

## INGRAHAM'S STATEMENT ON CRIME AND TO THE HOUSE

### Communication

By

**Rt. Hon. Hubert A. Ingraham**

Prime Minister

Anti-Crime Legislation

Mr. Speaker:

I wish to advise of the tabling for First Reading, a number of Bills.

Mr. Speaker:

### **Criminal Procedure Code (Amendment) Bill**

Amendments proposed to the **Criminal Procedure Code** will when enacted:

- Increase the sentencing powers of a magistrate from a maximum of 5 years imprisonment to 7 years.
- Increase the maximum period of extended time that a magistrate may allow the police to hold a person being investigated for a serious crime from 48 hours to 72 hours. The Police are still only able to hold a person for 48 hours without the authority of a magistrate.
- Abolish the practice for unsworn statements being given from the dock by a defendant in a criminal trial.
- Empower the Court to hear from victims as to the impact of the crime for the purpose of determining the sentence. Victim means the person who suffered the harm - physical or emotional and person(s) who would have suffered emotional loss as a result of the offence e.g. a spouse, relative or guardian of the person where the person is dead or otherwise incapable of making a statement.
- Require that accused persons who intend to rely upon alibi evidence at their trial to provide the court with notice of their alibi within stated time limits (21 days) failing which the court will direct the jury that adverse inferences may be drawn.
- Facilitate the evidence of the police *firearms licensing officer* being available for use at court proceedings by including that officer in a list of persons that are able to give evidence in writing rather than having to appear in person in every instance, thereby facilitating efficiency.

Mr. Speaker:

### **Bail Act – (Amendment) Bill (Amends ss. 4(2) & (3) and Parts A, B, & C of First Schedule)**

In addition to matters referenced in my National Address on Monday evening amendments to the Bail Act will require a Judge to take certain critical factors into consideration, prior to the grant of bail to a defendant in cases involving the following offences: murder, armed robbery, and rape, attempted murder, possession of firearms designed to discharge explosives, possession of automatic weapons, possession of firearms or ammunition intended to endanger life or cause serious injury to property, possession of firearms with the intent to commit an indictable offence and possession of dangerous drugs with intent to supply together with a number of other offences under the Sexual Offences Act and including rape, sexual relations with a minor under age 14, with a dependant or in instances of incest, sexual relations with someone suffering from a mental disorder. In these cases Judges will be required to take into primary consideration:

- the need to protect the safety of the public or public order, and
- the need to protect the safety of the victim or victims of the alleged offence,
- the nature and seriousness of the offence and the nature and strength of the evidence against the defendant.

**And, the amendment provides for magistrates to have no jurisdiction to grant bail in these cases.**

Mr. Speaker:

#### **Amendments to the Court of Appeal Act.**

The amendment provides that the prosecution has a right to appeal to the Court of Appeal against a ruling of a judge to uphold a no case submission or to withdraw the case from the jury in criminal trials.

Secondly, where an appeal against a conviction is allowed by the Court of Appeal but where it finds that the jury must have been satisfied of facts that proved the defendant guilty of a lesser offence the court will now be permitted to substitute a lesser verdict. At present I am advised the Court of Appeal exercises such power by reference to powers obtaining in England under rules that allows it to apply the law and practice of England where there is no specific provision in the law in The Bahamas. This amendment will now provide a specific provision in the law.

Mr. Speaker:

#### **Criminal Evidence (Witness Anonymity) Bill**

This Bill is far reaching. It provides for use in certain exceptional cases of evidence of a witness whose identity remains anonymous during the course of investigations, trial and thereafter. It is a special measure of last practical resort. It is considered necessary in circumstances where serious offences cannot be successfully prosecuted because of the real risk of harm to witnesses. Conditions are laid down for the making of an investigation Anonymity Order or a Witness Anonymity order.

