



NATIONAL ADDRESS

**The Most Hon. Dr. Hubert Minnis
Prime Minister and Minister of Health**

Sunday, 10 May, 2020

5:00 P.M.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Good afternoon.

Let me begin by wishing all mothers in
The Bahamas a blessed and happy
Mother's Day.

At the end of my address I wish to pay
tribute to the mothers of our country. They
are our bedrock and foundation.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

To date, there remain 92 confirmed
cases of COVID-19 in The Bahamas.

This includes 76 in New Providence, 8 in Grand Bahama, 11 in Bimini and 1 in Cat Cay.

This is the fourth consecutive day without a confirmed case of COVID-19.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

I wish to welcome home the 183 Bahamians and residents who returned to New Providence and Grand Bahama on Friday past.

One hundred and twenty-four individuals are in home quarantine and 59 are in government quarantine.

This is the first phase of a larger effort that will continue over the days and weeks ahead.

I have heard many expressions of gratitude from those who are now back home, including from those who have contacted me personally.

We are happy to have you back at home.

I know that quite a number of Bahamian mothers are happy that their sons and daughters are home in time for Mother's Day.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, most countries in the world closed international borders many weeks ago and have not allowed the general return of citizens and residents.

The Bahamas is among the first countries in the region, and indeed in the world, to allow the general return of citizens and residents following the closure of international borders.

Quite a number of countries are still not allowing the general return of citizens and residents.

For many weeks now, we have been planning the process for returning home citizens and residents.

It has been a lengthy and involved process with the need to balance many things, including protecting the health of Bahamians and residents at home.

The detailed process and planning has included the input of several ministries and agencies, including: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the Department of Social Services, the Royal Bahamas Police Force, the Royal

Bahamas Defence Force, NEMA and the Bahamas Red Cross.

I also wish to report that over the past several weeks that a number of Bahamians overseas who could not immediately return home were assisted by Bahamas diplomatic offices overseas.

The Government paid for hotel accommodations and food for a number of Bahamians who required assistance while overseas pending their return home.

The Government also paid for the COVID-19 tests.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

In my National Address last week, I noted that those returning will have the option of self-quarantining at home or being quarantined at a facility the Government has identified for the group, for a two-week period.

Individuals in quarantine, at home or in the Government facility, must adhere to the

strict protocols established by public health officials.

I also noted that those who break quarantine face a \$20,000 fine or five years imprisonment, or both, and that the quarantine would be strictly enforced in order to protect the general health of our citizens.

The agreement with those wishing to return is that no one who tested positive for

the virus would be allowed on a repatriation flight.

However, it was discovered after the aircraft landed that one COVID-19 positive passenger was on the flight to Grand Bahama.

We are investigating to see how the individual was allowed to board the flight.

Three individuals traveled with this passenger.

All four of these individuals have been tested again on arrival. We are awaiting the test results.

All passengers wore PPEs during the flight, which decreases the risk of exposure.

All passengers on the flight will remain in quarantine and will continue to be monitored.

Of the passengers on this flight, 51 disembarked at Grand Bahama, and 44 disembarked at New Providence.

Health officials will continue to keep the country informed on this matter.

Pending the investigation and review of this matter I have been advised by health officials to temporarily suspend the repatriation flights, which we will resume as soon as health officials advise.

We will advise when the repatriation flights may resume.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Pursuant to the powers granted to the Competent Authority by the Governor-General, under the Emergency Powers (COVID 19) Regulations, 2020, a new Emergency Powers Order, being No. 3 of 2020, has been promulgated.

Consistent with the measured re-opening of segments of the national

economy, the No. 3 COVID 19 Order has been significantly expanded in scope to accommodate the business openings permitted since the 4th of May, 2020.

Consistent with the overall strategy to adopt reasonable measures on an on-going basis to gradually restore commerce throughout the country, the Covid-19 No. 3 Order permits the re-opening of normal commercial activity on: Mayaguana,

Inagua, Crooked Island, Acklins, Long Cay, Rum Cay and Ragged Island.

