

# 2012 UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (RIO+20)

Statement by the Honorable Frederick A. Mitchell  
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Immigration of  
the Commonwealth of The Bahamas

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

20 June 2012

Heads of State, Heads of Government, Heads of delegation, Excellencies, Colleagues, distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mr. President,

On behalf of the People of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas, and our Prime Minister the Honourable Perry G. Christie, whom I represent, I bring warmest greetings.

Mr. President at the outset, allow me to express the sincere gratitude of my delegation to the Government and people of Brazil generally, and, to the city of Rio de Janeiro in particular, for the hospitalities extended to the delegation of The Bahamas during the convening of this Conference.

Further, particular acknowledgement is made of the laudable and tireless efforts of negotiators and the remarkable level of resolve and integrity with which they have conducted themselves. These efforts are duly reflected Mr. President, in our adoption, by consensus, of the outcome of this historic venture.

Mr. President,

This Conference takes place against a sobering backdrop of global economic and social challenges. The hard won consensus achieved on this occasion, attests to an understanding that present challenges must be braved alongside our efforts to confront with resolve the challenges of the future.

The goal of sustainable development lies at the heart of this Conference, and, the declaration adopted on this occasion, is one which we recognize as offering significant opportunities.

Mr. President, at this juncture, it must be made abundantly clear that The Bahamas is an archipelagic, open economic state which is challenged, at the national level, by the increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters, including hurricanes, which are due in large part to the effects of climate change. These factors together with other external forces such as the economic recession have left our economies tenuous with deep and lasting wounds. Further, the national debt, dependence on fossil fuels and other imports which exhibit significant price volatility, constrains efforts to develop sustainably and eradicate poverty.

Mr. President,

Despite these constraints the Commonwealth of The Bahamas embraces sustainable development and strives to eliminate exploitation, poverty and deprivation. We are a people inextricably linked to our environment, our shallow blue seas and our way of life. The environment sustains our lives and livelihoods. The Environment is the very foundation of our economic activity.

In this regard, tourism is the single largest industry which drives our economy. We are aware that the future of our tourism sector hinges on the plans and strategies we put in place to protect this sector and its resources.

The Bahamas therefore reaffirms its commitment to sustainable development. Advancements continue nationally in important areas pertaining to the protection of our biodiversity and supporting the development of policies which seek to promote renewable energy. The Bahamas has enacted legislation to foster the sustainable use and management of ecosystems, through better land-use planning. Under the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea we have initiated actions to preserve our fish stock by introducing penalties for overfishing. We have taken action to ban long line fishing, to establish The Bahamas as a shark sanctuary and to establish and expand marine protected areas.

Mr. President, for The Bahamas it is imperative that we seek to ensure that our Sustainable Development strategies are comprehensive, yet we must also establish a transparent process which will respond to our peculiarities, vulnerabilities, and national objectives. It is of particular importance that we are mindful of not only our policy space but also of our fiscal space and the impact that such strategies will bear on the welfare of our peoples.

Accordingly, The Bahamas has commenced a process to engage and incorporate our partners in efforts to overcome the challenges we face, to recover, to expand job creation and deal head-on with the vexing problems of crime and youth unemployment. These challenges form part of the context in which our sustainable development efforts are undertaken and we must make certain that sustainable development is *for all*; that is the future we want.

Mr. President, it falls upon Governments to make policies that are “people-centric”. We commit to engage and sensitize our citizenry in clear and concise terms through public education. People must be involved in the process and informed of the costs and benefits of implementing sustainable development policies. We are particularly focused on the need to engage young people in our public education efforts.

In consideration of the Green Economy, The Bahamas is guided by Principles of the Rio Declaration. Additionally, we must ensure that our pursuit of a Green Economy will enhance our efforts without compromising our current improvements. More importantly, we must ensure that greening initiatives do not place our macro-development at risk and or, increase our dependence on technologies which may be incompatible with preserving our environment. Much like our fellow SIDS, in order to appropriately address the transition and eventual implementation of

Green Economy initiatives there are some preconditioning fundamentals we must adhere to. That is, we must strengthen our institutions and enhance our technical and economic capacities.

Mr. Chairman, in light of our Declaration, it is incumbent upon us, both the developed and developing countries, to redouble our efforts and mobilize our resources to adhere to our commitments to implement accordingly.

Mr. Chairman, for many the axiom which states that “We should put our money where our mouths are” becomes even more relevant. Sustainable Development financing should usher in mechanisms that will be true to the essence and rationale of development.

We therefore must not permit our ambition to wane and call for a greater sense of urgency in efforts to achieve the internationally agreed MDGs and to sustain the progress already made. For a small island developing state like the Bahamas, GDP must not be used to restrict access to support and resources needed to achieve sustainable development. Our uniqueness gives greater definition to our vulnerabilities and exposes the disparities and inconsistencies that international agencies often employ when considering The Bahamas. The Bahamas continues to be deserving of considerations which will not restrict access and deny us the right to develop sustainably, supported by financial, human and technological resources.

Mr. President,

I must underscore the importance of the unique challenges of SIDS countries like The Bahamas, it is our desire that this conference not only validates our uniqueness but translates rhetoric into concrete and tangible assistance.

Mr. President,

The Commonwealth of the Bahamas will continue do its fair share, *based on its national circumstances and economic realities*, and, in full light of the inherent existential challenges faced. But Mr. President, we cannot do it alone. Let not small islands states suffer at the expense of inaction. The people of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas are proudly described, in the preamble of our Constitution as “*We the Inheritors of and Successors to this Family of Islands...*”.

Mr. President,

Our duty of guardianship is both a gift and a responsibility. We are proud of the islands inherited from our forefathers; we must be equally pleased in bequeathing them to our children.

Future generations should not be recipients of our failure.