I note for the information of Honourable Members that the Bill is in its terms similar to that of the Criminal Evidence (Witness Anonymity) Law of the Cayman Islands which was based on the Criminal Evidence (Witness Anonymity) Act of the United Kingdom.

Qualifying offences for an order are to be murder, manslaughter, armed robbery, rape, offences under the Dangerous Drugs Act, Anti-terrorism Act, or Trafficking in Persons (Prevention and Suppression) Act.

Amendments proposed to the **Penal Code will amend sections 290, 291 & 339** of the Act.

The courts have determined that the death penalty is not a mandatory punishment for murder. They have also decided that the death penalty may only be used in the worst of the worst cases. The amendment seeks to ensure that the death penalty remains an option in those cases that are considered sufficiently vile to warrant it. The most egregious categories of murder are defined in section 290. These categories include murder of police or other law enforcement officials, and persons critical to the judicial system such as witnesses, jurors, judicial officials, prosecutors, a murder in furtherance of robbery, rape, kidnapping, terrorism or other felony, multiple murders and contract killings.

All sentencing for murder are to be governed by section 291. A murder falling within the most egregious category is punishable either by a sentence of death or by *imprisonment for life*.

Any other murder is punishable in a range of 30 to 60 years. The exception will be conviction of a minor (less than 18 years of age).

A minor convicted of murder will be sentenced to a minimum of 20 years imprisonment and thereafter his continued confinement will be reviewed by the court every 5 years.

*Importantly, the amendment proposed will define Imprisonment for life as the whole of the remaining years of a convicted person's life.*

Finally, the punishment for a person convicted of armed robbery (robbery with an offensive instrument) is increased and will have a range of 15 to 25 years.

Mr. Speaker:

#### **Evidence (Amendment) Bill**

This Bill seeks to amend the Evidence Act to allow for the use of live television link to receive evidence of persons who are unable to be physically present at court proceedings. It also provides for remand hearings to take place by live television link.

The Bill also provides for the admissibility of video recordings of testimony from child witnesses under certain circumstances.

The Bill will amend the Evidence Act to allow a person's previous conviction to be given in evidence in murder cases punishable by a sentence of death.

Mr. Speaker:

#### **Sexual Offences Act (Amendment) Bill**

The amendment will introduce a sentence range of 15 years to life for a defendant convicted of rape. Life will mean the whole of the remaining years of a convicted person's life.

### **Pawnbrokers and Second-hand Dealers Bill and the Customs Management (Amendment) Bill**

Honourable Members are aware that my Government recently imposed a ban on the export of copper and restricted exports of other scrap metal as a deterrent to the escalation of thefts of scrap metal and of copper wirings. And, Honourable Members are aware of the terror inflicted upon our society by persons stealing from and robbing people of gold chains, bracelets etc. It is believed that many of these stolen items find their way into cash for gold operations. The **Pawnbrokers and Second-hand Dealers Bill and Customs Management (Amendment) Bill seeks to** address the challenges being experienced as a result of the unregulated 'cash for gold' and 'scrap metal' businesses by providing a regulatory regime to protect legitimate businesses whilst maintaining safeguards for the public.

The Bill will require that all such businesses be licensed under the Business Licence Act under specified conditions.

The Bill when enacted imposes upon a business owner or Dealers the duty and responsibility to verify the identity of customers, to maintain records, and to keep certain items in an unaltered state for specified periods.

I advise that the Bill provides for all such businesses to be subject to monitoring by a police designated administrator. It is also proposed to empower the police with a range of powers of entry, for production of records, seizure and forfeiture of articles included in the inventories of such business places.

Certain articles are prohibited from being dealt with by a pawnbroker or secondhand dealer, namely, firearms, prohibited goods and illegal substances.

Mr. Speaker,

Amendments are intended to both the Firearms Act and the Dangerous Drugs Act as follows:

### **Firearms Act (Amendment) Bill**

The terms of imprisonment have been increased for most of the offences provided under this Act. Many offences tried in the Magistrates Court will now become punishable by terms of imprisonment within ranges of 4-years to 7-years or 5-years to 7-years. Penalties will be substantially longer if tried in the Supreme Court.

