



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

**Swearing-in of
Hon. Pakesia Parker Edgecombe
Minister of State
Ministry of Disaster Preparedness,
Management and Reconstruction**

**Monday, March 8, 2021
1:30 P.M.**

Your Excellency;

Ladies and Gentlemen good afternoon:

I am pleased that the Hon. Pakesia Parker Edgecombe has accepted appointment as Minister of State in the Ministry of Disaster Preparedness, Management and Reconstruction.

On behalf of the Government and people of The Bahamas I congratulate her on her appointment.

I know that the people of West End and Bimini are also proud of their Member of Parliament.

I wish to acknowledge the presence of her husband, Trevor, her children and other family members, friends and colleagues.

Your Excellency;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

For the past four years, Pakesia Parker Edgecombe served as Parliamentary Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister with

responsibility for information and communications, and Lands and Surveys.

She is a former journalist who worked with the Broadcasting Corporation of The Bahamas, Northern Service for a number of years.

She has a Bachelor's Degree in Mass Communications from Bethune-Cookman, and a Master's Degree in Public Administration from Nova Southeastern University.

Mrs. Edgecombe is a proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated She been involved in community-based programmes for the youth and the elderly.

She also worked on a number of literacy programmes, particularly school reading programmes, within local schools on Grand Bahama. She served as a member of the Toastmasters Club.

Your Excellency;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

As we celebrate International Women's Day today, I note this year's theme: "Choose to Challenge" in the context of women leaders in The Bahamas.

Since independence, many women have risen to the highest levels of leadership in our national institutions, including in government, business and civil society.

Two women have served as representatives of our Head of State.

Women have headed both the legislative and judicial branches, including as President of the Senate, Speaker of the House of Assembly, President of the Court of Appeals and Chief Justice.

Currently, of the 16 members of the Senate, there are seven women serving.

I am pleased to lead the political party which was the first party in the country to successfully offer a woman for election to the House of Assembly in the person of Dame Janet Bostwick.

Women have served in a number of cabinet posts and Mrs. Cynthia “Mother” Pratt served as Deputy Prime Minister.

Government ministries and departments have been led by women for decades, with a succession of women serving as Secretary to the Cabinet.

Unfortunately, today, the representation of women in the cabinet is at a historic low given the previous number of women serving at that level.

This is not good for our democracy or our society.

In keeping with the theme of this year's International Women's Day, I challenge myself, my party, other parties, the nation, and the women of the nation, in our collective determination to ensure that more women serve in Parliament and in the cabinet.

Only by constantly challenging ourselves and each other, can we make progress and lasting change.

Because of our recruitment efforts, I am pleased that my party will be running more women in the upcoming general election, including a number of women who have served as leaders in other areas.

While there have been historic breakthroughs in the number of women who have served in the cabinet, we must work harder to ensure more women serving in the cabinet on a sustainable basis.

We must also honestly acknowledge the reluctance of women offering themselves for elected office, including the reasons for such reluctance.

If you will permit, as a party leader at the last election, I must admit my frustration that a number of women who my party asked to run, declined to do so for various reasons which I respect.

In the upcoming general election, I am pleased that more women are being successfully recruited to run.

If my party is granted the privilege of another term in office, the nation may be assured that there will be more women in the Cabinet of The Bahamas.

Your Excellency;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Last month, the Disaster Reconstruction Authority (DRA) issued its Report on reconstruction efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian.

As the Chairman of the DRA, Mr. John Michael Clark noted in his message in the Report:

“The initial damage from Hurricane Dorian was assessed at a staggering \$3.4 billion, representing nearly a quarter of our country’s gross domestic product.”

The Managing Director of the DRA, Mrs. Kay Forbes Smith, who recently served as President of the Senate, noted in her message:

“Reconstruction is challenging and it will take more than a year to see substantial change, but there is hope.

“This hope is being nourished by the efforts and dedication of the many volunteers: Bahamians, residents and our friends around the world. ...”

Mrs. Forbes Smith noted:

“Over the next six months, we will focus on five priority projects.

“These include: the continuation of the Small Home Repair Programme, the development of the Abaco Centre, the management and reduction of debris, the clean-up of the Marsh Harbour Port and the development of much needed housing solutions.

“We have many more projects awaiting us as we continue on our multi-year journey, working with Government and partners to fulfill our vision of rebuilding ...

“As challenging as these times are, there is a resiliency to the Bahamas.”

In the rebuilding and renewal of Abaco, the Abaco Cays and Grand Bahama since Hurricane Dorian, \$105.6 million dollars in tax concessions were provided during 2019 and 2020 under the Special Economic Recovery Zone Act, for VAT, Customs duties and excise tax waivers.

Further, \$11,536,683.22 in business licence fees were waived for 4,475 companies in the affected areas.

This related to business licence fees that had accrued during 2019 before the hurricane.

Additionally, \$5,983,424.42 was disbursed by the Small Business Development Centre to micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises in the affected areas.

Pakesia:

While there has been significant progress in our reconstruction efforts, there is still a long way to go to restore and to renew our second and third most populous islands.

I encourage and invite you to lend your abilities, your heart and your abiding empathy to the many communities who are continuing to rebuild with fortitude, with determination and with resilience.

Your Excellency;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

At a ceremony at Hope Town, Abaco, at the beginning of February showcasing the dune recovery and Hope Town Shoreline Stabilization Project on Elbow Cay, I noted:

“While there is still much work to do here on Hope Town and throughout Abaco and Grand Bahama, we are making progress together.”

“There is truly hope on the horizon!

“This very year, the economy of The Bahamas and Abaco will get much better.

“More investments will flow into the Abaco Cays, Abaco and Grand Bahama, including private sector investments and public infrastructure.

“Through the grace of the God of New Beginnings, Abaco and The Bahamas will rise!”

With each passing day and the progress we are making in addressing COVID-19 through our health measures, vaccines and our economic recovery and resilience plans, our hope as a country is gathering pace.

Your Excellency;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

May I close by thanking the staffs at the Ministry of Disaster Preparedness, Management and Reconstruction and the DRA for their tireless work in the aftermath of the worst natural disaster in our nation's history.

I once again thank His Excellency and the staff of Government House for their gracious hospitality.

May God bless Pakesia in her new role.

May God bless our Bahamas.

Thank you and good afternoon.
