

COMMUNICATION BY  
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PRIME MINISTER  
AND MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR CENTREVILLE  
ON THE IMPACT OF HURRICANE MATTHEW

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2016

Mr. Speaker:

I rise to report to The House on the impact of 'Hurricane Matthew', the 13<sup>th</sup> named storm of the 2016 Atlantic Hurricane Season. Fortunately, the majority of our Family Islands sustained no major damage. This was a relief, particularly for those islands which were impacted last year by Hurricane Joaquin. However, 'Hurricane Matthew' caused, and left in its wake, widespread devastation, particularly on the islands of New Providence, North Andros and Grand Bahama. Much of this communication, therefore, will focus on these islands.

Before beginning its assault on The Bahamas, 'Hurricane Matthew' impacted Jamaica, Haiti and Cuba, and we extend our sympathy to the Government and People of these countries. Our hearts go out especially to the people of Haiti, where there was considerable loss of life. Here in The Bahamas, we are extremely fortunate that there was no loss of life from 'Hurricane Matthew', but sadly, during the hurricane, a resident of North Andros suffered an apparent heart attack and died. We extend our heartfelt condolences to his friends and family.

Mr. Speaker:

'Hurricane Matthew', traversed the Commonwealth of the Bahamas from October 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016. During that time, it was variously classified as a 'Category 3' or 'Category 4' Hurricane, reporting maximum sustained winds of around 135mph.

At 6.00 pm on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2016 the first alert was issued by the Bahamas Department of Meteorology. It stated that the entire Bahamas and the Turks & Caicos Islands were under a Hurricane Alert. At this time Hurricane Matthew was about 600 miles south-southeast of Ragged Island, and 837 miles south-southeast of New Providence.

In the following days, there were forty-six Hurricane Alerts issued in total on Hurricane Matthew. The initial Alert was upgraded to a 'Hurricane Watch' for the southeastern Bahamas at 6.00am on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> October, and further increased to Hurricane Warnings at 2.00am on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> October.

The series of Hurricane Alerts, Watches and Warnings progressed up the archipelago as Hurricane Matthew pursued its northwestern path up our chain of islands.

At 6:00 am on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> October, Hurricane Warnings were issued for the Northwest Bahamas. This Warning placed the entire Bahamas under Hurricane Warnings. At the same time the Hurricane Warnings for the Turks and Caicos Islands were downgraded to Tropical Storm Warnings.

At 9.00am on Thursday 6th October, Hurricane Warnings were discontinued for the Southeast Bahamas and the All Clear given while Hurricane Warnings remained in effect for the Central and Northwest Bahamas.

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At 9.00am on Friday 7th October, Hurricane Warnings were discontinued for the Northwest Bahamas and the All Clear was given for the entire Bahamas.

According to The Bahamas Meteorological Department, on Thursday 6th October, 2016 around 8.00am, the center of Matthew passed about 31 miles north-northeast of Kemps Bay, South Andros, 27 miles southeast of Fresh Creek Central Andros, 52 miles southeast of Nicholl's Town North Andros, and 30 miles south-southwest of New Providence.

Around noon, The Bahamas Department of Meteorology's Doppler Radar, indicated that the eye of Matthew was between Andros and New Providence, and that the most intense portion of its eye-wall would batter the two islands from about 1pm and last for approximately three hours.

Around 2.00pm, dangerous Hurricane Matthew moved toward the northwest, and passed over the Berry Islands, with maximum sustained winds of around 140 miles per hour.

Later in the afternoon around 6.00pm, Matthew headed towards Western Grand Bahama, and around 8.00pm, the eye passed over the western tip of Grand Bahama with ferocious winds of 140 miles per hour.

In addition to the heavy winds and rainfall, the Met Department indicated that storm surges of up to 10 feet inundated the southern shores of New Providence and Grand Bahama, while the east coast of Andros Island also experienced large and powerful storm surges.

Mr. Speaker:

On Friday, October 7th 2016, I had the opportunity to briefly tour a portion of the southwestern part of New Providence, which had been subjected to extensive flooding.

I was also able to undertake a flyover of Grand Bahama and North Andros, which gave a stark indication of the extent of the devastation left by Hurricane Matthew.

On Saturday morning, October 8th, 2016, I led a team on-board a Bahamasair charter, firstly to North Andros and then onto Grand Bahama. The team comprised of several Cabinet Ministers, including the Hon. Shane Gibson, Minister of Housing & National Insurance, who has been delegated Ministerial responsibility for Hurricane Matthew Relief and Reconstruction, the Hon. Melanie Griffin, Minister of Social Services and Community Development, the Hon. Allison Maynard-Gibson, Attorney General; the Hon. Jerome Fitzgerald, Minister of Education, Science and Technology and Dr. Perry Gomez, Minister of Health. Other members of the delegation included Dr. Hubert Minnis, Leader of the Official Opposition; Commodore Tellis Bethel, Acting Commander of the Royal Bahamas Defence Force; Captain Stephen Russell, Director, NEMA; Dr. Ranford Patterson, President of The Bahamas Christian Council, heads of religious denominations

and senior public officers.

In North Andros, we visited the settlement of Lowe Sound, where we saw buildings and homes that had been extensively damaged. This had resulted in a number of people being left homeless. In Grand Bahama, we were able to visit West End and surrounding settlements. Along the shore road in West End, virtually every single building had suffered significant damage.

