

REMARKS BY

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PRIME MINISTER

ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL OPENING
OF THE SUNSET CLOSE SUBDIVISION

5TH JUNE 2014

I WISH TO CONGRATULATE THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND HOUSING, MY COLLEAGUE, THE HONOURABLE KENDRED DORSETT ON MAKING A WONDERFUL START IN THE PROVISION OF AFFORDABLE HOMES FOR THE BAHAMIAN PEOPLE. IT HAS BEEN JUST A FEW WEEKS OVER TWO YEARS THAT THE MINISTER WAS APPOINTED AND HIS IMPATIENCE IN WANTING TO START HIS HOUSING PROGRAMME WAS REAL AND PALPABLE. BUT WE HAVE HAD CONSTRAINTS, AS YOU HAVE HEARD FROM HIM, AND THE REAL FACTOR WAS THE PROVISION OF FUNDING. I AM PROUD THAT HE HAS NOW ROLLED UP HIS SLEEVES AND PUT THE FIRST SHOVEL IN THE GROUND, LAID THE FIRST BRICKS, COMPLETED THE FIRST ROOF AND INDEED, WE WILL HAND OUT THE FIRST SET OF KEYS TO EAGER HOME OWNERS.

I DO NOT WISH TO PUT TOO FINE A POLITICAL POINT ON THIS BUT IF YOU LISTEN TO THE NOISE IN THE MARKET, THE CYNICS AND NAYSAYERS WOULD HAVE YOU BELIEVE THAT WE HAVE NOT DONE A SINGLE THING. WELL, IT IS WORTH COMPARISON THAT THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT DID NOT BUILD A SINGLE UNIT OF HOUSING IN ITS FIRST TWO YEARS NOR IN ITS FIRST THREE YEARS BECAUSE THEY HAD SUSPENDED THE HOUSING PROGRAMME; IT WAS NOT UNTIL DURING THE FOURTH YEAR OF THEIR TERM THAT THE PROGRAMME OF GOVERNMENT AFFORDABLE HOUSING WAS RESTARTED.

TODAY WE ARE GATHERED HERE IN THE GREAT CONSTITUENCY OF SOUTHERN SHORES TO CELEBRATE WITH 16 FAMILIES THE JOY OF HOME OWNERSHIP. THE ATTAINMENT OF HOME OWNERSHIP IS A SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE IN THE LIVES OF THOSE WHO ARE SO FORTUNATE. YOU SEE HOUSING REALLY MATTERS, BECAUSE SHELTER IS A BASIC HUMAN NEED. THIS IS A NEED WE ALL SHARE AND IT IMPACTS THE QUALITY OF LIFE WE LIVE.

OUR HOME ENVIRONMENT OCCUPIES THE PRIDE OF PLACE IN THE MAKEUP OF WHAT WE CONSIDER AS AN ACCEPTABLE QUALITY OF LIFE. THIS IS NOT ONLY UNDERSTANDABLE; IT IS ALSO NATURAL. WE MEASURE OUR STANDARD OF LIVING IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE AMBIANCE WE LIVE IN. A COMFORTABLE HOME WITH

ALL THE MODERN AMENITIES GOES A LONG WAY TOWARDS CREATING THE IDEAL SETTING WHICH EVERY SELF RESPECTING AIMS TO ACHIEVE AT SOME POINT IN HIS OR HER LIFE. DECENT HOUSING HAS A DIRECT IMPACT ON SOCIAL MOBILITY AND OPENS THE PATHWAY TO ATTAINMENT OF EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS, BETTER AND HEALTHY LIVING STANDARDS AND ULTIMATELY IT PROPELS A GENERATION TOWARDS HIGHER GOALS AND ASPIRATIONS.

THERE ARE SEVERAL NEW INITIATIVES AND A SHIFT IN OUR HOUSING POLICY WHICH THE MINISTER HAS EMBARKED UPON AND I WOULD WISH TO EXPAND A BIT ON THEM.

