



**Ministry of National Security
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Televised National Address on Crime

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Introduction

My Fellow Bahamians:

The preamble to our Constitution states that we, the people of this Family of Islands, recognize that the preservation of our freedom will be guaranteed by a national commitment to self-discipline, industry, loyalty, unity and an abiding respect for Christian values and the Rule of Law. It is on this solid foundation that The Bahamas has long held proudly to a tradition of peace and stability, and stands as an example to the world, a true beacon of promise, as a small country that is big on pride and achievement.

Our country is an archipelago, like a bridge between the northern Caribbean islands in the south and the southern United States in the north...a collection of beauty unsurpassed, but it is that strategic location that has always subjected The Bahamas to criminal activity from the days of the pirates, when the motto of our then colony was, "EXPULSIS PIRATIS, RESTITUTA COMMERCIA"...which means "WHEN PIRATES WERE EXPELLED, TRADE WAS RESTORED"!

Although we have progressed in many ways since those days, our strategic location has, over the years, precipitated an unhealthy level of lawlessness where incidents of serious crimes and violence have reached unacceptable levels.

Bahamians today are concerned about violent crimes against the person, which include armed robbery, shootings, sexual assault, domestic violence and increasingly, murder. Such violent crimes, including murder, are directly connected to the trans-

shipment of and trade in illegal drugs and illegal firearms and ammunition through our islands. Additionally, there is trafficking in persons, human smuggling and money laundering, which form the basis of transnational enterprises which confront us on a daily basis. These crimes against the person are experienced predominantly in the islands of New Providence and Grand Bahama, where most of our population resides.

The security of The Bahamas and its citizens are of top priority to the Government of The Bahamas. We are very concerned and we will do all we can to combat crime, in particular murders. Additionally, we will continue to aggressively pursue criminal enterprises involved in human trafficking, human smuggling and money laundering.

I want to reassure all Bahamians that the Government understands and shares the same level of concern that you currently experience on the intolerable level of crime in our nation. We know that you want and deserve to feel safe, and that you want crime to be reduced. But, we must each make a fervent commitment to do all within our power to address this situation, if we are to move to a safer, modern and prosperous Bahamas...indeed a stronger Bahamas.

The Crime Problem

In order to successfully combat the criminal elements of today, we must keep in touch with what is happening on our streets, in our communities and even in our homes. We must devise workable responses based on an examination of emerging crime trends.

Although overall crime has been trending downward since 2012, murders are the yardstick by which the public gauges the level of crime in our nation.

At this time last year, there were 77 murders. Thus far for 2015, a total of 97 murders have occurred, representing an increase of nearly 25%. A closer study of murders over the last few years uncovered some clear patterns. First, more than 60% , that is every 6 out of 10, of these incidents occurred within our inner-city communities.

When we look at the victims and suspects, we note many similarities. About 56% of murder victims had prior criminal records; 7% of whom were previously charged with murder. As for the suspects, nearly 80% of them had prior criminal records; 15% of whom were previously charged with murder.

The Illegal Drug Trade

The regional drug trade is responsible for much of the local violence, making it one of the root causes of crime in our country. Local drug traffickers have transformed into criminal enterprises that steal drugs from each other and compete for limited turf in which to operate. Within the Ministry of National Security, the National Anti-Drug Secretariat (NADS) - which is the coordinating body for all anti-drug agencies - has recently been augmented. NADS has been refocused to conduct and facilitate research activities that will be used to inform the best and most progressive strategies and programs in the fight against drugs.

Local law enforcement agencies in cooperation with their international drug counterparts continue to produce tangible results in their interdiction efforts by seizing cocaine, marijuana and other illicit drugs. Most recently, there have been 2 major drugs busts. In mid-July, officials intercepted a 35-foot go-fast vessel in waters off Kemps Bay, South Andros, and seized 5,050 pounds of marijuana, with an estimated value of \$4.6 million. Five Bahamians and one Jamaican were arrested. Two weeks later over 30 bales of marijuana and a quantity of cocaine were seized in a local home. Four suspects were taken into custody. The drugs weighed 1,186 pounds and have a street value of nearly \$1.2 million.