For purposes of unlawful possession, deeming provisions are introduced that provide that the occupier of premises or person in control of a privately operated vehicle, aircraft or vessel where a firearm is found is deemed to be in possession.

Two new offences are proposed to be created i.e.:

- Importation of firearms

- possession of body armour without approval in writing of the licensing authority, i.e. the police .

Mr. Speaker:

### **Dangerous Drugs Act (Amendment) Bill**

Proposed amendments to the Dangerous Drugs Act provide for:

- amendments to the penalty provisions of the Act in relation to convictions in the Magistrates Court to increase the provisions for imprisonment to ranges of 4-years to 7-years and 5-years to 7-years regarding offences relating to possession with intent to supply, engaging in continuing criminal enterprise, and certain other penalties; and
- the imposition of penalties for possessing and supplying drugs to a minor and/or within one mile of a school.

Mr. Speaker:

There are a number of other Bills that we are introducing today. They include the Straw Market Authority Bill, Road Traffic Act Amendments, Modifications of Provisions of Ginn in West End, and a Freedom of Information Bill.

### **Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill**

The amendment to the **Road Traffic Act** proposes that we make third party insurance covering property damage and bodily injury of all passengers compulsory.

Further it removes the requirement for a policeman's presence at the scene of every accident. A police officer's presence would only be required if someone is seriously injured or killed or when serious damage is caused to a motor vehicle. Hence, "fender benders" as we often refer to minor accidents may be settled between the parties exchanging insurance information.

The Bill empowers the Minister to make regulations with relation to seat belts, provides exemptions of seat belt requirements for certain persons (taxis and trucks – except for the driver and any front seat passenger, and specially designed vehicles for the disabled).

The Bill creates an offence for driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, amends the Act so as to add "blood" as a specimen which may be required to be given to a police officer and amends and or sets a number of fixed penalty offences originally contained in the Criminal Procedure Act.

Mr. Speaker:

### **Freedom of Information Bill**

I am also pleased to table the Freedom of Information Bill which seeks to grant the public a right to access records held by public authorities, subject to exemption required to balance the right against the public interest in excluding certain governmental, commercial or personal information.

The Act provides definitions for information to include a written record, map, graph, plan, photograph, disc, tape, sound track or other device on which data or sounds are embodied.

The Act does not apply to judicial function of a court or the holder of a judicial office; the Royal Bahamas Police Force, Royal Bahamas Defence Force, the Department of Immigration, Customs or the Financial Intelligence Unit in relation to their strategic or operational intelligence gathering.

Records will be exempt from disclosure if the disclosure would injure the foreign relations of The Bahamas or reveal other confidential information of Cabinet; trade secrets, and in other specified circumstances

The Bill makes provision for the creation of the office of the Information Commissioner, who will be appointed by the Governor-General, serve for a five year term and be responsible to Parliament.

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5 October, 2011

**National Address on Crime**

**Rt. Hon. Hubert A. Ingraham**

**Prime Minister**

**Commonwealth of The Bahamas**

**3 October 2011**

**The Challenges Confronting Us**

My Fellow Bahamians:

Good evening.

Tonight, I speak to you on the issue of crime which is undoubtedly the most pressing issue in our nation. Crime has become one of the greatest threats to our way of life and to life itself.

The security, protection and welfare of the Bahamian people are among the most fundamental duties of my Government. These are my most urgent responsibilities.

We are today confronted by an intolerable level of crime, especially violent crime, and disrespect by the criminal class for life and for the Giver of Life.

We are confronted by criminals -- a criminal class of older seasoned offenders as well as a crop of bloody-minded juvenile offenders and thugs who seem to believe that they can evade the rule of law with little or no regard for life and other people's property.

For some, life is cheap; our common welfare is of no value.

