



**Hon. I. Chester Cooper, M.P.
Deputy Prime Minister and
Minister of Tourism
Investments & Aviation
Commonwealth of The Bahamas**

**Remarks at the
Good Governance Symposium
Breezes Resort
Cable Beach
8:30 a.m.**

Friday, 25 February 2022

[7.7 minutes/995 words]

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Thank you, Mr. Aubry, for that kind introduction.

- Cabinet Colleagues
- Mr. Michael Pintard, Leader of the Opposition
- Mr. John Pinder, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Tourism,
Investments & Aviation
- Senior Government Officials
- U.S. Chargé d' Affaires Usha Pitts
- Mr. Matt Aubry, Executive Director, Organization for
Responsible Governance (ORG)
- Symposium Presenters
- Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning.

It is indeed a pleasure to have been invited by the Organization for Responsible Governance (ORG) to be a part of this inaugural Good Governance Symposium, under the theme “The Culture of Governance in The Bahamas”.

I want to thank Mr. Aubry and the team at ORG, who in partnership with the United States Embassy, organised this one-day meeting. Let me congratulate all of you on this important initiative — the first, I am certain, of many that will follow.

Former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan (**ko-fee uh naan**) is widely quoted as saying that "good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development". The essence of good governance is to improve development outcomes. The fundamental nature of governance at the micro level is for fewer instances of corruption and more development outcomes. At the macro level, governance improves per capita income; better governance may also increase development.

The adoption of the position of good governance by the Government of The Bahamas in relation to the political, institutional processes and outcomes will result in the continual forward trajectory and development of the citizenry.

The Bahamas Government is resolute in delivering good governance which equates to integrity, accountability, and equity. This stance fosters a disciplined civil service and ensures access to information; the enforcement of laws and policies; oversight to monitor official actions; transparent budget processes that allocate public funding on a priority scale; and the ability of individuals to seek effective redress when fairness and equity are not observed.

Governance therefore encompasses a myriad of actors: government agencies; the private sector; local governments and communities and political actors. A well-functioning system of government also helps to ensure that public policy supports development and that corruption, where found, is renounced immediately.

Ladies and gentlemen, apart from political will, and given the complexity of the relationships of actors involved, good governance requires many elements that need to come into play.

First, there must be accountability by changing the way the government manages finances – how taxpayer money is spent accounting for the procurement of goods and services, new hires and how civil servants are rewarded. I am pleased to say that this Government is committed to strict observance of a Public Disclosure Act built on principles of accountability and transparency. We also intend to fully implement the Procurement Bill which facilitates an open online platform for bids and allows all persons registered on the electronic Procurement and Suppliers Registry, to be notified of all government tenders and entities seeking to acquire specific goods and service. The facilitation of an open platform will also help to curtail corruption in the award of contracts.

The second element required for good governance involves providing citizens with access to information. The decentralization of Government to local governments and communities is vital to allowing more citizens to be engaged through decision-making practices. As a point of record, just a few weeks ago, a fair and seamless Local Government Election was held to empower our citizens and reduce responsibility of politicians. This Government has also pledged to fully implement the Freedom of Information Act to create an atmosphere of access where all information, unless the information is restricted by specific rules, will be made available to the public at large.

According to the “Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index in 2020”, The Bahamas scored 63 out of 100 (where zero is perceived as highly corrupt and 100 is very transparent). Out of the 180 countries, we were ranked at 30 while New Zealand and Denmark were tied at number one for having the most transparent systems of governance with a score of 88. We know that we have lots more work to do, and we intend to do the work as a country and be recognised for our efforts.

Third, in this regard, as the Minister with responsibility for Investments it is the goal of my Ministry to push to improve the efficiency of processes for both foreign and domestic investment by eliminating unnecessary red tape and other avenues to engender a culture of change for economic growth and the ease of doing business in The Bahamas.

Fourth, this government of transparency is committed to political reforms with a legislative agenda that includes the full implementation of Campaign Finance Reform and Electoral Reform Acts.

Ladies and gentlemen, apart from the aforementioned, good governance is also needed to manage and respond to change. For nearly two years, as a nation and as global citizens, we have endured difficult times due to the Covid-19 pandemic. While we are still in the pandemic, it should be mentioned that all civil society have risen to the challenges faced thus far: imposed curfews and other restrictions; new ways of doing business; new formats for hosting conferences and the like.

Our capacity continues to be tested but our response proves that we are committed to a strong system of governance across public and private sectors.

Achieving good governance is no easy feat and will require each of us to mobilise for the common good. **Ladies and gentlemen**, if we pause and look at the printed agenda, we will see that persons are attending from many different facets of society and I hasten to add, with many other perspectives on The Bahamas' culture of governance. I encourage each of you to listen to the many voices here and together find solutions that will translate into action for a more robust governance in our country.

In closing, let me again thank Mr. Aubry for the invitation, and I do wish participants in this Symposium continued success in our shared journey on improving governance in The Bahamas.

Thank you.

End.