

For Immediate Release
July 6, 2012

REMARKS
BY
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NATIONAL PRIDE DAY CEREMONY
RAWSON SQUARE
NASSAU, BAHAMAS
6TH JULY 2012

His Excellency, the Governor General and Lady Foulkes;
Cabinet colleagues;
Fellow Parliamentarians;
Distinguished guests;
My fellow Bahamians –

It is always a high honor and a privilege to pay tribute to the lives of our visionary forebears, those freedom fighters of a bygone era upon whose shoulders we stand. We are all forever indebted to them for the countless sacrifices they made in the cause of freedom, equality and social justice.

But today I come here to pay special homage to those brave women who spearheaded the fight for social justice and gender equality in the local suffragette movement.

It is perhaps not widely known that this movement was born out of the defeat of one man, Mr. Rufus Ingraham, who lost his bid for election to the House of Assembly in 1949.

After his defeat, he reasoned with his wife, Mrs. Mary Ingraham, that his chances of victory at the polls would have been greatly enhanced if only women who were property owners had the right to vote as well.

From that bitter electoral experience and the idea that it

spawned came the women's suffrage movement of The Bahamas.

To her credit, however, Mrs. Ingraham had the wisdom and foresight to seek kindred spirits across the political spectrum. Although she was closely associated with the United Bahamian Party, she went to great pains to lock arms in the struggle with leading women of the PLP like Georgianna Symonette and Eugenia Lockhart and later Dr. Doris Johnson, and also with independent-minded women like Mabel Walker, a prominent educator and wife of Dr. C. R. Walker.

From this broadly based organization of women came one of the most historically important movements in the development of Bahamian democracy; a movement whose struggles would be crowned with success when, in 1962 – a half-century ago – women voted for the first time in elections in The Bahamas.

I learned just this morning that the first woman to cast her ballot in the 1962 election was Ivy Mackey.

It is particularly worthy of note that the very first woman to register to vote in the 1962 elections was Ruby Ann Darling, or Cooper as she then was. This lady, as we all know, would continue to blaze a trail when she was later elected a member of parliament in her own right, and appointed a parliamentary secretary as well.

We must never forget the women's suffrage movement, with its emphasis on equality and social justice for all, played a major role in that Great Awakening that took place in our country in the late 50's to mid 60's. I have had the occasion before to refer to this period as the golden age of Bahamian politics. Certainly it deserves to be recognized as the most defining period in the development of authentic democracy in The Bahamas and the attainment of true freedom for the masses, both male and

female.

Mary Ingraham, Mabel Walker, Georgianna Symonette, Eugenia Lockhart and, most famously of all, Dame Dr. Doris Johnson, deserve lasting recognition as freedom fighters and national heroines of the first order. During this, the golden jubilee anniversary of the great and glorious triumph they won in 1962, we should be especially mindful of just how much we owe to them and to the scores, nay, hundreds of other fearless women who joined with them in bringing the struggles of the suffragettes to fruition.

Just as our country overcame the transatlantic slave trade and won our emancipation; stared down institutionalised injustice in our triumphant march to majority rule and defied our most ardent critics in gaining independence, the suffragettes also deserved their place in history for overcoming great odds and delivering a great victory not only for women, but for all Bahamians.

In the fifty years that have ensued since women won the right to vote, our country has seen women break through one glass ceiling after another in all areas of national life. They have served as Governors General, Deputy leaders of political organizations; Parliamentarians, Cabinet Ministers, Chief Justice, President of the Court of Appeal, Secretary to the Cabinet, Permanent Secretaries, Governor of the Central Bank, and this record of leadership has been matched in virtually all sectors of the private sector as well.

Yes, the old shackles of gender equality have largely been eliminated but challenges still remain, especially in the private sector where, in many cases, women are still not rewarded on the same scale as their male counterparts.

This must end.

But today is not a day for agitation but rather a day for celebration, and so I want to conclude by proclaiming once again our collective gratitude, as a nation and as a people, to

the suffragette movement that delivered us such a wonderful addition to our democratic structures fifty years ago. We are the beneficiaries of this legacy and so today we take time out to remember those magnificent ladies who made it all possible. As leader of the government, I reiterate my commitment to serve selflessly and to use the instruments of the state to facilitate the full protection and empowerment of the Bahamian people regardless of gender.

I invite all Bahamians to join with me in that commitment. In doing so we will be honouring the memory and paying just tribute to the great women whose heroic accomplishments are central to this celebration here this morning.

May Almighty God continue to bless the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.