



National Report

**The Most Hon. Dr. Hubert Minnis
Prime Minister
Commonwealth of the Bahamas**

[Delivered on Monday, May 20, 2019]

Fellow Citizens and Residents:

Since January I have addressed you in two National Reports.

These reports are intended to provide updates on how your government is working for you.

It is one of my most important responsibilities to inform the Bahamian people as to how your Government is

working to improve the daily lives and livelihoods of citizens and residents.

Tonight, in my third report, I wish to update you on a number of matters related to:

- land reform
- the environment
- health care
- energy reform
- general infrastructure
- digital transformation and

modernization.

Fellow Citizens and Bahamians:

Since independence in 1973, successive governments established national institutions such as NIB, and built public infrastructure throughout our archipelago.

A major goal of our government is to continue the reform and modernization of

our Bahamas through innovative ideas and technology.

One of our major reform efforts on the eve of our Golden Jubilee as an independent nation -- is a revolution in digital technology and the ongoing modernization of government.

This revolution includes much easier access to data and information through user-friendly platforms and applications.

It is often too cumbersome and too difficult for Bahamians and residents to access basic government information.

There must be easier access to information such as: the wide range of economic and tax concessions available for Bahamian investors and businesses, lists of companies and individuals who have

government contracts, and other information and data that should be easily available to the public.

It should be easy for Bahamians to go online to report potholes, derelict vehicles, downed road signs and other basic matters.

While Government ministries and departments have made advances in digitization for years, they do not digitally talk to each other.

This puts the onus and the burden on the citizen to do what government should be doing. Government should work for the people -- not the other way around.

We will employ a “once only” policy, so that when one government agency owns or has a document or a bit of data, every other agency will be prohibited from requesting the very same document again and again and again.

No longer will the Passport Office or the Ministry of the Public Service ask you for your birth certificate or marriage certificate.

Citizens and residents will only need to carry one card which will be something like a modified version of the NIB card.

We will upgrade cyber security to ensure that your information and the government's services are protected.

To continue our digital transformation strategy the Government is launching, over the next several months, a pilot project for: passport renewals, driver's license renewals and the verification of birth and marriage certificates.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Land Reform remains a key priority of our Administration.

Through the Ministry of the Environment and Housing we will transfer several thousand serviced lots throughout The Bahamas to Bahamians over the next several years.

We are working to clear the land application backlog at the Department of Lands and Surveys.

We are restructuring the application process for Crown Land. We will reduce

the number of months to attain Land Leases or Crown Grants.

Land reform is not an easy or quick fix. But we intend to ensure that many more Bahamians have access to Crown Land.

Essential to the development of the Family Islands is the grant of Crown Land to Bahamians for lodges and boutique properties; for agriculture; for second home development, and for other purposes.

Fellow Citizens and Residents:

Construction, our second largest sector is set for tremendous growth with private sector mega projects and other projects coming on stream, especially on New Providence and Grand Bahama. These include the redevelopment of ports on both islands.

Capital works by the private sector and government are essential in creating more

economic opportunities for Bahamians, including many more jobs and more business for Bahamian vendors.

Infrastructure is not about steel and concrete and other material. Infrastructure is about improving the quality of life for all citizens and providing business opportunities for Bahamian entrepreneurs.

Toward this end we have launched an extensive roadworks program the length and breadth of The Bahamas and New Providence.

Between 2018 and this month we repaved a number of roads on New Providence. The list includes:

Allen Road;

Beatrice Avenue – Prince Charles to CW

Saunders Highway;

Bernard Rd.: From the intersection with
Village Road to the Fox Hill Roundabout;
Bilney Lane;
Black Sun Close;
Bruce Addition;
Farrington Road;
Ferguson Street, Fox Hill;
Fifth Terrace – from Montrose Avenue to
West Avenue;
Gibbs Corner;

Independence Highway - between East
Street and Abundant Life Road;
Lewis Street between East St. and Market
St.;
London Terrace off Shirley St; and
Madeira St. – from Mackey St. to
Montrose Ave

We recently launched the West Bay
Street Road Paving and Water System
Installation Project.

This Project comprises the resurfacing of West Bay Street, between Blake Road and Old Fort Bay roundabout, as well as the installation of Water and Sewerage water infrastructure. The water works are complete and the resurfacing works are ongoing.

An older person who lives in Gambier told me that this is the first time in over forty

years that this section of West Bay Street has been fully redeveloped.

For New Providence to be a modern, smart, urban centre, we need to continue to upgrade the island's road network.

We are continuing to modernize the network in a strategic manner with the least amount of interruption possible for drivers and for businesses.

