

**Remarks by
Rt. Hon. Hubert A. Ingraham
Leader, Free National Movement
Special Convention
Saturday, 26 May, 2012**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Twenty-two years ago when you first elected me at age 42 as your Party Leader, I could best have been described as an improbable choice having previously been Chairman of, Member of Parliament for, and Cabinet Minister in, the PLP Government.

Having first been elected Leader of our Party on the 17th May, 1990, I have come this morning to say thank you for making and keeping me as the longest serving Leader of our Party -- nearly one half of our existence as a party – 19 years.

I retired after 12 years as your Leader, and you summoned me back three years later. I express my gratitude to you for permitting me to lead you into four general elections; in three we became the Government. Indeed, we have won three of the last five general elections with huge majorities in our first two terms --- 57% of the vote in 1997. I accept responsibility for our most recent loss at the polls.

This Party and the Bahamian people made me what I could never, as a boy, have dreamed of becoming.

You and the people of The Bahamas caused me to go places and to meet people I would never have had the opportunity to visit and meet.

And you both gave me the opportunity to interact with the movers and shakers of the world – in government, in finance and world affairs, in banking and business, in travel and tourism, in law enforcement, in

music and the arts, in health, in education and in environmental conservation.

I was afforded the opportunity to influence and to help shape policies that will govern and guide not only our country but our region for years to come.

I am now the last of the leaders in the western hemisphere – from Canada in the north to Argentina in the south – who were elected during the 1990s, to leave office. Many who came after me in this hemisphere have also moved on.

Upon my return to leadership seven years ago, I promised to stay in office as long as I could or as long as the Bahamian people would have me.

The Bahamian people in their majority have now determined that it is time for me to go. I accept their decision. And I thank them for the confidence they previously reposed in me for 15 years as Prime Minister of The Bahamas.

Indeed, I thank the Bahamian people for having me for a longer period of time than I desired or expected. I am happy though, that it is they, the people of The Bahamas, who made the decision for me to go; I confess that I am happy to go.

It is therefore now time for me to relinquish the leadership of the FNM. Some who were here in our Party when I came left after I came. Many others came with me and many, many more have come after me.

To those who stayed after I came, to those who came with me and to those who came after me, I ask that you stay and continue the important work of our Party. To those who left after I came, I ask that you return now that I am gone!

I note that we were financially challenged during this election Campaign. When those who oppose us commenced their election television campaigns early, we did not; not because we did not wish to but because we could not afford a television campaign. We needed more money to run a more effective campaign this year. We finished the campaign carrying about \$1 million in debt which our new leadership team will need to address and settle moving forward.

You will know that our Party does not accept all offers of financial support for its election campaigns. It has always been critically important to the Free National Movement that its funding come from reputable sources and further that financial support not compromise the hand of the Party should it assume office as Government

I express sincere thanks and appreciation to all those who contributed to the funding of our campaign. I was especially encouraged by the wide cross-section of Bahamians who supported our Party via online donations at our Party's Campaign website. During the 3 week plus period of the online fund-raising campaign we raised some \$131 thousand through contributions ranging from \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50 to hundreds of dollars. In all some 363 individuals donated online, 30 others made direct deposits at the bank and still others took small cash donations to our Headquarters on Mackey Street.

I believe that this initiative to involve a wide cross section of Bahamians in supporting our Party bodes well for the development of our democracy. It is my hope that such fundraising will continue, demonstrating real ownership of our Party by the people.

I hope that such fund raising initiatives will soon enough assist the Party in maintaining a fuller presence in the media throughout the life of this

Parliament ensuring that our message remains relevant and that our message is received and understood by the wide Bahamian public.

I thank from the bottom of my heart, all the volunteers who gave freely of their time and talents to advance our message throughout the 2012 General Election campaign. I have always found your loyalty and support to be inspirational.

As I leave your leadership, I look back to when we began down the road to Deliverance. Back then we did not even own a Headquarters Building as we met in a borrowed space in the back of a building off Shirley Street.

After four successive general election defeats, FNMs by 1990 “having never danced in the streets in victory” were anxious to win. And win we did, defeating the ruling Party first in Marco City and then ending their six consecutive terms in office.

I vividly recall our first victory in Marco City. Once victory was declared Sir Kendal Isaacs came dancing into our hotel suite in Freeport. He said he had never had that pleasure before – dancing in victory.

And I recall returning to Nassau with my then Deputy, Sir Orville Turnquest. When his feet hit the tarmac he also began to dance. He told me that he too had never had the pleasure of returning to Nassau after an election victory over the sitting Government.

