



**CECIL WALLACE-WHITFIELD CENTRE**  
P.O. BOX CB-10980, NASSAU, THE BAHAMAS

**PRIME MINISTER**

24<sup>th</sup> November 2016

Dear Sirs:

Many thanks for your letter of 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2016 which I have read with great care.

In response, let me say at the outset that my Government and I remain resolute in our commitment to build a peaceful, economically progressive and politically enlightened society; a society in which all our citizens are afforded an equal opportunity:

- to live their lives in peace and security;
- to access good, well-paying jobs and to start their own businesses;
- to own their own homes;
- to educate themselves and their children to the highest levels;
- to have state-supported health care of first-world standards;
- and to retire in comfort and dignity after a life of honest toil and labour.

That has been our mission from day one.

Yes, our core goal is to improve the quality of life of our citizens – all our citizens

While we have achieved a great deal of good for our country in a comparatively short time, I am painfully aware, as I believe you must be as well, that we have suffered setbacks, many of them, however, beyond our control.

And so, while I recognize the important gains that we have made as a country over the course of successive administrations, I am the first to acknowledge that there is still enormously challenging work

that lies ahead. There is much we still have to do as a government and as a people if we are to fulfill the lofty goals we have set for ourselves.

That's one reason why, in 2014, I commissioned work on The Bahamas National Development Plan which addresses many, if not all, of the issues that you have raised as core concerns. This Plan was based on discussions with persons from all across The Bahamas and the political spectrum. It tackles the critical issues facing our country and develops a true agenda for sustainable progress in our country.

I am pleased to invite you and representatives of your group to attend a presentation of the preliminary first draft of the Plan. I invite your input into this document so that together we can continue to make this a truly collaborative effort transcending partisan and other divisive differences.

I believe that we can and must continue to develop our philosophy of governance, emphasizing increased accountability and transparency. At the same time, we must strengthen the institutional framework of governance, emphasizing the deeper involvement of our people in a more participatory democracy, one that allows our people a greater say in the formation of major policies that will guide our economic development and social transformation.

Included in the Governance reform agenda under the National Development Plan are recommendations that address:

- public service reforms ;
- a revision of General Orders to help ensure greater efficiency and accountability in the delivery of public services ;
- the implementation of a Freedom of Information Act and an Open Government Strategy to ensure greater transparency throughout the government;
- conflict of interest rules to govern politicians, both Government and Opposition, and public officials;
- the need for enhanced financial management and planning so as to ensure the prudent, efficient and honest use of public funds at all levels of the government, including local government.;
- the need to create a regime for Campaign Finance Reform

I am deeply conscious of the need to deepen our democracy. We are actively considering the improvement in local government as a tool for meaningful development throughout the Family Islands. We need better mechanisms to ensure the more efficient management of New Providence as well. This strengthening must also include new ways for civil society to be more involved in governance.

As for Bahamian workers, we need to remind ourselves that they have been dealt a series of brutal external economic blows and devastation from natural hurricane disasters in recent times as our nation struggles to cope with the forces of globalization and industry consolidation, particularly as they affect our

tourism and financial services sectors. Today, we all recognize that with decreasing costs of air transportation and continued investment throughout the region – it is just as cost effective to place a hotel in other parts of the region as The Bahamas. Similarly, it is just as easy for a visitor to travel to other parts of the Caribbean as The Bahamas. We operate with the reality that intra-regional competition has increased dramatically. Incentives and concessions, although important, are no longer as effective as they once were as other Governments in the region are even offering tax free concessions on consumables. More and more we must compete on our business environment and the efficiency and the productivity of our labour force.

As we make such adjustments, however, we must be careful to preserve our tradition of strong labour rights and fairness for The Bahamian worker. My Party throughout its history has been inextricably linked with the labour movement. I cherish this long and vibrant fraternal tradition. It is one that I am personally determined not to betray. Though we have our differences from time to time, it would be good to remind ourselves that virtually every major legislative and policy advance in relation to trade unionism and workers' rights over the years was championed by a Progressive Liberal Party administration, bearing in mind that our construction and labour costs are higher than elsewhere in the region.

Stronger management of government spending has been a major platform of my government and already we are seeing some significant success. The reality is that as a country we spend more than we take in with taxes. My government is committed to increasing our efforts at budget tightening through innovative programmes to improve financial management. We are working with our partners at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to assist us with our reforms and meaningful progress is underway.

The movement towards the elimination of the national debt is an important goal for The Bahamas and for my government. As the Minister of Finance, one of my priorities is the management of the growth of that debt and the implementation of measures aimed at reducing unnecessary expenditures as well as the enforcement of tax compliance. The reality is that our fiscal system requires further reform to be sustainable. We must therefore continue to carefully manage our expenditures and ensure that we receive the best value for money in all government contracts while also ensuring that we are all paying our fair and equitable share of taxes. I urge an informed and sustained conversation about the way forward on this issue.