I am happy to announce this evening that the design phase for the widening of

the Gladstone Road Corridor from two-lanes to four-lanes is about to commence.

The improvement to this corridor will increase the north-south road network capacity which will result in a reduction in delays along this congested corridor during heavy peak hour traffic.

The Government will be seeking proposals from local consultants for the design and supervision of:

- Tonique Williams-Darling Highway, between Bethel Avenue and John F Kennedy Drive.
- The 4-lane highway will continue between Bethel Avenue and JFK Drive; and
- Baillou Hill Road between Soldier Road and Cowpen Road.

We plan to improve the section of road between Soldier Road and Carmichael

Road, by increasing the number of southbound lanes, and by widening the section of Baillou Hill Road to Cowpen Road, from two lanes to four lanes.

We will continue with increasing the north-south road network capacity by extending the existing Milo Butler Highway southwards, from Carmichael Road, to Cowpen Road.

The proposed project will comprise a new four-lane dual carriageway together with roundabout junctions, street lighting, drainage, sidewalks, traffic signs, road markings and landscaping.

We are developing a design for the improvement of Coconut Grove between Baillou Hill Road and East Street.

We are developing junction improvements, with the installation of new traffic signals and road widening at: Commonwealth Boulevard and Prince Charles Drive, and Arawak Cay and West Bay Street.

There will also be improvements at the junction at West Bay Street and Blake Road, with the construction of a new roundabout.

We will resurface and rehabilitate the existing Village Road from Village Lane to Shirley Street.

The removal of casuarina trees along West Bay Street between Baha Mar and Sandy Port was recently completed in preparation for the hurricane season.

We have installed a number of sidewalks in various communities in New Providence as part of our initiative to improve the safety of pedestrians.

This work is also part of our small contractor development program designed to give more opportunities to small businesses.

The Ministry of Works has developed a pothole management system with targets to improve response times to complaints.

The Ministry has also set targets for arterial or major road and targets for local or minor roads.

The Government is planning the establishment of a traffic management centre, in order to monitor all signals remotely, in an effort to improve response times to any technical issues that require attention.

This traffic management centre will also: observe changes in traffic flow patterns and/or volumes; adjust signal timings to optimize the performance of the junction or

signalized corridor; and collect daily traffic data on a continuous basis.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Our economic expansion and growth requires the development of new industries and the fuller development of our entire archipelago.

The construction of a new terminal and airside works at Exuma International Airport is planned to commence in late 2019.

The Deadman's Cay Airport Terminal and Airside Construction Project at a cost of \$13.5 million dollars is due to commence in the next budget period.

The re-construction and expansion of the Great Harbour Cay Airport in the Berry

Islands is due to shortly begin. This will include a new terminal building.

We are in negotiation for what may be a major economic development at Mayaguana, our easternmost island.

I will have more to say about this in the months ahead.

I further note that in our Manifesto we foreshadowed the development of a port in the southeastern Bahamas.

The reconstruction of roads in the North Andros settlements of Mastic Point, Nicholls Town, and Conch Sound, including replacement of water mains, is progressing satisfactorily and nearing completion.

This \$14.9 million dollar contract started in June 2017. It is due for completion in the months ahead.

The \$4.55 million dollar contract for the Ernest Dean Highway Rehabilitation in Abaco commenced in March 2019.

The Monument Road Project in North Long Island started in January 2019. It is being done at a contract cost of \$1.35 million. The expected completion date is January 2020.

Private, Public Partnership (PPP)

Projects for a total sum of approximately \$30 million dollars for road improvements, are being considered for a number of other islands.

During the Passage of Hurricane Irma, Ragged Island was devastated with key public infrastructure destroyed or severely damaged.

The reconstruction of its public infrastructure includes the following new infrastructure.

- The construction of a school and teacher's duplex at a cost of \$2 million dollars;
- The construction of a new clinic at \$2.5 million dollars;
- The construction of an administrator's office, post office and court room at a cost of \$2.5 million dollars; and

- The construction of a police station and accommodations for officers at a cost of \$1 million dollars.

I am also pleased to announce that candidates have been shortlisted to participate in the Request for Proposal process for a solar generation facility in Ragged Island.

The RFP is expected to be published soon. Barring any unforeseen circumstances, the current projection for completion of the facility is by year's end.

Fellow Citizens and Residents:

The long vexing problem and nightmare of the New Providence Landfill is at an end. We promised to fix it. We have kept our pledge.

Residents of New Providence well remember the last big fire at the Landfill, with fires threatening homes and dark clouds of black smoke all over New Providence.