I share your anguish and anger whether you or a family member or neighbour has been a victim of crime.

This vicious assault of crime affects us all. It destroys lives and damages livelihoods.

Most particularly it threatens the future of our youth, the majority of whom daily choose to live good lives, study ardently, participate in health and life-affirming activities in sport, in the arts and through volunteerism. We owe it to that majority of our youth and to all our God-fearing citizens to reassert all that is good and decent in our heritage and to unite to stop those who seek to disregard and destroy that goodly heritage.

Our great ally in combating criminality is the rule of law. In a matter of days my Government will introduce legislation in Parliament to further aid in the shared battle we are waging against criminality. During the debate on these laws, I will, along with my colleagues, share with you in detail the measures we are pursuing to strengthen our laws and our resolve.

The arsenal and tools we must use in this shared and common fight against crimes and criminality must also include faith- and community-based responses. Government and other institutions are no substitute for personal responsibility and family life.

More broadly and urgently, our cause must be for a future that is more peaceful and nonviolent.

We did not arrive at this grave state of affairs overnight. Still, our dual challenge is to respond to the immediate effects of crime as well as the longer term causes and solutions to violence and anti-social behaviour.

### **How We Got Here and What Your Government is Doing**

My Fellow Bahamians:

To combat crime and its various causes requires us to understand how we got here, and that we all have a role to play in confronting this complex and vexing national challenge.

Today's culture of crime and criminality has deep roots and multiple causes, all of which must be addressed by each one of us.

In far-reaching and destructive ways, those roots and causes sank deep into our culture feeding off and growing from the rampant drug trafficking and gangsterism which ran wild in the 70s and 80s.

Among the casualties of that period were some of our sons and daughters who became addicted to the ill-gotten gains of that trade. Tragically, others became addicted to drugs like crack cocaine which ravaged their minds and their bodies as well as their dreams and potential.

Rampant materialism laid waste to long-held values and positive social mores. Family life suffered as too many parents and even grandparents traded traditional values for materialism, such as new satellite dishes, fancy cars, expensive jewellery and trips abroad.



Today, in addition to a more entrenched culture of criminal violence, there is also a gun culture. Supporting that culture is ready access to all manner of illegal weapons smuggled into The Bahamas. We will address this issue.

We are increasing the number and frequency of random searches of general imports by Customs with a view to discovering illegal weapons which are sometimes concealed in general imports of household appliances and dry goods, vehicles and or components and parts.

It will also require improving the tracking of weapons entering the country legitimately on visiting pleasure craft so as to ensure that each and every firearm departs The Bahamas on the vessel on which it arrived.

### **My Fellow Bahamians:**

It is our firm conviction that removal of the unlicensed firearms from our society will substantially reduce the level of crime and pain in our society. Toward this end the Police Force is strengthening and expanding the reach and intensity of action by its special task forces dealing with firearms and drug houses.

At the same time amendments to the Firearms Act and to the Dangerous Drugs Act together with new legislation for the control and regulation of Pawnbrokers and Second-hand dealers will add new teeth to police initiatives to identify and shut down drug houses and to closely regulate pawnbrokers and second-hand dealers (e.g. cash for gold and scrap-metal operators) so as to stop the sale of stolen property.

I advise that we are expanding by two the number of magistrate courts dealing exclusively with drug and gun crimes. This will bring to four the number of courts dedicated to hearing matters of individuals charged with drug and gun crimes.

I announce this evening that for a period of 30 days following the introduction of the amendments to the Firearms Act on Wednesday 5 October 2011 all citizens and other persons are requested to turn in to the Police any and all unlicensed firearms in their possession.

After the 4<sup>th</sup> November anyone convicted of unlawful possession of a firearm or ammunition will, upon conviction, be imprisoned for a minimum of four years. I highlight the fact that the power of magistrates to impose sentences is being increased from five to seven years and that conviction on drug and gun related offences may attract the maximum sentence of seven years.