The United States, Bahamian and Turks and Caicos Island authorities have, for the last several decades, cooperated in a drug interdiction program called OPBAT, which is recognized as the most effective initiative of its kind globally. Last year the Royal Bahamas Police Force and the Royal Bahamas Defence Force received an award from the United States in recognition of the significant contributions they have made through the OPBAT Program in the continuing effort to counter the increasing international threat posed by the trafficking of narcotics and other illicit substances.

Private sector stakeholders have also been assisting in the drug fight. For example, the Arawak Cay Container Port Company has agreed to fund a new Canine Interdiction Unit. This will involve purchasing dogs, which are trained to detect drugs and firearms, and stationing them at the Port to examine incoming containers for contraband. This program

will be operated by the Police and will supplement the work of the Customs Department which has its own Canine Interdiction Unit.

Through NADS, we have also refocused the way we fight the drug trade from a strictly enforcement approach to a new approach that also tackles the local demand for drugs. It has come to our attention that some drug and tobacco distributors are now focusing their attention on marketing their products to young people. Some of the most popular products marketed to youth are the *“backwood”, ‘beedies’* and the *‘hookah pen’*.

The hookah pen products come in many colors and fruity flavors that are appealing to young people and are being marketed as a healthier alternative to cigarettes. The fact is, however, that these products can be more lethal than regular cigarettes. Additionally, evidence has suggested that persons who use these products are more likely to use illegal drugs. There have also been cases where persons have placed marijuana inside these products. I am informed that there is a local company which is producing a brand of the hookah pen and so we are moving to enact and enforce strict regulations to ensure that these products are safe, properly marketed and not offered for sale for minors. We will also launch a public awareness campaign to better educate members of the public, particularly youths, on the harmful effects of using backwood, beedies, hookahs and similar products.

Overall, there will be more focus and attention on activities that are aimed at dissuading youths from becoming interested in using drugs, thereby lowering the demand for drugs.

I wish to bring to your attention that it is our knowledge that there are many young persons who end up with a prison record after conviction for minor crimes involving the use and or the abuse of drugs. Indeed, the majority of youth in our prisons test positive for drugs, especially marijuana. It is our intention to take a different approach to such cases by offering to them exposure to what are known as Drug Treatment Courts. These are courts, rather than sending such persons to prison, which may occur now, will provide the opportunity for rehabilitation, community service and skills training. If successful the offender would be reintegrated into the community without the label associated with a criminal record.

Illegal Guns

My Fellow Bahamians:

The drug trade drives crime through violence associated with trafficking in guns and contributes to the widespread availability of illicit firearms. Not only have levels of crime and violence increased, but the use of weapons in criminal acts has increased as well. The combination of illegal drugs and illegal firearms is a prime formula for murder.

Illegal firearms are being used in the vast majority of the murders committed in The Bahamas. Between the years 2005 and 2014, local police seized a total of 3,328 firearms. For this year alone, the police has already confiscated 260 guns and 5,273 rounds of ammunition. It appears that while more guns are being taken off the streets, criminals do not find it difficult to get firearms and commit more violent crimes. More recently, there

has been a shift from handguns to the increasing use of high powered automatic weapons such as the AK-47 assault rifle.

Our strategy is also designed to reduce and control the number of illegal firearms coming into our country, which will have a direct effect on the high murder rate. Given the archipelagic nature of our nation, gun interdiction at our borders has proven to be a challenging and complicated task. Nonetheless, we are up to the challenge.

The Government has augmented our local firearms intelligence agencies, which are collaborating with their international counterparts including the US Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco & Firearms (ATF). They have been providing us with more and more useful information on persons who are bringing these guns into our country. Two recent cases have demonstrated the fruitfulness of this improved partnership. First, in early June, 2015, intelligence led to the seizure of 3 illegal firearms along with 517 rounds of ammunition, which were recovered through a courier service. Three men were arrested in connection with this seizure. Additional arrests are expected both here in the Bahamas and in the United States.

A few days later, officials were able to intercept gun traffickers who were attempting to smuggle firearms through the Arawak Cay Container Port. After a short foot chase, officers caught 2 males, and conducted a search of the two boxes they had in their possession and found therein 8 illegal handguns. The two suspects, ages 35 and 21, were taken into custody.