Simultaneously, a team of public officers travelled to North Andros on a Flamingo Air charter. They were able to conduct an intense rapid assessment, to assess the damage to infrastructure, to determine the number of people displaced, and to determine how quickly life could be returned to some sense of normalcy in the shortest possible time. Another Flamingo Air charter delivered essential supplies to North Andros including food, water and baby items supplied by NEMA.

NEMA has also commenced the mobilization of officials to the most-significantly impacted areas on New Providence, specifically Marshall Road, Misty Gardens, Pastel Gardens and other areas along the south and southwestern shores to commence damage assessments.

Mr. Speaker:

You will recall that in my 'Statement to The House' on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> October, I described the advent of Hurricane Matthew as "a large, violent and dangerous weather system, which has the potential to cause catastrophic damage to parts of our country." In a series of public statements, I urged everyone in the affected areas to either move away, or to seek shelter as necessary. Thankfully, many heeded the warning, and moved in with friends or family, or into one of the public, Hurricane Shelters.

In New Providence, twenty-two shelters accommodated 2,159 people. The 'Hillview Seventh-Day Adventist Church' on Tonique Williams-Darling Highway, sheltered 352 people, the largest number of persons accommodated. 'St. Mary's Hall' at St. Augustine's Monastery, accommodated 330 people, the second-largest group to be sheltered. The third largest group – 260 people - was accommodated at the Kendal Isaacs Gymnasium.

After the "All Clear" was given on Friday, October 7<sup>th</sup>, thirty families remained at the Kendal Isaacs Gymnasium shelter, as they were either unable to access their homes or their homes were badly damaged. These ranged from a single household to a twelve-member household and included twenty-one men, thirty-five women and forty-eight children.

The National Sporting Authority provided meals for the first two days, and thereafter, the Department of Social Services provided meals until the facility was closed at noon on Thursday, October 13<sup>th</sup>. The Department of Social Services was required to arrange temporary accommodations for thirteen families whose homes were badly damaged and who were unable to make any arrangements for alternative accommodations.

In the Family Islands, hurricane shelters were opened on seventeen islands and a total of 2,612 persons accommodated. The largest number of persons sheltered was in Grand Bahama, 685, followed by Abaco (618).

## **DISPLACED PERSONS**

A number of people have been displaced due to 'Hurricane Matthew'. In New Providence, The Department of Social Services has arranged temporary accommodation for twenty-eight, families comprising a total of eighty-seven people.

Fifteen families, who were sheltered at the Kendal Isaacs Gymnasium, were unable to return to their homes because of the damage sustained.

Four of the eighty-seven people in temporary accommodation are from Acklins, and two others, both Senior citizens, are from Long Island. Those from Acklins and Long Island were evacuated before the arrival of the hurricane.

In **North Andros**, a total of eighty-four families comprising of three hundred and two (302) persons - 174 adults & 128 children - have been displaced due to damage and/or destruction to their homes. The breakdown of families by settlement is as follows: 70 in Lowe Sound, 6 in Mastic Point, 5 in Nicholl's Town, 2 in Conch Sound, and 1 in Fire Road.

Of these families, 56 were relocated to family or friends, 13 were accommodated in Guest Houses, 2 were relocated to New Providence, 1 was relocated to a new house, 5 families are awaiting placement, and 7 families are refusing to relocate.

In **Grand Bahama**, The Department of Social Services is providing temporary shelter for seventy-one persons who remained in shelters after the "All Clear" was given, the majority of whom are from the Pinder's Point and Lewis Yard area

## **RESPONSE ACTIVITIES**

Given the magnitude of the damage sustained on the two islands where our principal cities of Nassau and Freeport are located, as well as North Andros, there is need for a strong, coordinated approach to the relief and recovery effort. As indicated previously, the Hon. Shane Gibson has been designated responsibility for Hurricane Matthew Relief and Recovery and he is being supported by Permanent Secretary Jack Thompson. They are being supported by a team which includes a Co-ordinator each for Grand Bahama and North Andros and locally based Co-ordinators in Grand Bahama and North Andros.

As has been the case with previous hurricanes, the Government will provide relief to those in need. As of Monday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, the Government has provided a quantity of food, sanitary supplies, baby items and insect repellent to North and Central Andros to the value of \$39,439. The first shipment was sent in Saturday, October 8<sup>th</sup>, by a charter flight and further supplies were transported by the Royal Bahama Defence Force vessels. A large quantity of water has also been provided to North and Central Andros. Additionally, other items including hygiene kits and plastic sheeting have been provided to North Andros.

Mr. Speaker:

The enormity of the impact of Hurricane Matthew must be measured against the reality that this hurricane impacted the two most populous islands in our archipelago, New Providence and Grand Bahama where approximately two thirds of the population of our country resides. The immediate social and humane response had to therefore take into account the provision of hot meals for

hundreds of persons who had nowhere else to turn. At the same time the prolonged power outages in many areas meant that shops and restaurants could not immediately re-open and so food distribution centres had to be set up for those in urgent need of food. Many of these centres are still operating. This has been supplemented by “in kind” humanitarian gestures from the Red Cross and other humanitarian groups, including churches and corporate individuals.

In New Providence plastic sheeting has been distributed to several hundred residents in New Providence and the Department of Social Services is assisting persons through its food assistance programmes in both New Providence and Grand Bahama.

Additionally, the Government will also provide assistance with house repairs to needy, qualified homeowners with both labour and materials or materials only for these homeowners who are able to undertake their own repairs and these will be determined once the assessments have been completed. Additionally, provisions are being made for public officers to access low interest loans to undertake repairs to their homes. A number of persons with insurance coverage have expressed concern about and challenges in meeting the required deductible. The Government is exploring options to assist such persons and well as landlords who have having difficulty undertaking the repairs including the possibility of low interest loans.