I also advise that the penalty for the possession and sales of drugs discovered within one mile of a school will be six years.

### **Fellow Bahamians:**

The supply and use of illegal drugs have exacted a terrible toll on our communities. Drug traffickers, foreign and Bahamians, years ago determined that the supply of their illicit goods to Bahamian facilitators would win them both business partners and faithful customers. The demand for drugs has grown exponentially in The Bahamas over the past three decades. And, while well-intentioned, our anti-

abuse and demand reduction drug initiatives have not been as continuous or sustained as they might have been.

A creeping culture of lawlessness has led to a tolerance of petty crimes, small-theft and the defrauding of Government and others which sometimes opens the doorway to tolerance of even more serious crime.

Adding fuel to the fire is the length of time it takes to bring some offenders to trial and or the relative ease with which bail is available to hardened criminals and known repeat offenders who have contributed significantly to the present wave of crime.

**Fellow Bahamians:**

In the fight against crime my Government has taken immediate action and continues to pursue medium- and longer-term measures to bolster our anti-crime campaign.

We have:

- Increased the ranks of the Police Force by 200 officers;
- invested in new equipment, technology and crime-fighting tools for the Police Force;
- enhanced the facilities of the courts, a process nearing completion;
- filled all judicial vacancies to ensure a full complement of Justices and magistrates in the judicial system;
- implemented the electronic monitoring (ankle bracelets) of accused and convicted persons released on bail; and
- introduced, and will soon expand, CCTV monitoring in various high-crime areas of New Providence.

The police are particularly pleased with plans to expand CCTV coverage because of the threefold benefits of the presence of the cameras in high crime areas, i.e. crime prevention, crime detection and evidence production. It is important to recognize that CCTV footage is admissible evidence in court.

With a view to strengthening the Police Force's anti-crime fighting arsenal even further, we have reviewed measures effectively used in other jurisdictions to strengthen policing. We are poised to introduce a number of those measures determined to be most appropriate to our needs.

In this vein, in February of this year we paid for two highly-equipped mobile command centres for the Police Force. Made to order, the first of the mobile police units is ready for delivery. The second one will follow. Training in the use of this strategic asset commenced today.

These specialty mobile police stations are an essential addition to our crime fighting arsenal. Basic features of the units include video recording capabilities, flat screen monitors for viewing; specialized recording equipment, and high-tech police lighting/siren/public address system.

These units can be dispatched to any location in New Providence to serve as a mobile police station in support of anti-crime measures including during special operations. They will be used in high crime areas in support of community policing and during situations requiring high-visibility police presence.

They will provide easy access to the police for residents and crime witnesses to give statements or other information at the scene of an incident.

The specialized lighting and built in generator allow the mobile police station to run for long periods of time on-scene.

We propose, over the coming months to institute especially targeted training programmes to enhance the investigatory skills of the Police Force. While such training is ongoing and typically takes place overseas, what is now proposed is to mount the courses locally with the assistance of specialist consultants.

#### **Fellow Bahamians:**

We know that the grant of bail to fewer repeat offenders will help to reduce the number of murders, armed robberies, rapes, house-breaking and stealing, and the rate of crime.

Indeed, many witnesses to crime are afraid to come forward for fear that their identity will become known to the accused. The intimidation of witnesses is negatively impacting some prosecutions. So as to address this problem legislation will be put in place to authorise the non-disclosure of a witness's identity in specific circumstances and under certain strict conditions.

I note that Parliament is unable to prevent the Supreme Court from granting bail. Parliament may do so in respect of Magistrates Courts, and Parliament will be moved to do so.

