

Statement by Fred Mitchell MP

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Announcing the new diplomats

13th February 2013

Foreign Affairs Pavilion

East Hill Street, Nassau, The Bahamas

It is my pleasure to welcome the Prime Minister to the Foreign Affairs pavilion at East Hill Street to make this important announcement of the new Members of the Foreign Affairs team.

I want to explain to the Prime Minister that last week there was an unauthorized disclosure of the names of the new team. It should not have happened and I have taken the necessary steps I think to avoid something like that happening again.

Such is the state of our relationship with the media that even though there was a notice to pull back, stating that it was unauthorized, no one observed the pull back.

If you will permit me one bit of amusement in connection with this question of authority, I smiled the other day when I read a story of a public officer complaining that he had been disciplined because he did not show up for an assignment, engaging in a political attack upon his duly appointed supervisors. I say this: these may be days for some where the tail wags the dog but I can assure you Prime Minister not in this Ministry so long as you have given me its superintendence.

One of the lessons that new diplomats and foreign service officers everywhere can take from this is that the capital is the source of our power and our instructions. Wherever we are, we are the agents of the capital and do no act without their leave or authority. We must be sure that we have it before we act.

Similarly, once we have given our advice and our principals have decided the policy then we are to act strictly in accordance with those wishes. Our personal views have no bearing. When personal views get to the point of being so fundamentally opposed to policy then the result is simple: resignation. That is how I propose to run the affairs of this Ministry and Department.

This is not to say that there will be times when some matters will have to be acted upon in the deliberate judgment of the heads of mission but in matters of policy it is always best if there are no instructions to defer until you get instructions.

In a time of scarce resources, you will be dispatched to a foreign land with another and more imposing remit. The Ministry of Finance will be looking with added scrutiny on how we follow the spending instructions they give us, so that missions do not fall into error by spending monies on what they want and not what has been approved by Parliament.

You will also see that we now at last have a Shadow spokesman on Foreign Affairs in the Opposition Hubert Chipman MP who appears to be engaged and as such you can expect added scrutiny of our work. You will know that he is to be afforded the courtesies of office when he calls for enquiries and should he determine that he wishes to visit or call upon our offices overseas. I can assure the Opposition's spokesman that we will not flinch to answer any inaccurate criticisms of our work. Indeed, I was forced to point out to him yesterday this piece from the gospel of Luke:

Chapter 6 and verse 42: "How can you say to your brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in your eye, when you yourself behold not the beam that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of your own eye, and then shall you see clearly to pull out the mote that is in your brother's eye."

The fact is there is much we are cleaning up that was left undone by his party.

To you Heads of Mission to help you with your work, the Deputy Chiefs of Mission will be sent and you will have an opportunity to say whether or not this is someone who meets your approval.

The Cabinet has also decided that there is a need for press and cultural attachés to help you with your work and in particular to assist with the organization of the Bahamian Diaspora in your various jurisdictions.

So ladies and gentlemen I give you the Prime Minister to address us.