THE FIRST IS WHAT WE CAN ALL SEE THIS AFTERNOON AND THAT IS WE ARE BUILDING HOUSES WITHIN EXISTING COMMUNITIES. THIS PARCEL OF LAND COMPRISING 3.06 ACRES IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE WELL ESTABLISHED COMMUNITY OF SUNSET PARK WHICH HAS BEEN IN EXISTENCE SINCE THE 1970'S. BY BUILDING NEW HOMES WE ARE ADDING TO THE VALUE OF THIS COMMUNITY. IN TURN THE NEW HOMEOWNERS WILL NOT FIND THEMSELVES IN ISOLATION, HAVING TO CARVE OUT AN IDENTITY AND TO CREATE A NEW COMMUNITY. YOU ARE ALREADY A PART OF A COMMUNITY AND YOU MUST INTEGRATE WITH ALL THAT IS AROUND YOU, ESPECIALLY IF IT LEADS TO CONTRIBUTING TO THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE COMMUNITY.

THIS SUBDIVISION WHEN FULLY COMPLETED WILL COMPRISE HOUSES THAT ARE EQUIPPED WITH FULL LANDSCAPING INCLUSIVE OF GRASS, STEPPING STONE WALKWAY, PEA ROCK DRIVE WAY AND TWO EDIBLE FRUIT TREES. THE VERGES WILL BE GRASSED AND THE PARK DEVELOPED TO PROVIDE A PLACE FOR EXERCISE, RELAXATION AND SOCIALIZATION BY THE INHABITANTS OF THIS COMMUNITY.

ONE CONCERN THAT WE HAVE ALWAYS HAD IS THAT NEW COMMUNITIES OFTEN LACK A CHARACTER OR A SOUL BECAUSE PERSONS AND FAMILIES HAVE NOTHING WITH WHICH TO IDENTIFY WITH. HERE, YOU CAN FULLY IDENTIFY WITH ALL THAT IS AROUND YOU. AT THE SAME TIME THE AMENITIES THAT WILL BE PROVIDED WILL PROVIDE AN ENVIRONMENTAL BOOST TO THE SUNSET PARK COMMUNITY. WHEN THE ADDITIONAL 8 HOUSES ARE COMPLETED BY THE END OF 2014, SUNSET CLOSE AND SUNSET PARK WILL BE A FULL AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY.

THIS APPROACH OF FINDING VACANT LANDS WITHIN EXISTING, WELL ESTABLISHED COMMUNITIES AND SUBDIVISIONS IS AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT LAND IS A PRECIOUS COMMODITY AND THE ERA, SUCH AS WHEN I WAS A MINISTER OF HOUSING, WHERE WE COULD AT WILL ACQUIRE GREENFIELD SITES AND CREATE BRAND NEW HOUSING ESTATES MIGHT NO LONGER BE POSSIBLE IN NEW

PROVIDENCE. FURTHER, THE INFRASTRUCTURE COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH BUILDING IN OR NEXT TO ESTABLISHED COMMUNITIES WILL BE CONSIDERABLY REDUCED BECAUSE OF THIS APPROACH. IN SHORT, IT IS A WIN, WIN SITUATION.

THE SECOND POINT OF POLICY – AND THE HON MINISTER HAS TOUCHED ON THIS – IS THE AUTOMATED APPLICATION PROCESS AND THE AVAILABILITY OF AN IN-HOUSE MORTGAGE ADVISER. THESE ARE INNOVATIVE STEPS AIMED AT BRINGING A SENSE OF EFFICIENCY TO THE MORTGAGE APPLICATION PROCESS. THE MORTGAGE ADVISER WILL BE ABLE TO SIT AND COUNSEL INDIVIDUALS WISHING TO MAKE THE BIG STEP IN OWNING A HOME.