Technical officers from the various Ministries and Departments commenced assessments of homes in New Providence, North Andros and Grand Bahama immediately following the passage of Hurricane Matthew. The Department of Social Services dispatched four (4) social workers from New Providence to North Andros on Saturday, October 8, and eight (8) workers to Grand Bahama to assist the local staff with conducting assessments.

In an effort to ensure a more coordinated approach, it was determined that the Urban Renewal model be utilized in New Providence for the assessment process. Teams at the existing Urban Renewal Centres have been strengthened and, where no Urban Renewal Office exists, teams have been established in constituencies as follows:

- A Police officer,
- Social worker,
- Technical officer,
- Urban Renewal officer,
- Constituency Representative
- Department of Environmental Health Services Officer

These teams commenced door-to-door assessments in the respective constituencies with effect from Monday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

Assessments are in progress in both Grand Bahama and North Andros by the relevant technical officers. As of Monday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, 905 social assessments were completed in various communities on Grand Bahama, and according to the preliminary report, 48 of the homes assessed thus far have been destroyed, 407 received major damage and 387 received minor damages. The Department of Social Services has sent additional social workers to Grand Bahama to assist with the assessments.

In North Andros, social assessments have been completed to date and more detailed information

on damage assessment to private homes will be available shortly.

**Mr. Speaker:**

In respect of the Health Services, the facilities of the Public Hospitals Authority in New Providence (including the Princess Margaret Hospital, the Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre, the National Emergency Medical Services, the Supply Chain Management Agency & the Materials Management Directorate) and on Grand Bahama (including the Rand Memorial Hospital and the Grand Bahama Community Clinics), all weathered Hurricane Matthew fairly well.

With effect from the 5th October 2016, services at the Princess Margaret Hospital and the Rand Hospital were limited to emergencies only. At the Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre, the Lignum Vitae Unit was closed and patients were transferred to the Detoxification Unit so as to ensure that patients were accommodated in a central location. With the exception of Eight Mile Rock, all community health clinics of Grand Bahama were closed until after the hurricane.

During the periods of the storm, a total of fifty-seven ambulance calls were received in New Providence & Paradise Island. The service responded to forty-four calls. However, thirteen calls could not be responded to due to deteriorating severe weather conditions as of 3:26 am on Thursday October 6th. During the storm, a total of thirty-three calls were received in Grand Bahama and one in Abaco.

In its initial report, The Public Hospitals Authority indicated that the main difficulties experienced at the hospitals and ancillary buildings in New Providence were roof damages and leaks in isolated areas. Specific areas affected include: several areas of the roof of the main building of the Princess Margaret Hospital; the roof of the Outpatient Rehabilitation Therapy building at #45 Collins Ave; and areas of the roofs of the Geriatrics, Psychiatric Hospitals and the Child & Adolescent/Robert Smith Complex at the Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre. The Authority indicated however that these problems resulted in minimal interruptions in services, as institutional hurricane mitigation plans allowed for an immediate in-house response to ensure the continuation of services that may otherwise have been compromised by these structural damages.

Services have been restored to the Princess Margaret Hospital and the Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre. The PMH's Outpatient Rehabilitation Therapy Services was relocated to the Neurodevelopmental Clinic as of 11th October 2016 and resumed services on the 12th October 2016. The process of repairing the infrastructural damages at these facilities will begin shortly, with local contractors being used to assist with the works in this regard.

With respect to **Grand Bahama**, Public Hospitals Authority initial rapid assessment team headed by the Managing Director travelled to Grand Bahama on Saturday, 6th October to assess the damages and identify the extent to which additional support was needed.

Preliminary damage assessment reports indicate that at least two of the facilities in Grand Bahama received major damages from Hurricane Matthew. Additionally, severe problems of flooding throughout the island and the ongoing loss of the city electrical supply and water and sewerage services are also major concerns.

With effect from Tuesday, 11th October, the Rand Memorial Hospital resumed its outpatient

specialty clinics at Pearce Plaza. The Eight Mile Rock Clinic was opened from 9:00am to 4:00pm for normal services; and until 9:00 pm for emergencies only, as a result of damages to select areas of the building.

The Hawksbill, Grand Cay, Sweetings Cay and High Rock/McCleans Town Clinics have all resumed normal services. The building housing the West End Clinic (a temporary rented facility) received extensive damage; and residents of this community will now be seen at the Eight Mile Rock Clinic (during this initial post hurricane period). Ophthalmology Services have been relocated to the Eight Mile Rock Clinic. Mammogram Services have been suspended as a result of extensive damages to the Mammography Centre. A resumption date will be announced following repairs.

The process of repairing the infrastructural damage resulting from the hurricane in New Providence and Grand Bahama has already started, with local contractors being used to assist with the works in this regard, where necessary. The Authority has determined that the overall budget to facilitate repairs and the cost of replacement and remedial supplies and equipment resulting from the impact of Hurricane Matthew, is estimated at approximately seven hundred and forty thousand (\$740,000) dollars.

The **Ministry of Health** has advised that of the eighty-four Primary Health Care Facilities in the Department of Public Health, only two reportedly sustained significant damage, namely the Nicholl's Town Community Clinic in North Andros and Coconut Grove Clinic in New Providence.