Parliament can and Parliament will be moved in the coming days to require, by statute, that a Judge, prior to the grant of bail to a defendant in murder, armed robbery, and rape cases, be satisfied that the accused:

- (i) has not been tried within 3 years;
- (ii) is not likely to be tried within a 3 year period; and
- (iii) whether there are substantial grounds for believing that the defendant, if released on bail would fail to surrender to custody or appear at his trial; commit an offence while on bail, or interfere with witnesses or otherwise obstruct the cause of justice, whether in relation to himself or any other person; or
- (iv) having been released on bail previously, is subsequently charged with a similar offence.
- (v) And, the Court is required to take into account the antecedents and character of the defendant.

Where a Judge is so satisfied and grants bail, the reasons for doing so must be put in writing. And, the Attorney General may appeal such a decision, and if he does so, the accused is not to be released on bail until the appeal is heard and determined by the Court of Appeal.

**Fellow Bahamians:**

The last time the death penalty was carried out in The Bahamas was in January 2000, some 11 years ago. Up to that time, the Privy Council said we were constitutionally and legally permitted to execute convicted murderers.

Some six years later, in 2006, the Privy Council said it was not constitutional to have a mandatory single penalty of execution for murder. As a result, we have been unable to administer that punishment since our return to office in 2007.

On my watch as head of Government five individuals were executed.

In response to the ruling of our highest court, amendments will be made to our law. The amendment will retain the death penalty as a punishment and will add an alternative penalty of life imprisonment. Where life imprisonment is imposed as an alternative to a death penalty the sentence will be for the remainder of a convicted individual's natural life.

For persons convicted of murder who are not sentenced to death, the alternative penalty of life imprisonment will be imposed where the victim is a witness or a party in an action (civil or criminal), where a member of a jury or past jury in a criminal case is murdered, where the offence is in relation to the murder of more than one person, or where the convict had been previously convicted of murder and when the murder was committed on the direction of another. The sentence of death would also apply where the victims is a member of the Police Force, Defence Force, Customs, Immigration and the Prison Services, members of the Judiciary, or where the murder occurred in the commission of a robbery, rape, kidnapping or an act of terrorism.

In other murder cases where a death sentence is not applicable, the penalty will be a term of imprisonment of between 30 and 60 years. I note that such sentences are not applicable to convicts who are 18 years or younger at the time of their conviction.

**My Fellow Bahamians:**

As you may be aware the Government has for some time been engaged in the process of improving the facilities of the Supreme Court and the Magistrates Court.

It is expected that by the 1st January, 2012 we will have at least five courts instead of four courts in which criminal trial will be conducted on a daily basis in New Providence. This is in addition to a court in Grand Bahama in which criminal trials are conducted year round.

I have been advised by the Chairman of the Judicial and Legal Services Commission that the services of an experienced judge has been secured to serve as a new and additional Justice of the Supreme Court beginning on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2012.

The Supreme Court, in addition to dealing with outstanding matters, has assigned a court to deal with current matters to ensure that these matters do not become outstanding matters. With the new Supreme Court in New Providence, it is hoped that at least two courts will be assigned to deal with current matters.

The Magistrates Court complex on Nassau Street is nearing completion. This complex will permit all Magistrates Courts to be located in one complex with their own holding cells for prisoners. We expect that this will eliminate many of the delays in starting and completing trials previously experienced when the courts were located in a number of locations and prisoners had to be transported from the Central Police Station to the courts at different locations.

A new Magistrates court for Remand Hearings is now ready. Amendments will be offered to provide for hearings relating to persons held on remand to be conducted electronically via live video feeds. This will obviate the need for large numbers of persons held on remand to be transported to appear before a magistrate downtown or on Nassau Street.

### **Social Intervention**

Fellow Bahamians:

There is no denying the role played by young males in the crime scourge of our nation. These males are predominantly from the urban areas of the country, most particularly Nassau and to a lesser degree, Freeport. We cannot bury our heads in the sand about this reality.

