



OFFICIAL REMARKS

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Canada-Bahamas Virtual Business Mission

with The High Commission of Canada

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[PROTOCOL]

Good Morning.

I welcome the visiting delegation for this Canada-Bahamas Virtual Business Mission. The Bahamas and Canada have a longstanding tradition of cooperation and trade, which has richly rewarded the citizens and residents of both nations over the years. The Bahamas' most recent participation in CARIBCAN, the Caribbean-Canadian Economic Partnership Agreement is the latest means of formalizing our trade relationship and strengthening the various forms of economic development assistance extended between our borders.

In 2019, The Bahamas exported goods valued at over \$19 million Canadian dollars, \$17 million of which benefited from duty-free entry under this agreement. It is important to see the value of these exports in terms of the people and livelihoods they represent. They represent workers and families and local businesses that survive and thrive on the backs of our common values, shared interests, and mutual cooperation.

The coronavirus pandemic has thrust the world into some very turbulent times. Both of our countries have demonstrated great resilience even as many of our people have suffered a loss. Therefore, we must draw on our historic trade relationship, which is ripe for investment, as a source of strength and opportunity to emerge from this global crisis.

In the future, we hope to see more collaborations between investors and local businesses. Over the past four years, the Government has been working aggressively to grow and strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem through a publicly funded Access Accelerator Small Business Development Center (SBDC). This initiative which provides access to training and various forms of capital funding has had great success. It is helping local businesses that manufacture unique, authentic, local products to scale their operations and meet export standards to better access foreign markets for distribution. To further support our local businesses, the government has committed to provide an additional \$50 million per year over the next 5 years, which is particularly aimed at preparing our small business for the global marketplace by helping them to scale up production.

The opportunities in this space are unlimited and our international investors are recognizing such. Notable is the collaboration between Disney Cruise Line, the Eleuthera Chamber of Commerce and the Small Business Development Center. The Disney Lighthouse Point project is a \$400 million investment project to construct a cruise port and entertainment facility in Eleuthera, at one of the most pristine coastal spots in the entire archipelago. Disney signed an MOU with the Chamber and SBDC to inject \$1 million in assistance for the island's business start-ups. The new Business Hub just had a soft opening a few days ago; it will be staffed with advisors and house a number of resources to support entrepreneurs. These are the types of

collaborations that drive high returns for investors and for our communities.

The Government of The Bahamas is also placing a renewed focus on expediting the pipeline for larger scaled investment projects, which contribute significantly to new jobs and spending in the economy. We are doing this by restructuring the foreign-direct investment (FDI) decision-making process so that reviews and approvals for high impact investment applications are delivered faster. The demand today is as strong as ever even as the global economy has been starved by the pandemic.

Investments have continued to flow in The Bahamas. Downtown Nassau is undergoing a massive redevelopment with approximately \$1 billion dollars' worth of projects that will help to revitalize the city centre. The \$200 million-plus, Pointe project, is nearing completion in Downtown Nassau. At Prince George's Wharf, the \$250 million Nassau Cruise Port redevelopment is underway. The project recently reached another major milestone with the commencement of its sheet-piling operations, which marks the start of the port's marine construction.

Other major recent developments include:

- Sterling Global Financials \$250 million Hurricane Hole mega yacht facility on Paradise Island;

- GoldWynn's \$120 million condo-hotel with picturesque ocean views just across the street from my office on West Bay Street;
- The redevelopment of the Grand Lucayan Resort in Grand Bahama and construction of a new cruise port by the Holistica Development a joint venture company owned by the Mexican ITM Group and Royal Caribbean Cruiseline.
- The upcoming Jack's Bay development in Eleuthera with hotel, marina and signature Tiger Woods golf course;

The Government is also vigorously pursuing public-private partnerships (PPP) to meet the sizeable infrastructure development needs, estimated at two billion, throughout our extensive archipelago. In fact, capital expenditure goals, using the PPP framework, is a key component of our fiscal strategy, and critical to our economic recovery plans.

Not only are we planning to focus on investments in health infrastructure, roads, bridges, airports and energy, but we are also going to do so by creating a National Infrastructure Fund and leveraging PPP opportunities building upon the policy framework established in 2018. Due to the strain created by COVID-19 we have been more targeted in our Capex budgets in the short-term, but this has only increased our motivation to explore creative alternatives to finance critical infrastructure projects that must continue.

These projects include site works at the Exuma International Airport, the Long Island International Airport at Deadman's Cay; the North

Eleuthera International Airport and upgrades to the Leonard Thompson International Airport at Marsh Harbour. The Government is also in negotiations to purchase the Grand Bahama International Airport where similar works are required. Such significant investment in airport infrastructure will support increased airlift to our Family Islands as tourism rebounds and represents significant infrastructure stimulus spending in these islands.

When The Bahamas was in need of redeveloping its most important air gateway, the Lynden Pindling International Airport, it was a public-private partnership with the Canadian Vancouver Airport Services (YVRAS) company - later Vantage Airport Group – that delivered the top-rated airport we have in operation today. We know this model works and we have confidence in the type of investors attracted to The Bahamas.

The last area I want to touch on before closing is the fact that our focus is not only on traditional areas that have been a source of investment opportunity. The Government is committed to embracing new technology industries as well, within core sectors like financial services and beyond.

Dynamic changes are underway in the financial technology space. On November 3, 2020, the government passed a signature piece of legislation: the Digital Assets and Registered Exchanges (DARE) Act, 2020. The DARE Act is the Securities Commission's most progressive piece of legislation to date. It put the legal framework in place for those

interested in entering the digital asset space. It facilitates the registration of digital token exchanges and the provision of services related to digital token exchanges. It also provides for the regulation of digital assets- based payment service businesses and for the registration of financial services related to the creation, issuance or sale of digital tokens and other digital assets. By establishing the legal foundation for a new industry, the DARE Act expands the playing field for new and existing fintech operators.

Our encouragement of innovative business practices coincides with the timely development of Grand Bahama as our nation and region's future Technology Hub. Education and training is a high priority with respect to that, which is why the Government has a landmark agreement with CISCO Systems, a worldwide leader in networking technologies, and cybersecurity solutions, to build in-country talent based on CISCO's globally recognized standard and accelerate our national digital transformation agenda. This initiative is ensuring that we have a prepared workforce ready to support the needs of new and growing businesses in the digital economy.

Hopefully, I have painted a clear picture that shows opportunity is ripe in The Bahamas and that our two countries have a rich legacy to build on to help weather these globally challenging times together and capitalize on the opportunities to emerge stronger.

I thank you again for the opportunity to speak, and trust that this trade mission will have been a success when all is said and done.