I WOULD ALSO WISH TO SAY A LITTLE BIT ABOUT ANOTHER INNOVATION WHEN IT COMES TO THE PROVISION OF HOUSING AND THAT IS THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP ENTERED INTO THROUGH AN MOU WITH THE BAHAMAS REAL ESTATE ASSOCIATION (BREA). THIS MOU SEEKS TO ACHIEVE SEVERAL THINGS BUT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS THE NEED TO FOCUS ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND SECONDLY, IDENTIFYING AND PROVIDING BUILDING PLOTS AND PROMOTING AVAILABLE LAND FOR SALE IN THE FAMILY ISLANDS AND HERE IN NEW PROVIDENCE. THROUGH THIS COLLABORATIVE EFFORT, WE ARE HOPEFUL THAT WE CAN BEGIN TO BREAK THE BACK OF OUR OUTSTANDING AND PROTRACTED HOUSING DEMANDS.

AND SO THIS AFTERNOON IS ANOTHER OCCASION FOR CELEBRATION FOR THE NEW HOMEOWNERS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

AT THE SAME TIME, UNFORTUNATELY, THERE ARE MANY IN OUR COMMUNITIES WHO CANNOT AFFORD TO PURCHASE A HOME, YET THERE ARE OTHERS WHO MAKE GREAT SACRIFICES TO EXPERIENCE THE JOY OF HOME OWNERSHIP.

WITH THE PROVISION OF THE GOVERNMENT GUARANTEE THE BURDEN OF QUALIFYING FOR A MORTGAGE LOAN IS LIGHTENED.

MY GOVERNMENT HAS PLACED A HIGH PRIORITY ON HOME OWNERSHIP AND DESIRES THAT THOSE WHO ARE FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO FINALIZE A MORTGAGE ARRANGEMENT SEE IT THROUGH TO THE FULL AMORTIZATION.

THE CREATION OF THIS LITTLE SUBDIVISION IS THE BEGINNING OF WHAT LIES AHEAD WITH THE HOUSING PROGRAM. I WOULD HAVE WISHED TO SEE THEM "POPPING OUT OF THE GROUND EVERY WEEK" – A PHRASE THAT HAS STUCK WITH ME FROM MY TIME IN THE 70'S WHEN I WAS A MINISTER OF HOUSING. WE ARE PRESENTLY CONSTRAINED BY RESOURCES BUT AS SOON AS RESOURCES PERMIT,

THERE WILL BE GREATER AND MORE AGGRESSIVE ACTIVITIES THUS GIVING MANY PERSONS THE HOPE OF ACQUIRING A HOUSE.

I AM TOLD THAT PRESENTLY THERE ARE 27 NEW HOUSES UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN TWO EXISTING SUBDIVISIONS: STRACHAN HILLS ESTATES AND FIRE TRAIL ESTATES. THE SOURCE OF FUNDING IS THE NATIONAL INSURANCE BOARD. THE CONDITION OF THIS LOAN RESTRICTS US TO BUILD IN AREAS WHERE INFRASTRUCTURE EXISTS ALREADY. THESE HOUSES SHOULD BE COMPLETED BY AUGUST OF THIS YEAR.

I LOOK FORWARD TO THE CREATION OF OTHER SUBDIVISIONS WHERE WE CAN PROVIDE THE ADDITIONAL HOMES THAT THE PUBLIC IS CLAMOURING FOR.

TODAY, I CONGRATULATE MY DYNAMIC MINISTER FOR PIONEERING THIS NEW CONCEPT WHICH I HAVE ADVOCATED A LONG TIME AGO.

I CONGRATULATE ALL OF THE RECIPIENTS OF THESE 16 HOUSES HOPE THAT THEY HAVE MANY LONG YEARS OF JOY AND SATISFACTION LIVING IN THIS COMMUNITY, AND WITH THIS I OFFICIALLY DECLARE THIS SUBDIVISION OPENED.