Our local Firearms Tracing & Investigations Unit, [FTIU] has been upgraded with a full complement of highly trained and experienced investigators. The Unit has been outfitted with the latest technological advancements in tracing and identification software including the Bahamas Integrated Ballistic Information Network (BIBIN) which keeps them on the cutting edge in disrupting the illegal gun trade. The new tracing technology has enabled officials to trace a gun that had been purchased outside The Bahamas and link it to the commission of a crime in The Bahamas within days.

In order to prevent confiscated weapons from getting into the hands of members of the public, the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNLIREC) gifted the Bahamas Government a machine which destroys weapons. That weapon destruction machine has been put to good use over the last three years.

Addressing loopholes through which firearms and ammunition gain access into The Bahamas is an on-going effort by the Ministry of National Security. For example, travelers from the United States to The Bahamas are currently able to present an export certificate to airlines for the transportation of firearms in checked luggage. We have under consideration the prohibition of the importation of firearms and ammunition via commercial airlines with the imposition of significant fines on any airline that accepts firearms and ammunition for transport into The Bahamas without a permit previously issued by the Royal Bahamas Police Force.

Social Media

As of late, a number of persons have used social media to post pictures of themselves posing with illegal weapons and or to send threatening messages to the general public and to the police. We are not going to allow criminals to use social media to place fear in the minds of the members of the public.

This sort of behavior cannot and will not be tolerated. As a result, authorities have arrested and charged some of these persons for their actions. A recent case involved a female who is seen inserting a magazine into what appears to be an AK-47 assault rifle.. In addition to prosecuting such actions and putting a stop to them, we have also drafted a Cyber Crime Bill to specifically address crimes committed by persons with the use of computers and social media. It is our intention to present this Bill to Parliament in the near future.

Criminal Gangs

Fellow Bahamians:

Another trend we have observed is the proliferation of criminal gangs, which began forming in local communities by gang leaders recruiting young males, many of whom were high-school drop-outs. In fact, they have now infected many of our high schools. These criminal gangs include “One Order”, “Fire & Theft”, “Mad Ass”, “Mad Fire”, “War Dukes”, “Dirty South”, “Zoe Pound” and several others. They have now become more organized and are deeply involved in the illegal drug and gun trades. The drugs they sell and the guns

they use to protect their turf result in much of the murder, and mayhem and violence that we are currently experiencing, especially in New Providence. In fact, about 60% of the murders are the result of retaliations between rival gang members. These young men and women live in our homes. Their relatives must know about their criminal activities and in some cases depend on the proceeds of their ill-gotten goods. In too many cases these young men end up in prison or lose their lives. How many more of them do we intend to lose?

Officials throughout our national security agencies have been specially selected and trained both locally and overseas to dismantle these gangs which are a menace. Indeed, I regard them as public enemy number one! We have established an Anti-Gang Unit, which is currently attached to the Firearm Tracing & Investigation Unit, and they have begun their work arresting gang members for their engagement in illicit activities.

Last year, in Parliament, we enacted an amendment to the Penal Code with the intent to eradicate gangs. Bahamians, especially young men, should be aware that membership in an illegal gang is now a major criminal offence, punishable on conviction to a fine of \$500,000 and to imprisonment for twenty (20) years. The Act also makes it a crime for any person who has in their possession a bullet proof vest in association with an unlawful gang, liable on conviction, to a fine of \$100,000 and imprisonment for 20 years. The amendment also makes it an offence for members of an unlawful gang to commit crimes involving guns and or drugs, the penalty for which on conviction is \$500,000 and 20 years in prison!

I am therefore warning gang members that as this law takes effect, the consequences for you are very, very, very serious. Several gang leaders are presently serving time in The Bahamas Department of Corrections, though not being convicted under this Act. We will continue to do our part to ensure that all gang members, who continue to disrupt the peace and tranquility of our nation, will face the full brunt of this new Amendment.

The Bail Issue

Fellow Bahamians:

I now draw your attention to issues related to the grant of bail to accused persons.