Despite significant roof damage at the Nicholl's Town Clinic, however, health care workers continued to provide emergency medical services with hours of operation being extended from 9am to 9pm. Additionally, two nurses were posted to the Nicholl's Town Clinic to assist the health team and to provide community health outreach services inclusive of health education and screening. Special emphasis will be paid to the communities of Lowe Sound and Nicholl's Town. Additional medication was also shipped to the Nicholl's Town Clinic. The Department of Public Health has advised that emergency temporary roof repairs at the Clinic have commenced and are near completion.

With respect to the Coconut Grove Clinic, an assessment of the roof was conducted and as a result of the damages, Maternal and Child Health Services are being relocated between the Baillou Hill Road and Fleming Street Clinics.

Minor damage was reported at the Cooper's Town Clinic in North Abaco, Mastic Point Clinic in North Andros, the New Primary and Specialist Health Centre in Exuma, the South Beach Health Centre and the Gambier Clinic in New Providence.

In New Providence, Primary Health Care services were provided as of Saturday 7th October to Monday 10th October, at the Gambier Clinic, Elizabeth Estates Clinic, Flamingo Gardens Clinic and Fleming Street Clinic to ensure greater access for urgent and non-urgent medical and psychiatric care. Pharmacists were also on duty to provide pharmaceutical services, all in an attempt to reduce the burden on the Princess Margaret Hospital and to provide access to counselling services for persons severely impacted by the disaster. Further laboratory technicians and radiographers were on-call in the event that their services were needed.

Despite reported damage to health facilities, all main and satellite clinics in New Providence and the Family Islands with the exception of the Coconut Grove Clinic are providing health care services. Collaboration between the Department of Public Health and the Public Hospitals Authority continues to ensure that adequate pharmacy and other supplies are available.

During and following Hurricane Matthew, several emergencies occurred in the Family Islands. The New Exuma Primary and Specialist Health Centre, recorded its first delivery of a premature baby, which was successfully delivered and managed by the Medical Team until the mother and infant were airlifted to hospital. The presence of a physician at all times at the Ministry's Command Centre provided for medical support to the team in the Family Islands as well as the response to issues arising from shelters in New Providence. Unfortunately, the staff at the Command Centre at the Ministry's headquarters in Poinciana Hill Building had to be evacuated during the hurricane after the building was compromised. The Royal Bahamas Defence Force facilitated the evacuation of the staff.

It should be noted that since the passage of Hurricane Joaquin, where communication systems were severely impacted, the Ministry of Health, through, the collaboration of The Pan American Health Organization and The Ministry of Finance was able to purchase a total of fourteen Satellite phones which were distributed to main health care centers at George Town, Exuma, Smith's Bay, Cat Island, Deadman's Cay, Long Island, Marsh Harbour, Abaco, Abraham's Bay, Mayaguana, Landrail Point, Crooked Island, Matthew Town, Inagua, Cockburn Town, San Salvador, Nicholl's Town, Andros and Bullocks Harbour, and The Berry Islands. The purchase and distribution of these satellite phones is a noteworthy achievement, as it allowed the health care team in the Family Islands to communicate directly with the Ministry of Health's Command Centre and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) during the hurricane and in the event of a medical emergency or other disaster related event.

We are grateful for the swift and timely effort on the part of the 'Pan-American Health Organization' (PAHO) in ensuring that disaster experts in the area of water sanitation, health infrastructure and disaster assessment were available to advise the Ministry of Health as appropriate.

The Ministry of Health will continue to take necessary action as is required in the aftermath of a hurricane to ensure the well-being of the population and the provision of necessary services. The assessment and repair in collaboration with the Ministry of Works, of damaged health care facilities in New Providence and the Family Islands will also continue, especially in the Mastic Point, Nicholl's Town, Fresh Creek and Mangrove Cay Andros districts.

The **Department of Environmental Health Services** has undertaken a range of activities. They are:-

- The assessment of food establishments and condemnation of contaminated food in New Providence, Grand Bahama and North Andros;
- Larva-ciding New Providence, Grand Bahama and North Andros;
- Ground-fogging on New Providence, Grand Bahama, Exuma and Andros;
- Assistance with tree-cutting and debris removal from communities by DEHS staff;
- The identification, preparation and management of alternative sites for receipt of vegetative debris in New Providence;



- The identification of alternative disposal sites in Grand Bahama and North Andros;
- Participation in door-to-door assessment in North Andros and Grand Bahama;
- Increased garbage collection in New Providence;
- Increased bulk collection via contractors;
- Placement of dumpsters in communities to facilitate waste removal by contractors;
- Inspection of industrial facilities in Freeport industry area;
- Oversight of retrieval and reburial of displaced coffins North Andros.

**The Department's specific activities in Grand Bahama include the following:**

- Door to door assessments from West End to Mack Town, which is the southern coastline heavily impacted by Hurricane Matthew. In the process, a number of homes without sanitary facilities were identified. In Pinders Point, five septic tanks were damaged resulting in the release of effluent.
- Completed Larva-ciding from West End to Mack Town including Eight Mile Rock, Pinders Point, Williams Town
- The commencement of Larva-ciding begun in East Grand Bahama
- The commencement of ground fogging in West Grand Bahama

**Ministry of Transport and Aviation**

Mr. Speaker,

As we would all appreciate, the transport and aviation sector is vital if we are to maintain our internal and external economic linkages.

The Minister of Transport & Aviation, including officials from its departments, recently undertook a survey of New Providence, and also travelled to Grand Bahama and Lowe Sound, Andros, to assess the impact of Hurricane Matthew on government facilities in the capital, and on those islands.

