

Statement on Incident at Sea: Capsized Vessel in the Area Hawksbill Cay, Abaco - the Drowning of Occupants and Rescue of Survivors

Mr. Speaker,

I wish to brief this Honourable House on a fateful incident that occurred in Bahamian waters that speaks to the on-going challenges we face with the illegal smuggling of migrants into and from The Bahamas.

On Monday 11th June 2012, at about 12:10 p.m. an anonymous caller contacted the Marsh Harbour Police Station and reported that a vessel, with a number of what was believed to be illegal Haitian nationals on board, had capsized in waters just off North Abaco.

A team of Police Officers and Defence Force Officers responded and provided assistance.

A man, who is reported to be a Bahamian national of Haitian origin, reported to the Police that he was aboard the vessel during the entire ordeal. He stated that his mother insisted that he go to the United States aboard the vessel which was a twenty-five (25) to thirty (30) footer Macko white with blue stripe named, "GLORY TIME". The journey began somewhere in Treasure Cay. He reports that there were twenty-eight (28) persons aboard the vessel when they set sail at 5:00 p.m. on Sunday 10th June, 2012 enroute to Florida. The vessel was outfitted with two mercury engines, a 200 horsepower and a 250 horsepower.

The gentleman further reported that he believes each person paid a total of five thousand dollars (\$5,000) per head for the journey.

Sometime after 8:00 p.m. on the same date they began experiencing engine problems when one of the engines kept cutting off, which slowed the vessel down. Also aboard the vessel were four (4) large drums containing fuel and oil. He also reported that the seas were very rough and the vessel began to take on water. The vessel eventually capsized and everyone began to scramble to save their lives. The man reported that he did his best to save other persons but the sea was too rough so he had to save his own life. He recalls the gender of those aboard prior to the incident to be nine (9) children, five (5) young females between the ages of 18 to 30 years and fourteen (14) males. He further recalls seeing six (6) others who survived the ordeal, however, once on land those six (6) persons disappeared.

At about 3:00 p.m. on Monday, 11th June 2012, Defence Force personnel aboard craft P-49, discovered the bow of a vessel floating in waters just on the channel between Mount Hope Abaco and Fox Town, Abaco. A male resident of Crown Haven, Abaco also went to the area on another vessel and was able to dive up from the sunken vessel eleven (11) bodies all that appeared to be lifeless.

Eight (8) persons have been taken into custody that were seen in the area of Cooper's Town and believed to be associated with the sunken vessel.

The recovered bodies have been transported to the morgue at New Providence.

The last report is that ten (10) persons are missing and feared drowned.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been collaborating with the Haitian Ambassador on this matter.

Mr. Speaker:

I am to publicly acknowledge and express gratitude to the United States Government for the assistance which has provided in making available assets of the US Coast Guard and OPBAT.

Notwithstanding the alleged illegality of the operation that resulted in the unfortunate loss of life, I am also to, on behalf of the Government and people of The Bahamas, extend sincere condolences to the families of the victims. I trust that this unfortunate incident would further buttress the resolve of all right thinking persons to do all that is possible to bring an end to the smuggling of persons to and through our waters.