We have discovered that about one third of persons who were charged with murder, were also on bail for another serious offence. In fact, thus far for this year, fifteen (15) of the murder victims were on bail for a serious offence. In other words, research has shown that persons who are charged with violent crimes (including murder) are more likely to become a murder victim than persons who are not charged with a violent crime. The truth is that if these persons who were charged with serious crimes were not on bail, less murders would have occurred and the murder rate would have been lower. To confirm this observation, last year, 30 of the murder victims were persons who were on bail for committing serious offences. Had they been denied bail there would have been less than 100 murder cases last year!

This issue about bail is therefore quite vexing. I understand the right to bail as guaranteed by our Constitution but I confess that if it was in my power, I would not release any person charged with murder on bail. Constitutionally, however, that power is only vested in the judiciary. Our research has revealed that such persons are often the victims of fatal retaliation. We have knowledge of a case where a suspect who was on remand at the Department of Correctional Services was about to be released after someone had stood his bail. However, he was suspicious and asked for the identity of the person who was standing bail for him. When the name was revealed to him, it was a person who was unknown to him, and he immediately asked that he not be released as he was concerned that the person may well have been securing his release in order to harm him!

With (ten) 10 Supreme Courts now sitting and hearing criminal cases, our colleagues at the Office of the Attorney General are cutting down the backlog and are making progress in getting matters to trial within the shortest possible time. We commend them and support them.

Given the very serious challenges we face with respect to illicit drugs, firearms and criminal gangs, I appreciate the call by some people for the establishment of special courts to adjudicate the cases of a persons charged for offences associated with these matters. Like the bail issue, however, the final determination on the approach taken is a matter for the judiciary.

We do not want Bahamians to lose confidence in our criminal justice system, and attempt to administer 'street justice'. Our government will continue to do whatever it takes to ensure that all perpetrators have their day in court.

The Death Penalty

Perhaps one of the more controversial debate remains the death penalty and why there are no hangings.

There is a great deal of misinformation that there are persons incarcerated at the Department of Correctional Services awaiting the death sentence. This is not the case. At present, there is only one person on death row and his sentence is under active appeal.

Our Constitution permits the use of the death penalty in cases where a person is convicted of murder and is sentenced to death by our Courts. There has been debate on the administration of the death penalty. The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, our highest Court of Appellate jurisdiction, has determined that the death penalty is reserved only for the *"worst of the worst"* cases. As a result, a significant number of persons sentenced to death had such sentences commuted to life or other terms of imprisonment.

The issue of what cases warrant the death penalty remains a challenge for us. For instance, in a recent case where an accused was found guilty of murder, the trial Judge described the murder as a "premeditated and ruthless act" as the accused had shot the victim some 16 times. You and I may be of the view that a murder so described would be

classified as being among the “*the worst of the worst*”, however, the individual, as in many other cases, was sentenced to a term of imprisonment rather than the death penalty.

Police Shootings

My fellow Bahamians:

Police officers are skilfully trained in the proper use of the firearms that their carry on a daily basis. Recently, here have been several police-citizen encounters that have resulted in suspects being fatally wounded. I offer condolences to the loved ones of these persons who unfortunately lost their lives. While the Coroner investigates these incidents, I want to remind members of the public that officers are authorized to use their weapons when their lives or the lives of others are in imminent danger. I want to let all law enforcement officers know that we are grateful to them for putting their lives on the line each day so that we can go about doing our daily activities in peace. And, I also issue a stern warning - pointing a gun in the direction of police officers who are doing their jobs is not a good idea.

I take this opportunity to plead to our young men to become your brother's keeper. Resolve your conflicts through peaceful resolutions. I appeal to each of you and your family to help us to stop the bloodshed. I also appeal to all members of the general public that if you have any information on a crime that has occurred or know of someone who is preparing to engage in a criminal act, please report it. There have been instances where, through your help, serious incidents have been avoided, and that is the way it should be.

Other Law Enforcement Agencies in the Crime Fight

Fellow Bahamians:

To maximize the use of national law enforcement resources against increasing criminal activities, my Ministry re-instituted the Heads of National Law Enforcement Agency (HONLEA) to oversee the coordination and synchronization of efforts of the various law enforcement agencies in our unyielding resolve to defeat crime. HONLEA consists of the Commissioner of Police, the Commander Defence Force, Comptroller of Customs, Director of Immigration, the Commissioner of Corrections and the Director of the National Intelligence Agency, who will meet regularly to plan and discuss strategies for securing the peace and safety of our citizens and of our country.

