

Address by The Honourable Frederick A. Mitchell, M.P.  
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Immigration of The Bahamas  
To the Illinois House of Representatives

16<sup>th</sup> April, 2013

Speaker of the House, Michael Madigan and your staff, Chair of the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus - Representative William Davis and other Members of the Illinois House of Representatives, Ladies and Gentleman

I wish, at the outset, to thank you for your invitation to address this august body and for your warm hospitality during my stay in this charming and historic city of Springfield.

This State has a special historical and social resonance with the African Diaspora globally and, certainly, in The Bahamas. A few blocks from here, President Lincoln, began his rise from a tiller of soil to eventually convincing a nation of the equality of all men and the necessity of national unity. More recently, President Obama began his campaign, prefaced on hope and change, for the Presidency, on the Old State Capitol's steps.

Speaking of President Obama, you may be aware of the recent visit of his daughters to The Bahamas. They had by all accounts a safe and enjoyable time. Last year we welcomed some

33,000 or so people from this area to The Bahamas. We would welcome more and invite you to come.

It is in the same spirit of hope and optimism of Lincoln and Obama, despite the intractable challenges they both faced, that I stand here today to welcome the strengthening of our diplomatic relations and our bilateral cooperation.

I am here to seek to expand ties with this area. To seek to learn more about the area and to ask you to learn more about us: the cultural heritage which we both share and the trade and commercial opportunities which exist and can be expanded.

Thousands of Bahamians have received their tertiary level education in this state.

There are some 333 people who listed themselves as being of Bahamian descent in this state and in the 2010 census; some 10,000,000 dollars of business was done from The Bahamas in this state in the year 2010. Clearly this can be expanded. We do over a billion dollars of business with Florida each year.

The base is there and to show you what I mean. In 2005, 40,000 people visited The Bahamas from this area, compare that to just 33,000 last year.

The Bahamas also maintains regional and hemispheric superiority in the areas of financial services with one of the longest established international financial services sector in the Americas; and remains a high quality destination for wealth management and hub for capital investment

Our two communities have been socially and culturally close as well. The founder of the Bahamas Dance Theatre, Shirley Hall Bass, one of The Bahamas' cultural and artistic treasures, was a native of Chicago, Illinois before moving to The Bahamas at the apex of her professional dancing career.

Throughout her career, she consistently used her craft and capacity as director to foster an understanding between her two loves, the United States and The Bahamas, with the creation of the Foreign Cultural Exchange in 1968, when fifty-eight young Bahamian ambassadors travelled to Chicago.

These are the types of linkages, not just economically but also socially and culturally, that we wish to develop and expand with this great State.

So against this background, we are looking at the possibility of appointing an Honorary Consul, with residence in Chicago, to assist with enhancing the bilateral relationship between our two peoples. We have asked a Chicagoan with Bahamian roots Michael Fountain if this is something he would consider and of course this is subject to your governmental approvals at the federal level. I seek your support in this.

We think Mr. Fountain would do an excellent job.

As we celebrate today, the deepening of the friendship and collaboration between our two Governments and Peoples, I wish to close with words of motivation from a son of your soil, President Lincoln:

“The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew. With Malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up [both our] nation's wounds.”

May God Bless the People and Government of Illinois and the wider United States and may God bless the People and Government of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.