In New Providence, Grand Bahama and in the family islands, staff have been exceptional in their response to the ravages brought about by Matthew, by making adjustments required as a result of the damages sustained to various government facilities. At Lynden Pindling International Airport, the ASR 8 Radar, the roof of the existing Tracon Building, the Air Traffic Control Tower railings, the new App building, the Crash Fire Rescue Station and the Mechanical Maintenance facilities operated by the Airport Authority and Nassau Flight Services, all suffered under the onslaught of Matthew.

The existing Tracon building is particularly important for air traffic control services, as it houses the communications equipment essential for smooth air traffic control operations. Thanks to the diligence of officials, and with the exceptional assistance of the Nassau Airport Development Company (NAD), NEMA and USAID, the BCAA succeeded in obtaining a temporary covering for the Tracon roof, and repairs to it are now underway. The new railings for the Control Tower have also been manufactured, and will be installed shortly, while the leaking in the new APP building is also being addressed.

It is also important to note that all airports, with the exception of LPIA, were re-opened within hours of the “all clear” being given. LPIA was re-opened on Saturday, 8<sup>th</sup> October, following a one day clean up exercise.

With respect to the Airport Authority, the destruction of 40 % of the fire station’s roof, and the resulting destruction of the entire interior of the station had the potential to create considerable problems for the Authority. Thankfully, NAD provided temporary quarters for the fire fighters, while arrangements are underway for the purchase of temporary trailers, which will replace the devastated station, until a permanent building is constructed. The Airport Authority also suffered the loss of its Mechanical Maintenance facility, which was housed in the former Royal Bank of Canada premises. Thankfully, new premises were being prepared by NAD for staff of the unit; those works were accelerated and the staff have now moved into their new quarters.

The Meteorology Department also suffered damage to its Doppler Weather radar during the passage of Matthew, and to its Forecast Office, which was housed in the former domestic terminal. Thanks to the hardworking technicians of the Met Dept. and the BCAA, operability has been re-established. Further diagnostics, however, will be undertaken today in conjunction with international experts. Regarding the Forecast Office, we are pleased to advise that the space identified for the relocation of the staff from that section in the new terminal has now been completed, and the Met. staff will be able to move into their new quarters in three weeks’ time, as soon as the necessary wiring is in place for essential equipment required for forecasting work. In the interim, the Nassau Airport Development Co. has allowed the Forecast Office staff to utilize its Emergency Response Centre as temporary quarters.

The Road Traffic Department also suffered damage to its premises in New Providence in the Clarence Bain building, resulting in the Department being required to relocate from those premises to the Thomas A. Robinson Sports Stadium. The Department’s Examinations Unit was also required to relocate from the Munnings building on Thompson Blvd., to the stadium.

Regarding the Port Department, the Prince George Wharf sustained damage to electrical wires, sixteen light poles, roof damages to three security guard booths, and extensive damage to the roof of its electrical room. Due to the importance of the Port maintaining its International Ship and Port Security (ISPS) Code compliance status, that department has sought quotes to effect the repairs, which will be dealt with shortly. The Port re-opened following the hurricane on Friday, 7<sup>th</sup> October, following an inspection by Port staff. The Dockmaster’s Office at Potters Cay also sustained substantial damages to its roof, and the MOW & UD is currently preparing a Scope of Works, so that the Port can go to tender for the needed roof repairs. There has also been substantial damage to two port facilities in North Andros, and the Actg. Port Controller will be traveling to North Andros during the course of the week to assess the damage, with a view to facilitating urgent repairs.

Regarding postal facilities, the main Post Office in New Providence suffered some shattered glass, fallen concrete and leaking issues, all of which are being addressed by the Ministry of Works, which has also certified that the building remains safe for occupancy, pending the upcoming relocation of the Post Office. The Ministry of Works and Urban Development is also attending to minor roof boxing and other repairs at the Grants Town, South Beach, Carmichael and Fox Hill Post Offices. Post Office staff are also awaiting the restoration of electricity at the Fox Hill post office.

In Grand Bahama, the Freeport Post Office sustained damages which resulted in the facility being closed following the passage of the storm. I am pleased to advise that the repairs required to this post office have been completed, thanks to the excellent assistance of the Ministry for Grand Bahama, and the post office will re-open on Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> October. The post office in Hunters, Grand Bahama is also closed. However, the Ministry of Grand Bahama will be undertaking an assessment of that building shortly, and it is anticipated that the needed repairs will be given urgent attention. The Post Office in Eight Mile Rock also requires remediation work, however this facility remains open to the public.

With respect to Nassau Flight Services, the company's maintenance facility sustained some damages during the passage of Matthew and quotes are now being obtained to effect repairs.

The ministry extends its commendation to the staff of each department, all of whom made every effort to ensure that the vital services and connectivity which are key to the economy were re-established as quickly as humanly possible, in the interest of the Bahamian people.

## **UTILITIES**

### **Bahamas Telephone Company**

According to the BTC report of 6:00 pm, Monday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, the restoration for the mobile network was at 83.46 percent. The percentage for New Providence was 92.42%, for Grand Bahama, 43.61%, and Andros, 85.16%. Understandably, a critical item for full restoration to cell sites is commercial power. With respect to the fixed network, the restoration coverage stands at 72%. The total affected occupancy was 15,780 of which, 11,340 have been restored, leaving 4,440 to be restored.

### **Bahamas Power and Light**

According to the latest report, power has been restored to 83% of customers in New Providence and 65% in North and Central Andros. BPL anticipates being very close to full restoration in New Providence by the end of the week. With the pending arrival of an additional bucket truck and digger derrick in North Andros, more progress will be made. BPL is being assisted by teams from CARILEC and Power Secure.