Part C of the Order codifies and sets out the terms and conditions based on which certain additional establishments or businesses have been permitted to re-open nationally for home delivery and curbside pick-up.

It is important for business owners to carefully read these provisions, and to

strictly comply with the physical distancing and sanitization requirements, and the requirement for the remote or electronic placement of all purchase orders, both for curbside and home delivery services.

These provisions are designed to relate strictly to retail business establishments which can operate efficiently without the need for direct person-to-person physical contact or face to face interactions.

They were never intended to apply to the operations of gaming houses, and this is now made abundantly clear by the provisions of Part B of the Order.

Those provisions specifically state that permission to engage in home delivery and curbside pick-up services do not apply to “a gaming house operator”.

The Protocols which govern the process of repatriating Bahamians is set forth in Part E of the Order.

Responsibility for approving all incoming air traffic and the entry at any airport of any individuals traveling to The Bahamas from another country, by commercial and private aircraft, has now been consolidated in the Civil Aviation Authority in the Ministry of Tourism and Aviation.

There can be no doubt or confusion, going forward, about which government

agency now has the sole right to approve any incoming flights, and all air traffic within The Bahamas.

All Bahamians seeking to return home must first register at a Bahamas embassy or consulate, and secondly must obtain a COVID-19 molecular swab test with a negative result, prior to being granted permission.

Where a Bahamian is seeking to return cannot obtain the molecular swab test, the

nearest Bahamian embassy or consulate will assist with finding a lab to conduct that test.

Upon returning home, if necessary in the view of health professionals, the test may be repeated by the Ministry of Health who will conduct the evaluation and screening of all arriving passengers.

No other persons or residents may be approved to travel to The Bahamas without

first obtaining a COVID-19 molecular swab test with a negative result.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

From the very outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government's mission, my mission, was:

- to save lives;
- to protect the general health;
- to get emergency assistance to those
in need;

- to ensure law and order and national security; and
- to plan for the economic crisis ahead.

We are in a time of heartbreak and hardship.

We must protect lives and livelihoods.

Not since the outbreak of World War II over 70 years ago have we lived through such a devastating impact on our economy and the livelihoods of so many Bahamians.

Tourism, trade and commerce are all suffering devastating and deep blows.

We are in very difficult and uncharted waters.

Based on applications to NIB, more than 25,000 people have been laid off or have lost their income to date.

This number will likely increase.

The initial numbers from the Treasury indicate that the tax revenues for April were just about one-half of what was collected in April, 2019.

Our unemployment rate in the near term will likely exceed an unprecedented and extraordinary 30 percent.

The entire global economy is in freefall and in uncharted territory.

Even the most powerful and developed countries in the world have entered into deep recession with very high unemployment and the loss of scores of businesses, especially in service industries like tourism, hospitality and entertainment.

The chief economist of the International Monetary Fund has stated on the economic fallout from the COVID-19 virus:

“The magnitude and speed of collapse in activity that has followed is unlike

anything experienced in our lifetimes. This is a crisis like no other.”

The IMF predicts that the economic fallout will surpass “that seen during the global financial crisis a decade ago.”

As one news journal put it very clearly:

“The global economic upheaval sparked by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic will lead to the world's most severe recession since the Great Depression.”

Our closest economic partner, the United States of America, is now seeing job losses like that of the Great Depression.

By some estimates, our economy may shrink by between 14 to 20 percent during 2020.

This will represent a historic one-year decline.

Tourism, the leading engine of our economy, is being devastated.

Many businesses that closed during the lockdown are not confident they will be able to reopen once the restrictions are lifted.

We are facing a stark reality that the vast majority of us have never seen in our lifetimes.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

As your prime minister I must be very clear with you about our economic situation and the state of government finances because we are going to have to make very tough decisions as a country.