The Landfill was a health and safety hazard. An even worse fire there, would have been a major disaster.

Many people have told me of their great relief that their government is finally fixing this longstanding problem.

I am pleased to inform you that over time, part of the Landfill will be transformed into an ecology park.

Since coming to office we have identified and removed approaching 5,000 derelict vehicles from New Providence communities.

The Government has signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the

prestigious Kew Gardens of the United Kingdom.

This Memorandum will provide grant funding as part of a Global Tree Seed Project to establish a seed bank in The Bahamas for conservation of native plant seeds.

We have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a local nursery to collaborate on the propagation of ingenious

plants and trees such as native fruit trees and orchids.

The Blue Hole Conservation Forest, comprising 32,774 acres of crown land pine forest in South Abaco, was designated by The Bahamas, and approved by the Commonwealth Society of the United Kingdom, as part of the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy.

I am pleased that the Government of The Bahamas has signed an agreement with the Inter-American Development Bank to advance conch conservation efforts in The Bahamas.

We are deeply committed to environmental protection and preservation.

We have identified 43 new marine areas for protection which cover over 8.1 million acres.

This will ensure that The Bahamas fulfills its goal of protecting 20 percent of our marine environment by 2020.

We have also launched The Bahamas Coral Innovation Hub with the Cape Eleuthera Institute and Perry Institute for Marine Science.

The purpose of this coral innovation hub is to advance and deploy coral conservation

science, and to scale up coral restoration using groundbreaking techniques.

Further, approximately 1.3 million coral embryos have been created by collecting spawn from reef-building and endangered coral species in The Bahamas using cutting-edge coral reproduction techniques.

We have also created a management plan for the Spiny Lobster fishery.

This is the first ever fishery management plan in The Bahamas customized for a single species.

Fellow Citizens and Residents:

Environmental protection and energy reform go hand-in-hand.

I wish to briefly update you on a number of developments in the area of renewable energy.

A solar car park was recently opened at the Thomas A. Robinson National Track and Field Stadium.

It includes: a high powered, rapid-charge, electric vehicle car charging station.

A grant of \$900,000 was received from the Italian Government for retrofitting the T. G. Glover Primary School, one of the largest government-operated primary

schools on New Providence, with approximately 730 students.

The Office of the Prime Minister and Anatol Rodgers High School will be retrofitted for renewable energy.

Request for Proposals for energy audits to be conducted at seven other Government Buildings include: the House of Assembly, C.I. Gibson Senior High, Uriah McPhee Primary, Doris Johnson Senior High, Customs Headquarters, C.V., Bethel

Senior High, and the Ministry of Education Headquarters.

These audits will inform the scope of works for the tendering process to engage suitable firms to perform renewable energy and energy efficiency retrofits to these buildings by 2020.

Bahamas Power and Light has developed a strategy for the Family Islands to incorporate renewables in generation in

an additional three islands per year starting from 2020.

Priority is currently being given to conducting technical feasibility studies for facilities to be installed on Andros, Inagua and Bimini.

In Grand Bahama, the Grand Bahama Power Company held a ground-breaking ceremony for a 3.5 MW solar utility facility that is expected to go online by the end of 2019.

There are limitations on the size of the system that can be approved for each island.

BPL is aggressively working on completing a renewable energy plan that will be submitted to its regulator this year to allow for the installation of larger systems.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

It is true that children and young people are our future. But they are much more.

They are also a test of the kind of country we are building today.

Over the past few months I have had the privilege of being with students from Abaco and from Grand Bahama at a youth training program in Freeport.

I was happy to be with students from Gambier Primary for my birthday, and with Grade Two students from St. Anne's at

LPIA, who were on their way for a field trip to Andros.

Along with Patricia, we enjoyed the Easter event we hosted at the Office of the Prime Minister.

At Lyford Cay School I met our National Spelling Bee winner, and I am very proud of our Carifta athletes, some of whom I met at the House of Assembly.

I fondly remember well, the children, and young people, involved in the World Autism Day ceremony at Rawson Square.

The work your government is doing to increase jobs and expand the economy; to combat crime; to improve education and health care; and to modernize and transform our Bahamas is about a better life for all of us today.

But we are also touching the future.
When I am with our children and young people I am very confident about our future.

Our mission is: One Bahamas for all Bahamians, in which your government is accountable and intolerant of corruption.

I will never take for granted the privilege of serving our country.

In the meditation of Micah 6:8, let us ever remember what the Lord requires:

“To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with [our] God”.

May the God of New Beginnings bless our children and young people.

May God bless our entire Commonwealth.

Thank you and good night.

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