



## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

on the occasion of the

FAREWELL LUNCHEON FOR  
DR. ESTHER de GOURVILLE, PWR

by

THE HON. RENWARD R. WELLS, M.P.  
MINISTER OF HEALTH

BALMORAL CLUB  
SANFORD DRIVE, NEW PROVIDENCE  
28<sup>th</sup> January, 2021  
1:00p.m.

**SALUTATION:**

- The Most Honourable Hubert Minnis, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas;
- The Honourable Jeffrey Lloyd, Minister of Education;
- Our Honouree, Dr. Esther de Gourville, PAHO/WHO Country Representative for The Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Islands;
- Sr. Government Officials;
- Representatives of International Agencies;
- Ladies and Gentleman;

Good Afternoon!

An unknown author once said, “No one is more cherished in this world than someone who lightens the burden of another.” Dr. Martin Luther King took this thought even further, he opined, “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?” There is no question that these fine principles have been the hallmark of the tenure of our honouree today.

Dr. Esther de Gourville, saying farewell is never easy. It is more difficult when we say farewell to a colleague that is leaving as a friend. Dr. de Gourville, your work in The Bahamas and contributions to our healthcare system and society have been greatly valued and appreciated and you have become an eternal friend of our archipelago.

Moreover, this friendship was not one born overnight. It would not have been possible without the organization you serve. To fulfill the resolutions and decisions of the United Nations and the World Health Organization (WHO), in 1976, the then Minister of Health Loftus Roker and the Regional Director, Hector R. Acuña at the time

signed an agreement between WHO and the Government of The Bahamas which outlined the provisions for Technical Advisory Assistance. This assistance included –

- a cadre of advisers to the Government and its technical staff;
- opportunities for seminars, training and various programs facilitated in-country and abroad;
- procurement of necessary equipment and resources; and
- data collection and statistical analysis support.

This long-standing agreement and sustained diplomatic relations have fostered an advantageous partnership and friendly cooperation between The Bahamas and the World Health Organization and PAHO for some 44 years.

The Ministry of Health through the Government of The Bahamas maintains a robust and active relationship with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). With each in-country representative, the Ministry of Health has benefitted from the

knowledge, guidance and collaboration fostered by the invaluable technical support of PAHO.

In 2016, Dr. Esther de Gourville was appointed as the Pan American Health and World Health Organization representative to The Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos.

An accomplished scientist, Dr. de Gourville holds almost 40 years of experience in microbiology, virology, laboratory coordinating and logistics. She accrued her years of experience by working in her home country of Trinidad and Tobago and other countries throughout the Caribbean. She also made contributions while working at the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), the WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office in Egypt, the World Health Organization's (WHO) Headquarters in Switzerland and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States. Lending her expertise and skills to multiple regions, Dr. de Gourville can be deemed an assiduous global citizen.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dr. de Gourville's expertise and training in virology have benefitted The Bahamas greatly during the COVID-19 pandemic. She provides the 'inside scoop' so to speak, on what we could and should expect from the virus and how to prepare even with so many unknown variables. ***With the establishment of policies and practices to limit the spread of the disease, the counsel and technical support that Dr. de Gourville has provided is immeasurable.***

Looking back, during Hurricane Dorian, the Pan American Health Organization's responses were consistent. Under the leadership of Dr. de Gourville, PAHO came to the aid of The Bahamas after Hurricane Dorian slammed into our beautiful islands as a Category 5 Hurricane. The support, guidance and technical assistance that The Bahamas required was readily available. When the personnel in the signature blue vests arrived in the country and stood alongside Dr. de Gourville, we knew that the recovery and restoration process provided by our friends were on the way. PAHO lived up to its role as an invaluable friend we could lean on.

Yes, we were able to lean on PAHO as the song says, “when we were not strong, ”and PAHO was a friend that helped us to carry on!

In the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian, PAHO -

- conducted mould, air quality and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) assessments on public health clinics, schools and the Office of the Prime Minister in Grand Bahama and the Government Complex in Abaco;
- PAHO provided a Mental Health consultant to assist with mental health and psychosocial support post-Hurricane Dorian;
- PAHO introduced the Logistics Support System (LSS) to provide logistical support to help The Bahamas consolidate, share information, improve transparency and register and monitor undocumented items, particularly unsolicited donations;

- PAHO provided a procurement specialist to facilitate purchasing and delivery of its donations of medical supplies and equipment;
- PAHO provided funds for travel costs of physicians and nurses; and
- PAHO offered financial support for the repair of laboratory equipment needed for testing mosquito-borne diseases in the Reference Laboratory and the procurement of electricity generators and modular homes for Grand Bahama and Abaco.