To address this reality, the Government will make \$1 million available immediately to initiate programmes within urban areas of Nassau and Freeport. These programmes will be developed and executed in conjunction with social partners such as the church, civic groups and sporting groups. The funds for these new initiatives are in addition to the resources that are already budgeted for various urban renewal and youth development programmes in Nassau and Freeport.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Development will spearhead this effort together with the Ministry of Youth Sports and Culture. We expect these programmes to be up and running by as early as December of this year.

### **A Call to National Volunteerism**

Fellow Bahamians:

I must speak clearly on this. With its best efforts, the Government alone will not be able to fully address this scourge of crime. We need as many of you who care about our nation to enlist in this fight.

I am therefore calling you to a new era of national volunteerism.

We will launch on November 1, 2011, a National Volunteers Register. This register will enable you to sign up to be available to volunteer your time for mentoring our young men and women; assisting in community centres with afterschool programmes; outreaches to urban neighbourhoods to encourage parental and child involvement in school activities; to work with existing youth organizations in their programmes; and a host of social activities that can positively impact upon our society.

You will be able to register online or at various designated government offices. Our aim is to enlist hundreds if not thousands of volunteers. This effort will also be spearheaded by the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture together with the Ministry of Labour and Social Development.

Fellow Bahamians:

One of the social dimensions to fighting crime is social intervention which can play an essential role in deterring crime, stopping first offenders from re-offending and rehabilitating some criminals.

Accordingly, my Government will continue to work with and strengthen partnerships with civil society generally. We will collaborate with churches, civic groups and the business community to fund and manage targeted social intervention programmes to confront anti-social and criminal behaviour among various groups.

In our shared fight against crime, there is an urgent need for more community service and mentoring and greater corporate citizenship and philanthropic efforts inclusive of helping to fund and sustain various youth and young adult programmes as well as crime prevention and offender rehabilitation programmes.

The four principal areas we are targeting are:

- Community service programmes in all public schools with an enhanced service-learning, ethics and character development component;
- Community and youth development programmes geared towards providing young people with positive and alternative life experiences and skills while discouraging anti-social behaviour; and
- Effective and creative alternative sentencing for juvenile offenders.

Towards this end, the Minister of Education has been charged with implementing a new and more comprehensive community service-learning programme for all Government schools. This is with a view to helping more young people develop a sense of belonging in our community and deeper sense of responsibility for its well-being while better respecting themselves and others.

The Ministers of Education, Labour and Social Development and Youth, Sports and Culture will collaborate on the development of a programme like the highly successful Outward Bound Programme which may help steer at-risk youth and first-offenders away from a life of crime.

Simultaneously, these Ministries and Departments will collaborate toward improving the programmes available for youths at the Simpson Penn and Willamae Pratt facilities with a view to improving the results being achieved in preparing these young people for reintegration into the community with skills to pursue productive lives.

## **Conclusion: Building a More Peaceful Culture & Restoring Community**

### **My Fellow Bahamians:**

I have addressed you on numerous occasions. Yet, tonight is one of the more distressing national addresses I have had the solemn duty of giving.

It is distressing not mostly because of the murder count and high incidence of violent crime as painful as are these numbers. It is what those numbers represent that is heart-breaking. For all of our good fortune as a country, we have in significant ways lost a sense of ourselves and of what is essential. One writer reminds us that “what is essential is invisible to the eye.”

While the bonds and threads of community may be invisible to the eye, their absence or presence is plain for all to see. We know that peace is not merely the absence of violence. Instead, we know that it is a sign of community and mutual respect.

So, we long for something more than the outer trappings of material success. We long for something more, like community and fellowship. We long for something more, like peace and well-being.

Remember when the old people used to tell us that all you have is your good name and your reputation and that you don’t leave this Earth with any of your worldly goods.

Our most precious possessions are invisible to the eye like a good conscience or the service we give with no expectation of recognition or reward.

This crisis of culture and community manifested in an unprecedented level of criminality requires us to deal with essentials invisible to the eye like values, attitudes, social trust and mutual respect.

We will get the crime numbers down. But most crimes are symptoms, not root causes.