We are involving the Royal Bahamas Defence Force in the crime fight in addition to their other law enforcement duties. The Government has approved a \$232 million dollar loan for the acquisition of state of the art patrol craft and the modernization of bases and port facilities at Coral Harbour and in the central and southern Bahamas at Gunpoint, Ragged Island and Matthew Town Inagua, respectively.

To date, the Defence Force has acquired five of nine patrol craft. These craft have already produced promising results. For example, while on patrol, Defence Force officers discovered over 200 pounds of marijuana hidden on one of our islands and have apprehended 15 persons for possession of undeclared firearms and ammunition.

As a result of suggestions from members of the public at one of our crime fora, we set up an outpost at South Beach Pools. Results there have been promising too as South Beach is no longer a major drop off point for illegal immigrants. The Defence Force has also extended this by establishing coastal patrols in New Providence, assisting the police by monitoring of the land and sea areas.

The Sandy Bottom Project calls for a complement of 2,000 Officers, Non-commissioned Officers and Marines by 2019. To date, the Defence Force has a complement of 1,345 service personnel. Consequently, we have embarked upon an extensive recruitment program at a rate of approximately 185 persons per year over the next three-and-a-half years in order for us to operate bases, ships and aircraft. In May of this year, the largest number of marine recruits in the history of the Defence Force—108 in total—graduated from New entry Training.

We will continue to expand the reach of the Defence Force and provide marines with the tools they need to carry out their duties more effectively. Ultimately, the Defence Force is being prepared to provide even greater assistance to the Police Force as it becomes necessary.

The Department of Customs efforts have been buttressed by the addition of a Marine Unit and the establishment of Canine Interdiction Unit. Additionally, equipment has been procured to scan containers. All of these developments have been instituted as part of

our strategy to intercept the illicit flow of drugs, weapons and ammunitions and the smuggling of goods to evade the payment of import duties.

Saturation Patrols

The government has also invested millions in the purchasing of state-of-the art police vehicles to ensure that police are able to effectively patrol our communities. Using Geographical Information System [GIS] crime-mapping and examining crime trends, a 'saturation patrol' strategy has been implemented to ensure that the police make their presence felt throughout communities that are most affected by crime. Having properly equipped police officers constantly patrolling throughout crime hot-spots has not only improved response times, but has also reduced the fear of crime and deterred would be offenders. In fact, patrol officers have caught many suspects red-handed and prevented many serious crimes from occurring

CCTV & Electronic Monitoring

Law enforcement agencies are making use of the latest technological advancements in crime fighting including the use of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) and Electronic Monitoring. Currently, there are over 360 persons who have been released on bail and are being electronically monitored. It costs \$15 per day to monitor each person, which annually works out to over \$2 million. These technological advancements have yielded significant results as they have been used to assist investigators in the identification of suspects and placed such suspects at the scene of a crime. This technology has also been used successfully as evidence in a number of criminal trials, including murder trials.

Approximately 250 hi-resolution cameras have been strategically positioned throughout New Providence to assist law enforcement officials in the crime fight. The use of CCTV has been successful as perpetrators have been caught on camera committing or intending to commit criminal offences. This has proven to be very helpful to investigators as they are able to identify suspects and use this footage as evidence during trials. CCTV, in and of itself, has been shown to have a preventative effect by virtue of persons being aware that they are being watched.

Citizen Security & Justice Program

Fellow Bahamians and residents of The Bahamas:

Addressing the crime problem requires a holistic, multi-pronged approach.

As we take a firm stand against hardened repeat offenders, we are *Building a Safer Bahamas* by targeting the effective prevention of crime through early intervention and education.

We understand the importance of tackling the underlying issues associated with crime in order to make our nation safer. With funding from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), we are about to invest \$20 million in a new Citizen Security and Justice Program. The findings of a recent Living Conditions & Crime Perception Survey are being used to design several crime prevention programs under this project. This program is among the most comprehensive and innovative crime reduction strategies that have been devised to address root causes of crime from a socio-economic crime prevention perspective.

