



REMARKS

THE MOST HON. DR. HUBERT A. MINNIS

PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF

FINANCE

Presentation of Land Grants for Crossing Rocks,

Abaco

Friday 11 December 2020

12:00 Noon

Ladies and Gentlemen:

On September 14, 1999, Hurricane Floyd made landfall in Abaco as a Category Four storm, barreling through communities, tearing off roofs, flooding homes and dislocating hundreds of residents.

The community of Crossing Rocks became one of the many victims of this treacherous storm.

During a visit to Crossing Rocks, on June 1st 2018, I saw the more than 120 properties destroyed from the storm.

Following this visit, my Government made a pledge to the people of Crossing Rocks, who were relocated following the passage of Hurricane Floyd.

We pledged to do what we could to ensure that you received title deeds to your properties to rebuild.

There were some challenges which were eventually overcome.

In 2019, some 56 title deeds were transferred to residents of Crossing Rocks by the Ministry of the Environment and Housing.

I am pleased to announce that we have returned today to award an additional 24 grants to residents of this community.

This brings the total title deeds and grants awarded to residents in this community, to 80.

This figure represents more than 60 per cent of the properties in Crossing Rocks which were destroyed by the 1999 storm.

For those of you who are patiently waiting to receive papers to your property, I encourage you to remain steadfast.

I am advised that additional grants are being prepared and they too will be awarded to residents of Crossing Rocks.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Today's award ceremony is a demonstration of the Government fulfilling its commitment to grant government-owned land to Bahamians, including Crown Land and land held by other Government agencies.

Under the Land Grants initiative, approximately 140 grants have been finalized for Bahamians.

These grants are spread over Inagua, Crooked Island, Mayaguana, Eleuthera, Exuma, New Providence, Grand Bahama and Abaco.

Under my Government, two 60-acre parcels were transferred to the Disaster Reconstruction Authority, to

provide homes for approximately 400 residents in Wilson City and Marsh Harbour.

An additional 49 lots were transferred to the Disaster Reconstruction Authority for the construction of homes in Central Pines.

Presently, my Government is identifying additional land on Abaco, particularly in the Treasure Cay area, Andros and Eleuthera, with other islands to follow.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

My Government has been committed to this initiative of providing land grants to Bahamians, particularly within the Family Islands.

Since commencing this strategy, we identified critical impediments to proceeding and clearing the backlog of Crown Grant applications.

This included a need to update our technical equipment and enlarge our human resources.

These processes have taken time, and has been impeded to some extent by the limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Notwithstanding, since March of this year, we concluded the procurement of specialized mapping equipment deemed essential to creating greater efficiency in the survey of property.

This equipment will now help us to move more quickly. We are hopeful that it will cause the Department of Lands and Surveys to maximize on the preliminary work already

executed throughout our Bahama Islands, and to produce the surveys necessary for Crown Grants.

In addition, we have also retained additional skilled personnel to aid in the work of the Department of Lands and Surveys.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff of the Department of Lands and Surveys for the grants being issued today.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Allow me a moment to share another strategy under the Land Reform Priority which my Government undertook in 2018.

Because my Government believes that access to land and the opportunity to own land are the greatest ways to generate and

to build wealth across generations, we implemented a policy of Ready-to-Build Serviced Lots.

Under this initiative, Bahamians would have greater access to land and by extension affordable homes.

My Government enacted the Access to Affordable Homes Act of 2018 which enables serviced-lots owners to benefit from customs duties on all necessary building materials for the construction of their home.

To benefit for concessions, Bahamians are able to apply to the Minister of Finance for exemption.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In addition to the three keys handed to residents in Spring City in 2019, the Ministry of the Environment and

Housing will be offering 21 additional lots for residential purposes over the next few months.

I want to assure you that much work is being done to secure a better future for all Bahamians!

To the people of Abaco, we are aware that you are still rebuilding your lives after the catastrophic Hurricane Dorian.

You would recall that as part of our effort to assist, the Government declared Abaco and Grand Bahama as Special Economic Recovery Zones, and provided tax concessions to aid in the rebuilding process.

Before I leave, I would like to repeat here today that my Government is extending a number of the concessions until June 2021.

Certain concessions provided for under the Disaster Reconstruction Authority (Special Economic Recovery Zone)

Relief Order 2020, which would have been scheduled to expire at the end of this month, have been extended to June of 2021.

The following specific extensions will be provided for:

- The local sale of fuel will continue to be tax free, particularly to support the running of generators where necessary;
- The local sale and importation of household furniture, furnishings and appliances will continue to be tax free;
- The ability to receive a discount on the VAT payable on the sale of real property for transactions valued up to \$500,000 will continue; and
- Tax concessions on replacement vehicles ordered before the end of December 2020 will be permitted for all replacement vehicles that arrive by April 2021.

As originally provided for in the Order, a zero VAT rate and concession from other taxes and fees will continue on hardware supplies; building materials, electrical fixtures and materials; and plumbing fixtures and materials.

It is our hope that these allowances and extensions provide support in the reconstruction and rebuilding efforts under way.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite the challenges this year, I encourage you to remain prayerful and hopeful because better days are coming!

May God continue to bless each and every one of you.

And may God bless the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

Thank you and good afternoon.