### **Grand Bahama Utility Company**

The Grand Bahamas Utility Company has commenced the restoration of supply to customers. Two of the six major well fields have been brought back on line and regular potable water supply has been connected to some 85% of businesses and residents in the city of Freeport. Water supply to East Grand Bahama was uninterrupted throughout the hurricane as the High Rock well fields remained operational. Limited potable water supply is currently being pumped to substations in West Grand Bahama providing the residents of Eight Mile Rock and Bootle Bay, and will restore pressure to West End by weekend. The Company is currently working on repairing ruptured mains in the western end of the island to quickly restore full supply to the respective communities. The Company will continue the restoration of water supply in a phased manner over the next few days and weeks.

### **Grand Bahama Power Company**

The Grand Bahama Power Company has moved with haste to replace fallen poles and repair

transmission and distribution infrastructure, and presently, power has been restored to some 5,200 customers with increasingly more homes and businesses being reconnected to the power grid in the City of Freeport. The company is currently being assisted by its international partners and accordingly, 200 additional support staff and additional emergency repair vehicles to supplement its on-island workforce have arrived on Grand Bahama.

### **Water and Sewerage Corporation**

The Water and Sewerage Corporation has advised that in New Providence, water supply was maintained throughout Hurricane Matthew and are presently at normal levels though underground/unreported leaks still appear to be a challenge. The **Windsor** de-salination plant suffered major roof damage, which resulted in damage to some of the plant's electronic equipment; despite this, production recommenced with some occasional reliability issues. BPL's power was restored following catastrophic failure of a generator; a portable generator also on site for redundancy; there was some flooding during weather event on October 16<sup>th</sup> but operations continue.

The Blue Hills (BH) de-salination plant is operational and producing at 90% of maximum capacity; the pumping station now on primary power from BPL.

### **SEWERAGE**

About 60% of the 113 sewerage lift stations fully have had BPL power restored. WSC teams continue operations of remaining lift stations using portable generators to mitigate overflows.

### **FAMILY ISLAND OPERATIONS**

In Abaco, most areas are at normal operations; a generator has been sent to Crown Haven in Abaco

In *Sweeting Cay*: water supplies have been rationed since Hurricane Matthew and the situation is critical for barging to Sweeting Cay. Normal power is via Grand Bahama Power Company and is not expected for an extended period

**In Nicholls Town, Conch Sound and Lowe Sound in North Andros**, there has been significant damage and flooding in the pumping station. The system serving Nicholls Town and Lowe Sound has been partially restored but high losses are affecting supply to Conch Sound, and Johnson Hill. A leak detection team was deployed to locate and repair leaks and water production was also significantly below normal levels. An additional generator has been deployed.

BPL has restored power to parts of the wellfield and this will increase production to normal levels and remove the need to ration supplies to these communities while leaks are detected and repaired.

In **Red Bays**, the water supply was normalized with the use of generator power. Once BPL power is restored, the generator will be assigned to assist Mastic Point production.

The water system in **Mastic Point** is operational but with numerous leaks. Production is around 60%. With the reassignment of the generator from Red Bays, and other locations now on BPL power, full production capacity will be restored.

In **Stafford Creek**, BPL power reportedly restored on October 16<sup>th</sup>, hence a team has been deployed to resume full operation on primary power.

In Central Andros, BPL has reportedly restored power to all areas from Bowen Sound up to Stafford Creek. Cargill Creek, Bowen Sound, Fresh Creek, and Love Hill were all on BPL primary power since last week; some gensets will remain in use or on stand-by at these locations until power supply is fully stabilised.

**At Staniard Creek**, portable gensets are in place, but scheduled to be removed and re-deployed following restoration of BPL primary power. A leak detection crew has also completed some activities in this area.

**Cargill Creek, Bowen Sound, Fresh Creek, and Love Hill have** all have been on BPL primary power since last week. However, some gensets will remain on stand-by at these locations until power supply is fully stabilized and operations effectively normalised.

In **Exuma and the Cays**: all systems are operational. There was major damage to storage tank in Steventon. Williams Town is now on primary (BPL) power supply but this is unstable. Supply levels are generally being maintained. The challenges with generator last week are being addressed.

In its report, the Ministry of the Environment and Housing indicated that once the arrival of Hurricane Matthew became eminent, measures were taken by the Department of Housing personnel to ensure that houses currently under construction in subdivisions were secured as well as the Governmental rental apartment complexes.

On Monday October 3<sup>rd</sup>, officers from the Department of Housing visited Acklins and Crooked Island to conduct an overview of the post hurricane Joaquin reconstruction progress and preparations on those Islands before the arrival of Hurricane Matthew. Simultaneously, DOH inspectors were busy in New Providence conducting assessments in subdivisions and making sure that contractors secured those houses that were still under construction and in their care. Likewise, at the governmental complexes, inspectors conducted assessments and made sure that tenants understood the importance of securing their personal items in their rental units and, where necessary, relocate to shelters. As a result of these assessments, to a great extent, damages were minimized in our subdivisions and at the rental complexes.

There were some reports of damaged sheetrock due to roofs leaking. There was no visible structural damage to the exterior walls of buildings in our subdivision, even in cases where there are squatter houses. In Pastel Garden, however, some homeowners have reported some structural damage to homes. Assessments are being conducted by Department of Housing Inspectors to determine the extent of it. From the subdivision, reports indicated that foundations were compromised when the area flooded and some of the homes were under several feet water for a while. It seems that the flood water has affected the fill in the foundation and is causing the floor to shift. As a result, the reports indicate that interior walls are reported to be coming away from the exterior walls. Assessment reports will bring more clarity, once completed. On Tuesday October 11<sup>th</sup>, staff from the Technical Unit conducted assessments of all 19 rental complexes. It was determined that all of the complexes sustained mostly minor flooding, minor roof damage and

associated water damage. A 'Scope of Works' is being prepared for approval.