This multifaceted approach will not only include prevention, intervention and suppression tactics but will also address challenges involving prosecution, sentencing and the rehabilitation of persons in conflict with the law. The four (4) key objectives of this program include:

- firstly, improving non-violent behaviors which involves the promotion of norms that do not promote violence to solve conflicts;
- secondly, increasing employability and employment of at risk youths between the ages of 15-25 years; as we are all aware unemployment is a correlate of high crime rates;
- thirdly, strengthening institutional capabilities of the justice services in terms of swifter case disposal; and
- finally, reducing the recidivism rate which involves the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders so that upon their release from prison, they are equipped to lead crime free lives.

Numerous governmental agencies, non-governmental agencies and civic organizations in our country already have programs that address the socio-economic challenges being faced by our people. Rather than “*re-inventing the wheel*”, we are going to provide funding and other means of support to on-going local programs that have demonstrated effectiveness and success. We want to assist them in expanding their reach and building their capacity in offering their programs.

For example, there are persons like Ms. Stacy Lee who resides in the Fort Fincastle area and who has opened her doors to volunteer her time and efforts in assisting young students who need afterschool instruction and assistance with their homework. Ms. Lee was featured on the ZNS Programme *Ordinary People*. These are the types of programs and people we will be supporting in the new Citizen Security and Justice Program. We welcome more ideas from civic organizations and civil society who want to partner with us in this crime fight. Additionally, we will try other programmes which have worked elsewhere, especially if they have worked in our region.

The Urban Renewal Program

Urban Renewal 2.0 remains a vibrant, potent, comprehensive crime prevention program that touches our inner-city communities primarily. Urban Renewal 2.0 has transformed the lives of many Bahamian families through its various outreach programs. I commend law enforcement, in particular officers from the Police and Defence Forces, who unselfishly go beyond working hours to positively impact the lives of many in these communities. This is, in fact, the most significant social intervention in our Nation's history. And, it is a manifestation of our commitment to heal the sick, house the homeless, protect the vulnerable, and bring peace to every heart.

School-Based Policing Program:

The School Based Policing Program, which began in 2005, continues to curtail acts of violence in our schools. A scholarly study was completed on the program which found that there were statistically significant lower rates of violent school incidents when police

officers were in schools and significantly higher rates when they were removed from the campuses. While there was some apprehension of the program during its initial phase, the program now enjoys the full support of all stakeholders. This program will be further expanded to ensure that our children are not only safe while on school grounds, but also while travelling to and from school. We will continue to spare no effort to protect our children, especially when they are doing their studies.

Programs for At-Risk Youths

Youths are disproportionately represented in the ranks of both victims and perpetrators of crime and violence. At present, there are 34 boys under the age of 18 who are incarcerated in the Bahamas Department of Correctional Services, 6 of whom are incarcerated for murder. None of these boys finished school.

Our investigations have shed more light on the challenges that our inner-city youths face daily. Many of our young boys and girls are not completing their basic education. Local surveys have found that in some cases only 60% of males actually make it beyond the ninth grade. Regrettably, the remainder of them are either expelled, suspended or simply drop out of school. Additionally, too many of our school-aged girls still become pregnant and do not complete their high school education. Such persons, bereft of any positive certification or skills, are on a path to unemployment and possibly to crime.

In recognition of this problem, the Government has allocated \$20 million to, among other things:

- establish a Student Refocusing Program for junior and senior high school students with behavioral issues that mitigate against their learning and employability; and
- establish an Apprenticeship Program in partnership with the private sector to employ young persons so that they can be afforded the opportunity to acquire vital basic job skills through practical on-the-job training.

Too many of our children do not take exams such as the BJC and the BGCSE at the appropriate time. In some cases they indicate that they did not because their parents could not afford the examination fee. Too many who take exams never find out whether they passed or failed and parents do not check either. This is unacceptable!

A young person growing up in our country must have an opportunity to get an education, receive job skills, and have some level of positive family and/or community involvement if they are to lead a productive crime-free life. With this in mind, my Ministry has designed a number of youth-based initiatives that are geared toward dissuading youth from choosing a life of crime.