I also remember Noel Robert’s tearful joy during a 1992 campaign rally in The Bogue, North Eleuthera. He said to me then that he had never before been permitted to hold a public meeting in that Settlement because of the overwhelming control of the residents by the PLP. In 1987 we got 32 votes in The Bogue while the governing party’s candidate received 262! Gradually we won the support of more and

more residents in The Bogue as they recognized that it was the FNM that had their backs. Still, as late as 2007 we only won 99 votes in The Bogue Polling Division. This time, we won 194 votes, just 13 fewer than our opponent. And, we won in Upper Bogue for the first time ever. It was support from Upper and Lower Bogue and the Bluff which caused us to keep the North Eleuthera seat in FNM hands this time. And so goes the story of the FNM. We have made our Party acceptable to people who hithertofore believed that support for the FNM was heresy.

We all remember the victory of 1992 when finally the veil was lifted, the pall removed. Bahamians of every race and class, from every walk of life, of every political affiliation, and in every one of our islands, believed that they could enjoy the full, unfettered benefits of citizenship.

In winning, we changed The Bahamas forever.

We replaced F-E-A-R with F-A-I-R.

We provided competent, honest and productive governance.

What we accomplished is the demonstrable modernization of our country. 1992 ushered in a new era in which The Bahamas moved beyond the promise of nationhood to its fulfillment. We turned away from a culture of privilege and introduced the era of Government in the Sunshine, government committed to accountability and transparency in all its dealings.

We freed the airwaves making it possible for Bahamians to enjoy the fullest expression of freedom of speech in a democracy deepened by open, free private broadcasting for the first time. And we facilitated the introduction of cable television and access to the internet, bringing the information age to our country. Today, our ICT sector, including radio,

television, telecommunications and internet, is fully privatized and regulated by an independent body -- URCA.

We computerized the public sector. In each term in office, we reached new milestones in the reduction of bureaucracy and improvement in the delivery of services to the general public including application for and issuance of business licences, drivers' and vehicular licences, machine readable passports, and the rationalization and reduction of the number of customs duty rates.

We reduced the size of the House of Assembly by 11 seats, the minimum allowable under the Constitution and we conducted well organized, hassle-free elections on each occasion it fell to us to organize General Elections.

We privatized areas of the economy better operated by the private sector most notably in hotel ownership and operations and in telecommunications.

We re-invented our tourism sector, introducing themed resorts beginning with the development of Atlantis on Paradise Island. During our most recent term in office we made the redevelopment of Baha Mar Resort in Cable Beach possible and won agreement for the award of \$400 million in contracts to Bahamian contractors on the project. In our Family Islands we promoted and facilitated the development of small, environmentally friendly boutique hotels, bone-fishing lodges and guest houses.

We accelerated diversification in the economy, making the dream of container transshipment a reality in Grand Bahama and further facilitating the development of the ship and high-end yacht care and repair industry in Freeport.

We deepened Bahamian ownership in the economy, facilitating the acquisition of fee simple title to Crown Land and government-owned land for thousands of Bahamians; thousands more become home-owners for the first time facilitated by the economic expansion which our policies created. We created the Bahamas Securities Exchange (BISX). Today thousands of Bahamians are owners of shares in profitable businesses -- previously the sanctum of the Government and a small select group -- most notably including the Bank of The Bahamas, Cable Bahamas, and the new Port at Arawak Cay.

We measurably expanded and upgraded our national school plant from pre-school to tertiary level education, undertaking an extensive programme to construct new primary and secondary schools around the country, introducing pre-school places for 4 year old children. We enhanced the work environment and terms of employment of teachers and created teaching career paths. We devolved the College of The Bahamas into an autonomous institution and made it tuition-free for qualifying Bahamian students, grew the number of tertiary level scholarships available to Bahamian students exponentially and instituted a \$100 million education loan programme under which the Government assumed responsibility for the payment of 50% of interest payments.

We improved and increased social assistance to those most in need.

We expanded the network of modern Community Health Clinics around the country, instituted free prenatal care for pregnant women in all public hospitals and clinics and improved the delivery of public health services. And we introduced free anti-viral treatment for HIV-positive pregnant women and subsequently extended it to all HIV-infected individuals.

We reduced the work-week from 48 to 40 hours, introduced minimum wage in the public and private sectors, improved protections and safety standards in the workplace, increased maternity benefits and introduced familial leave in Labour Law for the first time. We created the Industrial Tribunal to facilitate the settlement of trade disputes.

We introduced elected Local Government in the Family Islands, thus deepening and expanding our democracy and fulfilling the long-deferred dream of many who struggled for majority rule.

We brought never before experienced transparency to our Immigration processes, regularizing the immigration status of the foreign born children and spouses of Bahamian citizens and removing the fear and uncertainty that distressed and tore apart so many families for so many years. We regularized the status of thousands of other long term residents of The Bahamas – teachers, doctors, nurses, prison officers, other public servants and significant investors in our economy– who had contributed and continue to contribute in meaningful ways to our development as a people and a nation through careers that spanned as many as 40 years.