With respect to the new home construction programme, as a result of pre-hurricane preparation by the various contractors, these homes sustained damage. This was restricted primarily to roof shingles, and there was no flooding. The Department has not yet been able to conduct an assessment of the John Claridge Estate due to limited access to the subdivision.

Currently, DOH inspectors are assisting with hurricane Matthew's post-hurricane assessment in some of the private subdivisions that have received the greatest reported damage.

Mr. Speaker:

Turning now to the Public Buildings and infrastructure, preliminary reports indicate that the following public accommodations were damaged:

- The Churchill Building
- The Clarence Bain Building
- The Poinciana Hill Complex
- The General Post Office
- And The Department of Labour Office, Freeport (which is leased accommodation).

With respect to infrastructure, the Prince George Wharf sustained some damage.

In North Andros, the Administrator's residence and office was damaged, while in Exuma, damage was sustained to the Administrator's Office in both Farmer's Cay and Stanial Cay Creek.

On Grand Bahama, damage was sustained to the following buildings:

- The Freeport Post Office
- The Garnet Levarity Justine Building
- The Harold Degregory Complex
- The Department of Labour Office (leased accommodations)

A detailed report on damage to public accommodations and infrastructure will be forthcoming.

Mr. Speaker:

Turning now to consider the impact on the tourism infrastructure and commerce in Grand Bahama: the majority of hotels there suffered major roof and/or infrastructural damage including: the Grand Lucayan Hotel, Lighthouse Point Resort, Memories Resort & Casino, Pelican Bay Hotel, Castaways Hotel, Island Seas Resort and Old Bahama Bay. Presently, Pelican Bay Hotel has resumed business and the Lighthouse Point is proposing Monday October 24th, as their re-opening date. All other properties are undergoing repairs.

Small businesses in Grand Bahama are re-opening their doors daily as commerce is being restored to the city centre.

The **Grand Bahama Airport** is open for emergency and domestic flights only. The domestic terminal, as well as the international terminal and the United States pre-clearance facility suffered roof damage, resulting in the temporary withdrawal of pre-clearance services. Re-commissioning will follow the restoration of power and water; as well as the full operation of all navigational

equipment.

The Seaport is open for emergency cargo services only and other limited services.  
The Freeport Container Port is experiencing some challenges and will, in time, return to normalcy.

### **Response of the Armed Forces**

In addition to the maintenance of law and order during the hurricane, we have heard of the heroic actions of the Royal Bahamas Police Force in conducting evacuations from communities along with southern coast of New Providence for which the Commissioner and his officers are to be commended

We are aware of the critical role of the Royal Bahamas Defence Force in disaster relief. The Force's vessels have transported relief supplies to North Andros and Grand Bahama. A number of marines have been posted to North Andros and Grand Bahama to support local relief and recovery efforts. The Force's mobile base has been established in North Andros and as of 8.00am on October 13<sup>th</sup>, drinking water was available to the community. RBDF marines are assisting NEMA with the distribution of tarpaulin to communities in New Providence.

Mr. Speaker:

Apart from the impact of Hurricane Matthew on people's homes, and on the infrastructure of the country, in visiting the affected areas, time and again I heard stories of individual hardship.

Rising flood waters damaged buildings, furniture, fixtures and fittings, clothes, food and personal effects.

Some people are still paying off the loans to cover the cost of the things that have been damaged. Others have lost virtually everything.

Over the course of an afternoon, a young lady in Grand Bahama lost her car, her home and her job.

Others who may have fared better during the storm, have had to suffer in the aftermath without electricity, or water or both.

It is the human cost of this Hurricane which my government holds closest.

If the mission of politicians and leaders of any description means anything, it is this: to do the best we can to improve the lives of those we serve.

Mr. Speaker, if I am permitted to say through you to my fellow Bahamians, friends, colleagues we will get through this time of struggle and ordeal.

Mr. Speaker:

It will be apparent from the widespread damage and destruction which I have described, that the financial impact on the country is going to be significant. The costs involved are currently estimated to be around \$150 million dollars. These costs come on top of the costs associated with Hurricane Joaquin, for which we are still paying.

## **Financial and Budgetary Arrangements**

Hurricanes are a feature of life in the Caribbean and in The Bahamas it is even more prevalent. So Hurricane Matthew's path through The Bahamas was not unexpected by any professional meteorologist or keen weather observer.

It was the scale of the damage that was unexpected but in hindsight understandable given global warming coupled with the natural tendency of Bahamian citizens and residents to live near the shores of these islands. While final damage estimates are not known it is accepted that the damages from Hurricane Matthew would be multiple times that of Joaquin, with the reality that the reconstruction programme for Joaquin is not yet completed.

So the response to a storm, whose damage to public and private infrastructure is at once in a generation level, has to be different from responses in the past. It also has to be comprehensive and take into account the hard earned fiscal recovery efforts of the Government.

In the Government's traditional toolkit for hurricane reconstruction we have the Exigency Order, which was issued effective October 7<sup>th</sup> 2017. This allowed individuals in the impacted islands of New Providence, Grand Bahama, Berry Islands and North and Central Andros to import on duty and VAT free basis the goods necessary to repair their dwellings. In addition, it also allowed for the duty free import of generators, motor vehicles and for the first time bottle water for two month period. I should state that the import of bottle water is to compensate for the partial loss of production capacity in Grand Bahama.