Even as we relentlessly combat the criminals, provide law enforcement and the judiciary with the tools and resources they require and modernize our laws, there is something else as urgent, as essential -it is urgent and essential that we renew, restore and replenish our sense of community choosing a culture of life over a culture given over to deadly violence.

From where shall we draw inspiration? Where do I find hope?

We find inspiration and hope in the young man who turned from the business of crime to running a small landscaping business. Early one morning his mother heard tapping on the window. She thought it was her son’s former criminal associates, only to find out that they were his work crew headed out on a contract from the Ministry for the Environment to help beautify New Providence.

We draw inspiration from the work of groups like the Peace and Justice Institute of the Bahamas Conference of the Methodist Church, which along with other denominations are organizing faith-based alternative sentencing programmes for juvenile offenders.

We find hope in the many service clubs, civic groups and thousands of public and private school students who render community service to their fellow-citizens including some of the least-fortunate among us.

And we draw courage and determination from that anthem of hope and inspiration, “Get Involved” by the late Tyrone Fitzgerald, “Dr. Off”.

Fellow Bahamians:

Poverty is not an excuse for crime. I too grew up poor.

A two-parent family is our ideal. I am the child of a single parent and I was raised by my Grandmother.

Many children from two-parent families get caught up in crime while many children from single-parent households are good citizens and fine young people.

In the end, it is the quality of parenting, not the quantity that is essential.

I grew up in what was then a remote part of Abaco called Cooper’s Town. I came up at a time when there were few opportunities for a poor boy like me born to a single parent. The first time I met my father was when I was 11years old.

Even though I didn’t possess material wealth, I had wealth more everlasting: Mama, who instilled in me a sense of my own worth as belonging to her and as a child of God.

She schooled me in the knowledge that the land of my birth, The Bahamas we all love, is a land of opportunity for anyone willing to work hard.

As a boy, never in my wildest dreams could I ever imagine becoming an attorney, Member of Parliament or minister of government let alone prime minister. But having been given this great privilege I have dedicated my public life to providing every Bahamian boy and girl with opportunities I never had.



This is why I have never stopped working to make sure that every Bahamian child on every island in every settlement in The Bahamas has decent schools and access to higher education. This is why my Government ensures that everyone meeting a certain criteria and academic standards can attend the College of The Bahamas at public expense. And that is why since coming to office in 2007 we increased scholarship funding from \$400.000 to \$7.75 million. And this does not include bonded scholarships, the All Bahamas Merit Scholarship or Bahamas Commonwealth Scholarships.

I say to you, young Bahamians: While your country may give you a hand-up, you are not entitled to hand-outs.

So, even while we have much to improve as a country including the quality of our public education system, young Bahamians, men and women, you have more opportunities than any generation in Bahamian history.

And so we must not throw up our hands or find easy excuses; instead let us unite to help to restore law and order and civility and community by getting involved. In the words of Dr. Off, we can get involved. Indeed for the sake of our children and ourselves, we must get involved in:

Making sure our children finish their homework;  
Mentoring and tutoring students who need a caring adult;  
Assisting the police in identifying criminals;  
Community service programmes for at-risk and other youth;  
Crime and neighbourhood watch programmes.

Unless more of us get involved, none of us are truly safe. In the end, community engagement and service will be more effective in combating crime than iron bars and gated communities.

Our task is not only to stop criminals from breaking into our homes and businesses. As urgently we must stop them from wanting to do so in the first place.

And, we will do both.

My Fellow Bahamians:

I close tonight by invoking the guidance and protection of Almighty God on our country. We are a blessed people, a people of hope and resilience, faith and fortitude.

In the spirit of Psalm 121, just as another people did at another time of lamentation we pray:

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.”

With God’s guidance, unity of purpose and unyielding resolve we will ensure greater law and order, we will ensure greater peace in our Bahamaland.

I thank you for listening. Good Night.