

Statement by Rt. Hon. Perry Christie MP

Prime Minister

Announcing New Diplomats

Foreign Affairs Pavilion

East Hill Street

13th February 2013

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Good afternoon all.

It is my pleasure to announce to you that I have nominated the following persons to serve The Bahamas abroad:

Dr. Elliston Rahming as Ambassador to Washington and Permanent Representative at the Organization of American States

Commander Godfrey Rolle as Ambassador to Haiti and to the Dominican Republic

Calsey Johnson as High Commissioner to Canada and Rhoda Jackson as WTO Ambassador.

Serving as Consul General in Washington D.C. will be Paulette Zonicle.

The team in Washington will be joined by Oswald Brown as press and cultural attaché.

I welcome them to the diplomatic service of our country. I am sure that each will serve their country well and with distinction.

I would like to say a brief word about each.

The search for an Ambassador to Washington was an exhaustive one. This is without doubt our most important relationship. In looking for an Ambassador I wished to have someone who understood our policies and philosophy of governance; who had the understanding of the United States and its government; who understood government and public policy in The Bahamas; who had distinguished himself in public service prior to his appointment.

The Foreign Minister advanced several names because the post has usually been filled by former Ministers of the government or high level retired civil servants. When I honed upon Dr. Rahming's name, the Foreign Minister reminded me that Jamaica had appointed to their Ambassadorial post in

Washington an academic with three a Ph Ds. That sealed the deal. Dr. Rahming fits the bill in every respect.

I know he will bring his tireless energy to the job. I know of his devotion to duty having worked with him when he was my special assistant when I was Prime Minister last time. I appointed him to the post of Superintendent of the Prison and I know of his reforming work there. I am therefore pleased to nominate him.

Commander Godfrey Rolle will return to Haiti, this time as Ambassador. It is a role for which he is well prepared. He worked there as a Defence Force officer and as a diplomat before. He goes to a land which will require a lot of work to ensure that our relationship remains on even keel given that the main issue which arises between our two countries is illegal migration. It will be his task to broaden the relationship and to ensure that the migration problem is also properly managed. In addition he will have the responsibility of managing the relationship with the Dominican Republic with which we have been working to resolve poaching in our seas. He will be joined by his wife who will work with him in the Mission seconded from the Ministry of Tourism. He comes to the job with a background of distinguished service in the military and in the fight against drugs which is his most recent job in the public service.

To lead our most-recently established Mission in Geneva, Switzerland, Ms. Rhoda Jackson brings a wealth of professional experience which more than effectively advances Bahamian interests at the various United Nations specialized agencies, as well as to the World Trade Organization, as we seek to conclude our accession process. She was specifically chosen by me because of her extensive knowledge of the Foreign Service rules and procedures; and so, will be key to establishing a new mission.

Most recently serving as Consul General in Miami, she is a career diplomat with over twenty-four years' experience in the Bahamas Foreign Service. In London, she focused on the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, a group in which we actively participate under the European Union's Economic Partnership Agreement and CARIFORUM, which will greatly enhance The Bahamas' trade capacity and our role as an international trading partner. Her exposure to the intersection of social and economic matters in both Washington, DC, and at the Permanent Mission to the United Nations has acquainted her well to represent all facets of our country to the specialized agencies of the United Nations, and position us strategically to identify and request the assistance we need for national development.

I want to welcome Calsey Johnson to the diplomatic corp. He will serve as the High Commissioner to Canada, one of our most important trading partners. In this connection, we are seeking to settle a trade agreement with Canada within the Caricom context. He will be working with our Minister of Trade in seeking to develop this pact. He will also have the responsibility for relations with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) which develops the rules and practices in and around international airports and in civilian travel. The most contentious issue that we have with Canada is that of the treatment of our students who apply for visas to study in Canada. At last count, we have almost 500 students from The Bahamas studying across Canada. We believe that it is vitally important that Canadian student visa procedures for Bahamians be expedited and with dispatch. Relations with the student community will be most important in Canada. It may be that at some stage a Consul General will have to be added to

your support team given the number of students there and the fact that many of them go to school in Atlantic Canada far away from our office in Ottawa. Mr. Johnson comes to the job highly qualified having worked as a senior broadcasting executive at the Broadcasting Corporation of The Bahamas and then working in the insurance field as a senior executive in his years since he left the Corporation.

This leads me then to the support team in Washington D.C.

Former Senator Paulette Zonicle brings considerable talents to the job of Consul General. She too comes from a background in broadcasting, having worked at the Broadcasting Corporation of The Bahamas. She knows our philosophy of Bahamians first. She is being sent to Washington to help with the organization of the Diaspora in that jurisdiction. Bahamians in and around Washington are a small but important community there. Many of them work in the professions and in industry. They have been asking for us to pay some attention to their concerns, mainly a wish to be further engaged in the work of The Bahamas abroad and to lift up The Bahamas and its interests where they work. That will be her job to organize the Bahamian Diaspora and to assist the Ambassador in the political work of the mission. We expect great things from her.

Last year we did not even have a formal celebration by our embassy to mark our nation's independence. I do not want this to happen this year.

The Ambassador will also be joined by a veteran of journalism Oswald Brown. Mr. Brown is a former editor of the Freeport News and The Nassau Guardian. He has a long history of public commentary and activism. He will help to make the story of The Bahamas known abroad, to assist the Ambassador and the Consul General in their work in pursuing Bahamian interests abroad and to ensure that the story is told at home. I am happy to welcome him to the team.

Foreign Affairs is important to the success of our country. We want to ensure that Bahamians when they travel abroad have a seamless experience passing through the international borders. You are to serve the Bahamian community.

Recently, there has been some public commentary by the Opposition about the appointments and about what we are doing in Foreign Affairs. I act with deliberation and I act only when it is right to act.

The FNM can have no complaint about political appointments

The FNM when in office appointed C A Smith, Maurice Moore, Anthony Rolle, Frank Rolle, Kay Forbes Smith, Elma Campbell Chase, Calvin Johnson all former FNM MPs and Senators as Ambassadors and Consuls General. How then does the fact that one of the Prime Minister's appointees is a PLP and former Senator disqualify her for an appointment to office?

I am advised that with regard to the residence of the High Commissioner in London, the structural work on the building which was delayed for over four and half years is now being done at a cost of 159,000 pounds. This necessitates the High Commissioner living in temporary accommodations until those repairs are done. London happens to be a very expensive place to live and as unfortunate as cost is we

must do what we must do within reason to maintain our presences overseas. No one is more conscious of cost than I am about our work.

I say to our new team however that you must not be deterred in your work by public criticism. Criticism comes with the job. Remember always that you are servants of the Bahamian people. I expect you to discharge your responsibilities without fear or favour in the best interests of the Bahamian people. Once you do that, you will have my support.

I therefore congratulate you and all of your families as you begin this new chapter in your lives.

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