Bahamas faces in implementation

116. The Bahamas has faced issues with sustained coordination across the breadth of Government Agencies for implementation of Summit Commitments and reporting on their implementation in an expeditious manner. Going forward, the development of an implementation committee, or formal delegation for follow-up to an existing inter-Agency Body, to coordinate the execution of commitments in a timely and cohesive manner would increase The Bahamas' ability to carry out commitments and report on them in a satisfactory manner. Such a committee should be inter-Ministerial in nature in order

