

PRESS STATEMENT

PRESS STATEMENT

We warmly welcome the statement of Deputy Prime Minister *Pratt* at the Opening Ceremony for the National Anti-Drug 'Plan Workshop on January 30th reconfirming The Bahamas' commitment to fight the scourge of illegal drug trafficking and use, pledging full use of resources in this vitally important fight, and her pledge that the Bahamas will adopt a national anti-drug strategy this year. We, along with the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission, have been urging the Bahamian Government to adopt such a plan for several years, The Embassy's position was reiterated most recently at the December 6 Bahamas-US. Narcotics Joint Task Force Conference.

We share the Deputy Prime Minister's frustration with the length of time that the asset forfeiture procedure takes since modernizing and expediting this process would make additional assets available to the Commonwealth to fight drugs. We look forward to the Deputy Prime Minister's staff preparing a mutually satisfactory plan to use some \$1.2 million of the drug money seized during joint investigations by U.S. and Bahamian law enforcement agencies. Such seized assets are a valuable and fitting source of support to supplement taxpayers' funding for the Royal Bahamas Police Force Drug Enforcement Unit

We also share the Deputy Prime Minister's calls, made on other occasions, for reform of the bail process so that alleged traffickers and other violent criminals are not returned to the streets to continue their criminal ways.

We also welcome the Deputy Prime Minister's statement that she will initiate a full, complete, and transparent investigation of the 1992 "Inagua" incident involving the alleged theft of cocaine seized by the Royal Bahamas Defence Force. For a number of years the failure to resolve this worrisome issue has been the subject of discussions between the Embassy, the Royal Bahamas Defence Force commander, senior officials of the National Security Ministry, and the Foreign Ministry.

We would like to reiterate that the United States Embassy has repeatedly stated that it would welcome those members of the Defense Forces into the war on drugs who are willing to place duty, honor, and country above all else. We have full confidence in the honesty, professionalism, and integrity of the institution and men and women of the Royal Bahamas Defence Force. We continue to believe that there must also be established a swift, sure, and just administrative process for resolving allegations of impropriety against those individuals involved in anti-drug efforts. Such procedures would protect their honor and their good names as well as remove those who would succumb to the blandishments of drug traffickers.

Allegations of "discrimination" against the Royal Bahamas Defence Force in the allocation of United States assistance are unfounded. United States law requires that U.S. International Narcotics Control-funded equipment - such as fast response boats -

PRESS STATEMENT

be used for counter-narcotics purposes. While the Royal Bahamas Defence Force heretofore has been unwilling to accept this restriction, nevertheless it continues to benefit from other forms of United States Government assistance, such as International Military Education and Training and Foreign Military Financing.