Shock Treatment:

Last year, the Ministry of National Security launched a youth initiative dubbed 'SHOCK TREATMENT'. The program was developed to help young Bahamians who have strayed down the wrong path, to become more sensitized to the consequences of their deviant behavior.

With the consent of their parents, children with some of the greatest disciplinary problems are exposed to what life is like for persons who choose to lead deviant lives. They spend time in police stations and in prison, and they get first-hand knowledge about some of the hardships criminals face. Participants also experience the rewards that can be gained from being law abiding citizens and are provided with opportunities to build technical and vocational skills.

Give Every Child A Father:

We understand that boys need a more positive male role model in their lives. Unfortunately, a significant number of males in prison have no father figure in their lives. With this in mind, my Ministry launched a “*Give Every Child A Father*” Program at the Salem Union Baptist Church, a week before the observance of Father’s Day last year. Fifty (50) men were selected to serve as mentors for at-risk young boys in the community. Several of the at-risk boys selected for the program were able to spend their first Father’s Day ever, with their male mentors.

The Program is giving boys positive male role models and mentors; men who show up consistently; who tell the truth about struggles as men; men who will praise the boys for their unique gifts; who will correct them when they make mistakes. They will also guide them in their transition to manhood and let them know that they can accomplish anything to which they put their minds. Mentors for the Program have been screened, selected, trained, and matched with the hope that long lasting, beneficial relationships will be established.

Marco's Law:

Recently , the enacting of the amendments to the Child Protection Act, better known as Marco's Law, as well as amendments to the Sexual Offender's Act have been passed by Parliament. This legislation has led to the creation of a nationwide alert system for missing children. Already, there have been 2 cases where the notification system has been activated and children were successfully returned home to their guardians. The sexual offenders register is currently being prepared.

Parental Responsibility Bill

My Fellow Bahamians:

The family structure is the basic pillar of society. Approximately 70% of children born in The Bahamas, however, are born to single mothers. While it is proven that some children who come from two-parent homes also engage in criminal activities, the numbers are significantly higher in single parent households. This is an age-old challenge and each era brings a new dimension. Due to the youthfulness of many single mothers, many of them try to be 'friends' with their children rather than parents. Indeed, many of them simply do not know how to be a parent. Certainly, good parenting seems to be a lost art. Even where institutions have provided parenting classes, few women or men take advantage of the opportunity.

Indeed, we have exhausted a vast array of attempts to get parents to accept responsibility for their children. Unfortunately, these efforts have proven futile. We feel that we have no alternative but to respond to a call made during one of our crime fora that

we legislate responsibility of parents for their children. Hence, we have engaged the assistance of the Office of the Attorney General to draft a Parental Responsibility Bill which will be tabled in Parliament, following consultations with civil society. The primary objectives of this Bill when legislated would be to compel parents to properly supervise their minor children at all times and accept responsibility for their actions. Failure to do so will be a criminal offense.

Re-Integration of Offenders

One year ago, the Ministry of National Security implemented the beginning of the transformation of what was formerly called Her Majesty's Fox Hill Prison, from a punitive institution to a correctional facility. A Correctional Bill was passed by Parliament and brought into effect. This was a long awaited project to place greater emphasis on reintegrating prisoners into society when their period of incarceration was complete. The introduction of this new policy is not easy but acceptance is garnering increasing support.

The Department of Correctional Services has recently been awarded a grant in the amount of \$350,000 from the Inter-American Development Bank to design a new Parole Program geared toward facilitating the successful re-integration of non-violent offenders into society. The specific objective of this system is to reduce recidivism, that is, to stop persons who have been to prison from re-entering. It will also give recently released inmates an opportunity to return to society and live a productive, crime free life.

Law Enforcement Officers

The Government of The Bahamas has faithfully provided resources to engage the services of men and women in our law enforcement agencies to meet their manpower requirements.

I want to take this opportunity to officially commend all of the hard working law enforcement officers including those in the Royal Bahamas Police Force, Royal Bahamas Defence Force, The Bahamas Department of Correctional Services, and our partner agencies including the Department of Immigration and Customs Department, for their service to our country.