So as to ensure the protection of our biodiversity and protect our natural environment we more than doubled the size of the National Park System, created and then expanded a network of marine protected areas, legislated protection of marine mammals, sharks and marine turtles, modernized legislation and regulation of the built environment making environmental impact assessments mandatory under defined circumstances, and increased the Government's subvention to the Bahamas National Trust ten-fold.

During our last term in office, notwithstanding the terrible world economic condition, indeed, the worst financial crisis in 80 years, we

undertook some of the big things required to make our capital island not only more livable but also more functional.

New Providence is being transformed into a modern city with the potential to be the most efficient small city in our region.

Nassau Harbour was dredged and now accommodates the largest ocean-going cruise ships.

The Phase I construction of a new US Departure Terminal at the LPIA is completed and operational. The Phase II redevelopment of the International Departures Terminal is on schedule for completion later this year and we fully expect that the third and final phase of the redevelopment of the domestic terminal will be completed and opened in late 2013.

After years of day-dreaming about the removal of cargo shipping from the centre of our city centre, freight cargo shipping has now been removed from downtown Nassau, a new Port of Nassau has been created at Arawak Cay and a new 100,000 square foot Customs Warehouse constructed at Gladstone Road.

Downtown Bay Street is being revitalized following the replacement of leaky water mains and the upgrade of other underground utility services in the City of Nassau and work is continuing on the refurbishment and upgrade of the Houses of Parliament and the Judicial Complexes.

The reconstruction of the Pompey Museum and the creation of Pompey Square at the western entrance to downtown Nassau will be further complemented by the replacement of sidewalks in the downtown area, and the pedestrianization of Charlotte Street where asphalt is to be replaced with stone pavers.

The New Providence Infrastructure Upgrade Programme, bringing the island's road network and water and sewerage services up to 21st century standards, is nearing completion. As a part of that project, proper sidewalks, drainage and street lighting are being installed in what were some of the most blighted Over-the-Hill communities. And, the elegant 4 lane Airport Gateway Project is well on the way. An important component of that project is bringing improved water quality and supply to communities in eastern New Providence.

The transformation of the Princess Margaret Hospital including the construction of a new critical care wing is underway.

The new Harry Moore Library and Communications Centre at the College of The Bahamas is now open and will assist that institution in its progress to university status.

Significant infrastructure upgrades were undertaken in our Family Islands including public service accommodations and facilities and the construction of two new community hospitals in Exuma and Abaco now underway.

An Unemployment Benefit is now in place as is the National Prescription Drug Plan.

And the original terms of Government's \$100 million Educational Loan Programme have been restored.

Our successors in Office will now reap the fruits of our labour. The economy has begun to grow, and the tide, instead of ebbing, is beginning to rise.

I am especially satisfied and deeply proud that during three non-consecutive terms in office we successfully implemented our policy initiatives first formally outlined and pronounced in my address to our

1990 Party National Convention. We must never forget from whence we came and what we did to fulfill our promise of Deliverance for the Bahamian people.

This notwithstanding, we have also had two major disappointments: the failure to achieve full equality for women with men under our national constitution; and the still unresolved dilemma of the status and position of children born in The Bahamas to illegal immigrants.

Remember always, you are now in the Opposition; as a Party your focus must be returning to Government.

You must therefore hold the governing party accountable for all the outlandish promises it made during the election campaign. And you must do so at every opportunity. You may start with crime and continue with the economy and education.

I wish to thank all those whose labour and support helped make our achievements in Government possible. To my brother Deputy, the Hon. Brent Symonette, my Deputies from my first two terms in office, Sir Orville Turnquest and the Hon. Frank Watson, I offer profound thanks and appreciation for your unstinting service to our people.

I also recognize and thank with much appreciation all who served in my Cabinet beginning in 1992. Each of you was an important part of the team that delivered.

I acknowledge and thank our Party officers, past and present Chairmen, Deputy Chairs, Secretaries General, Treasurer, Councillors and Meritorious Councillors who have throughout my tenure worked to keep the fire of the Free National Movement burning. I am especially grateful to our Members and supporters throughout The Bahamas and indeed, to all Bahamians.

I acknowledge with gratitude the tremendous love and affection and goodwill which you, the membership and supporters of our Party, have bestowed on me over the years. Know that it is returned in full measure.

I thank you all as do my wife Delores and all our children. May God bless you all and continue to watch over our great movement and over our nation.

I am proud of our service. I did my best. I remain confident that the work I did will speak for me long after I depart this life.

You are my people and I am forever in your debt.