The Ministry of Health also received six (6) trailers retrofitted for living purposes. PAHO also -

- provided guidance on software and software specifications for creating and maintaining a visual dashboard for the health response;



- PAHO contributed \$100,000 and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the PHA/Ministry of Health for the repair of the roof at the Rand Memorial Hospital;
- on 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2019, PAHO/WHO announced that a special Bahamas Health Relief (BHR) Fund was set up to support the Ministry of Health in the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian. The purpose of the fund was to enable the Ministry of Health to respond and give timely relief to the medical needs of those residents in the islands hardest-hit by Hurricane Dorian – Abaco and Grand Bahama. The fund was established at Citibank, Nassau, for the deposit of local and international funds transferred in Euros, Bahamian or US dollars, and was utilised solely for the medical response and relief efforts associated with Hurricane Dorian;
- on 13<sup>th</sup> September, 2019, Dr. Carissa Etienne, the Regional Director of WHO/PAHO, made a courtesy call on the Minister of

Health during an Official Visit to The Bahamas, in support of the emergency response in the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian; and

- on 26<sup>th</sup> September, 2019, Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus, the WHO Director-General, paid a courtesy call on the Minister of Health during his official visit to The Bahamas to experience firsthand the devastation caused by Hurricane Dorian. This was the first time a WHO Director-General had visited our lovely Country - The Bahamas.

Ladies and Gentlemen, PAHO's assistance did not stop there. With Dr. de Gourville at the reigns, the Country Office gave valuable assistance during this COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. de Gourville contributed tirelessly as she represented PAHO/WHO on the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) of the Ministry of Health and several advisory committees at the Office of the Prime Minister.

The Bahamas received assistance with the identification and use of an epidemiologist in the Region to assist the Surveillance Team with contact tracing.

PAHO has donated many supplies to assist with the COVID-19 Pandemic in New Providence, Grand Bahama and throughout the Bahamian Archipelago. Dr. de Gourville facilitated the issuance of some -

- 1.5m gloves;
- 100,000 face shields;
- 100,000 goggles;
- 500,000 gowns;
- 950,000 medical masks;
- 900,000 N-95 Mask;
- 200 pulse oximeters;
- 2 Gene-Xpert machines and over 1800 test cartridges to increase in-country diagnostic capacity;

- 2 55” Televisions with mounts, keyboard and mouse;
- 2 laptops;
- 6 Samsung mobile phones and 3 mobile Wi-Fi hotspots which were sent to Grand Bahama to assist the local Surveillance team; and
- 4 donated trucks – 2 for the Ministry of Health and 2 for the Public Hospitals Authority.

***Dr. de Gourville you have done us good.***

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dr. de Gourville was passionate about ensuring care for frontline workers. She insisted on providing appropriate training programs, workshop opportunities and public education programmes, especially during COVID-19. In conjunction with the University of The Bahamas, PAHO assisted with the establishment of a free online contact tracing course consisting of participants who voluntarily augmented the COVID-19 Contact Tracing Strike Force team.

Ladies and Gentleman, PAHO routinely procures vaccines for routine immunisations; so it was no surprise that PAHO introduced The Bahamas to the global COVID Vaccine Access (COVAX) Facility and the Vaccine Alliance (GAVI) and other global partners for COVID-19. PAHO also assisted The Bahamas to access the COVID-19 vaccine using the PAHO Revolving Fund.

Dr. de Gourville, I know when you took office on 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2016, in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew and presented your letters to the Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 14<sup>th</sup> December, 2016, you never dreamed that the country your organization was mandated to assist would face a Category 5 hurricane and also be embroiled in a global pandemic of unprecedented portions.

Dr. de Gourville, you have executed a Yeoman's task, and you did a fantastic, excellent job in the process! We are thankful for your determination, efforts and genuine concern for The Bahamas to succeed in its health goals. You leave a record that will no doubt

serve as excellent guidance for Dr. Eldonna Boisson, the new PAHO/WHO Representative as your successor.

Whilst it is customary that the Ministry of Health says good-bye to a PAHO/WHO representative, this good-bye is with bittersweet sorrow. Whilst we are privileged to have received your dedicated service, we are saddened that you will be retiring after this stint with The Bahamas.

So on behalf of the Prime Minister and the Government of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas I salute you, Dr. Esther de Gourville, for your years of committed service and dedication to the advancement of healthcare services, policies and programmes here in The Bahamas and throughout the region and indeed the world. May God's richest blessings sustain you, and continue to direct your path.

Again, I say thank you.