We will continue to equip our officials with the resources and accommodations they need to carry out their duties. We recently commissioned a new police and fire station in Eight Mile Rock, Grand Bahama, and broke ground for a new fire station in Pineridge. I am also pleased to announce that a new police station will be opened in western New Providence in the next few months to serve the communities of Lyford Cay, Old Fort Bay, Mount Pleasant, Love Beach, Clifton, Albany, Serenity and surrounding areas. We want to express gratitude to the following corporate partners for their generosity in providing some of the resources to acquire this new police station. They are:

- New Providence Development Company;
- Lyford Cay Property Owners Association;
- Lyford Cay Group; and
- Albany.

Plans are also in place to expand the facilities available to the Drug Enforcement Unit and the Central Detective Unit and to build a new state of the art Forensic laboratory.

Conclusion

My Fellow Bahamians and residents of The Bahamas:

Crime reduction is being relentlessly pursued with a renewed emphasis and vigor on dismantling criminal gangs, the removal of arms and ammunition from our streets and the removal of illicit drugs from our communities.

Those engaging in criminal activity can expect to face the full weight of the law. Those who would threaten the security of our nation and our citizens should know that we will not shirk from dealing with them.

Most of us are peaceful, law abiding, God-fearing citizens who love our country, our heritage and the freedom that our forefathers fought to secure and protect. We are not going to allow a small group of thugs – who have demonstrated that they are not interested in changing their ways – to ruin our nation’s future.

I warn criminals and members of criminal gangs that we will not rest until all of you are taken down and brought to justice.

I warn members of the public to cease and desist from allowing their homes to be havens for criminals and their illicit activities.

I remind all law enforcement officers that confidence in our law enforcement agencies is of paramount importance in our fight against crime. When the forces of law and order are compromised by way of corruption, the state cannot legitimately prevent and punish violations of the law or protect citizens' human rights. It is not good enough to know

right from wrong, you must embrace that which is right and reject that which is wrong. Not only must you oppose criminality, complicity, corruption and compromise, you are obliged expose it. In our fight against crime, there must be zero tolerance for corruption.

We need all Bahamians and residents of The Bahamas to step up to the plate, and support the many initiatives that are ongoing. Join in and support us. There is a generation of children who find themselves at a crossroad. They are at that point in their lives when they are considering following the wrong path taken by deviant persons in their communities or choosing the path of honesty, hard work and integrity. I call on the church, civic organizations, and concerned citizens everywhere to become more involved in the crime fight and help these boys and girls to choose the right path. You see them every day, in your communities, families, and churches. Perhaps some of you don't know how close these youths are to making the wrong choice. But you can change that. They need their fathers to be a part of their lives. In fact they need both parents to be a part of their lives.

We want parents to take their rightful places in the upbringing of their children. We want your support with the many ongoing crime fighting programs. We want each church to adopt at least one at-risk youth, and see to it that they finish high school. Teach them the true Christian values upon which our country is built. We need mentors, tutors, counselors and workers. Our ability to restore peace and order lies in our capacity to come together and work as one team for there is much work to be done. We need you to join us!

Commencing September, I intend to conduct community walkabouts on a regular and on-going basis. I invite political leaders, community leaders, church leaders, activists all other interested persons to join us in interacting with residents to demonstrate concern and to determine the extent to which we together can solve the challenges being experienced.

On behalf of the Government, I re-affirm our commitment to ensuring that no effort will be spared in addressing the criminal elements in our society. We must all work together to ensure that The Bahamas becomes a safer, modern, prosperous and stronger Bahamas.

Fellow Bahamians:

I invite you to join me in upholding the tenets of the preamble to the Constitution with which I began this address.

“We the inheritors of and the successors to this Family of Islands, recognizing the Supremacy of God...do hereby proclaim in solemn praise the establishment of a free and democratic nation founded on spiritual values...” I am urging you to let these powerful commitments, upon which our nation was founded, guide us in our lifestyles, our values, our respect for ourselves and for each other, and our love for our Bahamas!

The pirates have been expelled long ago. Commerce has been restored. Let us therefore strive to live up to our motto that calls us to move “Forward, Upward, Onward, Together” as we build a stronger, safer, more prosperous and modern Bahamas.

I thank you for listening and may God bless you and the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.