In a significant departure from the existing policy and in recognition of the enormity of the damages and the need to provide assistance quickly and efficiently as possible, I have authorize the delegation of approval of duty free status by NEMA. This means individuals impacted by the storm upon the completion of the relevant NEMA form can import goods or purchased goods duty or VAT free without prior approval of NEMA. The only exceptions to this rule are for purchases or imports where the value is greater than \$10,000 or for those individuals seeking to replace motor vehicles.

The Exigency Order has also been granted for 180 days a departure from the traditional 90 days.

The Government has also for the first time incentivize the business community to given by agreeing with the Chamber of Commerce a mechanism by which businesses can see a reduction in their tax bill if they donate to the Bahamas Disaster Relief Fund, Rebuild Bahamas or any other charity duly recognize by the Government. Legislation would soon be presented to the House to give legal effect to this agreement.

These steps impressive as they may be in the normal course do not provide the direct impetus, which we believe is necessary to start the rebuilding effort. In previous public statements I made it known that the Government felt it necessary to seek special authority from Parliament to borrow to fund the rebuilding effort. I also posed a question; that being whether it was time for the Government to consider some levy to offset the cost of hurricane reconstruction which has grown exponentially as we developed and because of climate change which has increased the frequency and negative impacts of the weather on this country.



I want to address the latter point first. Hurricane Joaquin's rebuilding effort would cost the Government in the region of \$200 million. This would be paid for foregone tax revenue via Exigency Order and direct expenditure. In the normal course it will take the Government years to fully rebuild with replacement of public infrastructure being secondary to rebuilding homes. Hurricane Matthew is going to cause the Government in the region of \$600 million. So in 1 year the Government is faced with an \$800 million obligation, which is roughly 9% of our GDP and 40% of our national budget. So it is only rational that this question is posed. It is a dialogue which has to be take place.

That being said when I indicated that Government's intention to seek approval for hurricane recovery related funding; I was doing so with the assurance of the technical staff of the Ministry of Finance that the funding to service this debt can be derived from the existing tax system in a policy neutral manner (i.e. no change in existing rates). This assurance was done by the way of study done on behalf of the Ministry by external experts. This study was commissioned and presented to the Ministry prior to arrival of Hurricane Matthew.

The key finding of the study is that with a more structure compliance programme the revenue base could grow by 10% in the short term and up to 20% in the medium term of 3 to 5 years. The study indicated that with the investments made by this administration in information technology to support tax collection efforts that this was not only doable be achievable.

It is with this background that we approach the commercial banks seeking funding. All of these banks have stake in the economy and are deeply invested in The Bahamas. It is with gratitude and pride that I note that all of the Banks contacted have readily agreed to participate in the financing. I also note that ordinary citizens and residents of The Bahamas have also expressed an effort in participating in this effort. In this respect the Ministry of Finance has designed a two tranche financing, a tranche for commercial banks of \$120 million and tranche for the public of \$30 million. The tenor and rate of the both tranches would be identical. In addition, the Central Bank has recommended that non-residents with a nexus to The Bahamas be allowed to participate in this offering. This recommendation has been accepted by the Government.

These funds would be exclusively used for the reconstruction effort. The initial focus on the reconstruction effort has been ensuring restore access to essential services such as electricity and water. The next phase would be the repair and reconstruction of homes and parallel to that phase reconstruction of public infrastructure would be addressed. The entire Government would be involved in all phases of this effort working with local and international partners.

### **Acknowledgements**

I wish to commend Capt. Russell, the staff of NEMA and the many other persons who manned the Emergency Operations Centre during and after the hurricane, many of whom are now involved in the recovery and relief efforts.

I also commend the various non-governmental organizations that are assisting with the relief efforts.

I also acknowledge the support of the Hon. Roosevelt Skerrit, Prime Minister of Dominica and Chairman of CARICOM, for the donation of \$100,000 and the visit to North Andros and Grand

Bahama along with Mr. Irwin LaRocque, Secretary General of CARICOM.

Mr. Speaker:

Amidst all the losses, amidst the damage and devastation and disruption to our lives, we must give thanks. Given the ferocity of Hurricane Matthew, and its original, forecasted path, things could have been much, much worse. To the degree that we were spared the worst, we give thanks.

Some of our Caribbean neighbours suffered tremendous loss of life.

Several days ago, the Secretary-General of Caricom told me that, more than a week after the storm, five communities in Haiti had yet to be reached, their fate still unknown.

We were spared such a disaster, and for this we give great thanks.

For the acts of heroism, the instances where so many of our people stepped up to help one another, to be their brothers' and sisters' keepers: we give thanks.

In the coming days, weeks and months, there is much to do.

And as we provide relief, secure the recovery and embark on the necessary reconstruction, let us also seek out the opportunities in our current situation.

We will first, of course, do everything in our power to alleviate suffering, to bring help and hope wherever we can.

But should we just replace what was there before, or should we strive to build a vision of what there might be?

As forest fires clear the way for new growth, so we must put out minds to planting our own green shoots of recovery.

We have made great progress in the past year in constructing a National Development Plan.

How can that Plan inform our way forward?

Can we translate our present difficulties into considered choices, and boldly, consciously, lay new paths toward our future?

If we all work together, I believe that we can.

"This time will pass....

Tomorrow's another day"

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