

**MESSAGE by His Excellency Sir Arthur Foulkes
GCMG Governor General Commonwealth of The Bahamas**

on

MAJORITY RULE DAY To be read by Principals

**Thursday, 10th January 2013 at all Public Schools in Special
Assemblies 9:00 a.m.**

My Dear Young Bahamians:

Today, January 10th, is Majority Rule Day and we mark this date as perhaps the most important day in our history since the abolition of slavery in the Colony of The Bahamas on August 1st, 1834. On the 10th of January 1967 the will of the majority of Bahamians was freely expressed in a general election based on universal adult suffrage where all men and women of adult age, regardless of property qualifications could vote to determine who would govern them. Majority Rule Day memorializes what was, in a sense, a Second Emancipation, since that was the day when people of African descent who made up the majority of the population of The Bahamas were enabled, for the first time, to form the government of the country. That event removed the last psychological shackles from the minds of many; it shattered false notions of superiority or inferiority; it initiated the fulfillment of the promise of universal access to education; it created the foundation upon which to build a society with opportunity for all; it unleashed the hitherto brutally-suppressed but powerful entrepreneurial instincts of a people; it freed many Bahamians from the fear of one another because of differences of colour or ethnic origin; it opened the possibility of fully sharing and nationalizing a rich and diverse cultural heritage; and it held forth the promise of a new kind of political culture in which no Bahamian would ever again be made to suffer for exercising his or her right to free association. It had been a long, hard struggle. Even though slavery had been abolished in 1834 and men of colour had sat in the House of Assembly since the 19th century, there was racial and economic discrimination which prevented the large majority of Bahamians from achieving fair representation in the House of Assembly. Stephen Dillett, born in Haiti, was

the first man of colour to be elected to the House of Assembly. From that time up until the 1950s there was only a handful of representatives of African descent in the House of Assembly. Numbered among the early pioneers were James Carmichael Smith, William Parliament Adderley, Etienne Dupuch, A. F. Adderley, Milo B. Butler, Thaddeus A. Toote, S. C. McPherson, Gerald Cash, Bert Cambridge, Claudius Walker, L. W. Young, Maxwell Thompson, H. M. Taylor, Cyril Stevenson and William Cartwright. Most people accepted racial discrimination against the black majority as the way of life. The first signs of mass social and political unrest and rebellion against the system came in 1942 when the Burma Road riot erupted over a wage dispute at the construction site of what is now the Lynden O. Pindling International Airport, then called Windsor Field. Among the important events to remember after the Burma Road riot are: the formation of the Citizens Committee in 1950 which reversed the ban on the showing of Sidney Poitier's film, *No Way Out*; the formation of the first national political party, the Progressive Liberal Party, in 1953; the election of the first organized political party, the PLP, to the House of Assembly in 1956 with Lynden O. Pindling as Leader; Sir Etienne Dupuch's anti-discrimination resolution in the House of Assembly in 1956 which was the catalyst for dismantling racial segregation in public places; the General Strike of 1958 led by Sir Clifford Darling and Sir Randol Fawkes; women voting for the first time in 1962 following a suffrage campaign led by Mary Ingraham, Dame Doris Johnson, Eugenia Lockhart and Georgiana Symonette; Black Tuesday in 1965 when Lynden O. Pindling, Leader of the Opposition, threw the Speaker's mace out of the window to protest the way constituency boundaries were drawn; a boycott of the House by the PLP in that same year, and the presentation in New York of a Petition to the United Nations Committee on Decolonization. Prior to 1967, appeals to the Imperial Government in London brought about limited reform including a new constitution in 1964 which ushered in Cabinet government for the first time. It was under that constitution that the general election was fought in 1967. The 1967 election was held against the disappointing loss in 1962 when the PLP polled more votes than the governing UBP but lost the general election because the ruling group had given more seats to the Family Islands although most of the population lived in New Providence. On evening of January 10th 1967, the results slowly trickled in. There was a tie between the

two political parties: 18 for the PLP under Lynden O. Pindling; 18 for the UBP under Sir Roland Symonette; Sir Randol Fawkes representing the Labour Party and Sir Alvin Braynen, an independent. Sir Randol, a member of the progressive movement who ran unopposed by the PLP, and Sir Alvin joined with the PLP to form a government and for the first time in the history of The Bahamas on January 10th, 1967, we had majority rule. People took to the streets shaking cowbells and beating goatskin drums as they marched from Over-the-Hill to Bay Street. It was a joyous day. The names of the victorious PLP candidates of the General of Election of 1967 were: Lynden Pindling, Leader, Preston Albury, Clarence Bain, Milo Butler, Clifford Darling, Elwood Donaldson, Arthur Foulkes, Carlton Francis, Arthur Hanna, Warren Levarity, Curtis MacMillan, Uriah McPhee, Maurice Moore, Edmund Moxey, Jimmy Shepherd, George Thompson, Jeffrey Thompson and Cecil Wallace Whitfield. In 1969 the Bahamas got its second Constitution extending internal self-government and in December 1972 a Bahamian delegation of Government and Opposition members negotiated with the British Government the Constitution which, on July 10th, 1973, gave full independence to the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. I conclude with some words of Sir Lynden Pindling spoken at the Anglican Diocese Youth Conference in 1990 which are appropriate for this Majority Rule Day:

"... Freedom does have a price. It is not free. Freedom means responsibility, a responsibility to properly look after our families and ourselves; and citizenship demands more than simply paying taxes and voting for one's leader. In addition, each of us has a sacred duty to love and protect this blessed land God has given to us, to build it up and make it better for future generations. All of us have a stake in being Bahamian."

God bless you and God bless the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.