Crime remains a very major concern of Bahamians. No one is immune from the effects of crime.

My Government is determined to effect a major reduction in crime by dealing with the social troubles of our nation – from drug abuse to broken homes and high youth unemployment. We recognize that the Church must play its role as well. Similarly, families must play their role too. The Government meanwhile must provide the necessary social and financial support in the form of Urban Renewal, youth programmes, community centres and positive activities to provide a viable alternative to criminality.

In addition, we are firmly committed to strengthening our capabilities in relation to the detection of crime by better equipping the Royal Bahamas Police Force and utilizing innovative, state-of-the-art crime strategies.

Significant efforts are also being made to improve the administrative functioning of the courts and to deal effectively with the policies governing the sentencing of criminals, the grant of bail, and the rehabilitation of persons convicted of crime. . We must also ensure that the victims of crime and their families are given more sustained attention and meaningful assistance in the war against crime.

Our people must feel safe again – on the streets and in their homes. This is the only way to improve the quality of life on a sustainable basis. As a Government we are resolute in our commitment to achieve this goal.

At the same time we have invested heavily in providing additional seacraft and equipment for the Royal Bahamas Defence Force to address illegal migration, the protection of our borders and our marine resources.

As for the economy, I share your concerns about the challenges that are facing us. In particular, the impact of unemployment on the lives of many Bahamian families continues to be a source of great distress for me and my government. . The sluggish global economy and pressure from the international financial institutions have combined to place considerable pressures on the traditional growth sectors of our economy.

Although opportunities for the development of non-traditional sectors to drive growth and create entrepreneurial and ownership opportunities are opening up. I readily agree that the process of opening a business needs simplification. My government is actively working to remediate this problem. In so doing, we must also improve access to capital for Bahamian entrepreneurs to ensure the development of an ownership economy.

We must also empower Bahamians by engendering a culture of savings and investment from an early age so that our collective capital can be used to create an economy that is for Bahamians and owned by Bahamians.

My government recognizes that land for Bahamians is essential for economic development and social progress and that there is an urgent need to resolve land issues in the country. For this reason, the National Development Plan makes recommendations for the settlement of land disputes including issues of generational or commonage property. It also makes recommendations for improving the allocation of Crown Land to deserving Bahamians who have a serious and viable plan for putting the land to productive use. We also need to improve the transparency of all Crown Land matters and we are determined to do so.

The Government also intends to move in earnest towards the creation of an efficient land registry to reduce land disputes, and to clarify who owns land in The Bahamas.

My Government continues to make the issue of poverty an area for urgent attention and highest priority. We are addressing the structural causes of poverty while at the same time endeavouring to deal with the circumstances of people living in poverty today. The needs of such persons are immediate and undeniable.

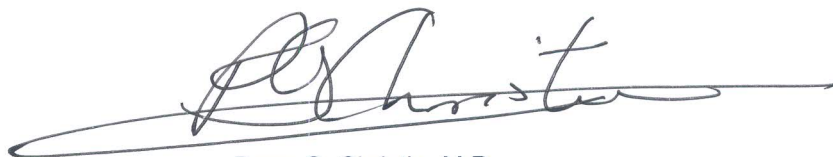
Our anti-poverty policies and programmes must include:

- increasing employment and entrepreneurial opportunities as a source of life sustenance;
- increasing the availability of safe and affordable housing and the revitalization of our traditional communities;
- improving access to affordable and nutritious food within our communities for healthier lives; and
- strengthening the resources and capabilities of our social services institutions to better assist Bahamians in dealing with poverty generally and the sudden financial shocks and dislocation such as were recently experienced with Hurricane Matthew.

Such, then, is an overview of just some of things my government is doing to address some of the principal concerns set out in your letter. I would welcome your feedback, including your own specific development ideas and strategies so that these can be properly considered and, where appropriate, incorporated into our evolving National Development Plan and associated strategies. Such a collaborative approach recognizes that no one grouping in the country can claim to have a monopoly on wisdom. In pursuing the foregoing our newly chartered University of The Bahamas will play a significant and transformative role.

I therefore invite you and representative members of your group, to a meeting at the Office of the Prime Minister at a mutually convenient time, for what I sincerely hope will be serious and mutually respectful dialogue aimed at bringing us closer to what is surely our common aim and purpose: to improve the quality of life of all our people and, in so doing, enable our nation to achieve its full promise.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Perry G. Christie', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Perry G. Christie, M.P.,  
Prime Minister and Minister of Finance

A small, stylized handwritten mark or signature in the bottom right corner of the page.