I will continue to lay out our economic and financial reality in order for you to appreciate the gravity of the situation we are facing.

We must be prepared to do things differently both in the near-term and in the

long-term in order for us to maintain some measure of economic stability in the near-term.

I have previously reported to you on the details of the \$120 million in additional allocations already provided to allow for the immediate health and economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

These initiatives have funded:

- COVID-19 healthcare costs and related necessities;
- they have provided tens of millions of dollars to self-employed individuals who do not normally qualify for unemployment benefits;
- they have provided loans and grants to number of Bahamian entrepreneurs and businesses to allow them to stay open and keep people employed.

My Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

The upcoming National Budget communication on May 27th will outline the economic and fiscal plan for the country for fiscal year 2020/2021 which begins in July.

It will be a budget that is shaped to match the unprecedented nature of the times we are living in.

What I will say at that time is that your government will ensure that social welfare allocations are expanded to meet the basic food and other core needs of those

economically displaced because of COVID-19.

The upcoming budget will provide for the ongoing support of those still recovering from the ravages of Hurricane Dorian.

We will ensure that no Bahamian goes hungry as we weather the economic hurricane caused by COVID-19.

The Budget will also make provision for expanded capital works and will seek to stimulate domestic private construction.

We will focus on both large and small civil works so that small contractors and their teams across the country can get as much work as possible to provide jobs and commercial activity in all the islands of our archipelago.

These expanded works will bring income to thousands of families in need during this downturn.

We will do what is necessary in the near term to preserve social and economic stability.

We must also change the way we approach how our economy functions.

I recently established the Economic Recovery Committee with an expressed mandate to be bold in their thinking and innovative in their approaches.

For too long we have embraced a status quo model that is not suited for the times.

I am pleased to report that the Economic Recovery Committee has been meeting regularly.

They have agreed their broad aims and objectives and have established the following subcommittees:

- Structural Reform
- Family Islands Development
- Healthcare & Social Capital
- Commerce, Entrepreneurship, & Next Generation (Youth) Engagement
- Agriculture, Fisheries & Manufacturing
- Environmental Stewardship
- Labour & Education

- Digitization & The Conceptual Economy
- Tourism & The Creative/ Orange Economy
- Financial Services

These subcommittees will include individuals from outside the core Economic Recovery Committee.

The approach by the Economic Recovery Committee and its

subcommittees will be to seek feedback and input from those who are interested in participating and offering ideas and advice.

The various subcommittees will host stakeholder meetings and other forums to obtain and distill a range of experiences, viewpoints and perspectives.

The Economic Recovery Committee will soon provide an update to the public on

their progress to date and their immediate plans.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Through the upcoming budget exercise and the collective national input into the work of the Economic Recovery Committee, I wish to assure you that my Government understands fully the gravity of the situation that we face as a country.

We will not sugarcoat the severity of the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Some of the decisions that we shall have to take will no doubt be uncomfortable, and indeed painful.

But we cannot shirk away from making the hard decisions.

Given the times that we are living in, we cannot be guided by narrow partisan considerations.

It is my sincere hope that the Official Opposition will be similarly guided by a broad-based patriotic spirit and spirit of unity and cooperation.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

I want to inform you that discussions with the President of the Bahamas Christian Council on the safe and appropriate time to fully re-open churches continue.

These discussions will continue.

Churches are now open for individual prayer with safe physical distancing measures.

Church offices are allowed to operate for half the day, Monday to Friday.

Churches also continue to operate food programs.

Medical science and healing are critical in the fight COVID-19.

But we also need spiritual healing and God's everlasting grace to heal our souls,

to comfort our spirits and to uplift the nation.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Over the past weeks, questions have been asked about the numbers of individuals who were permitted to enter The Bahamas prior to the commencement of the general repatriation exercise for Bahamian citizens and residents who were abroad.

I wish to provide the country with information I have received from the Director General of the Bahamas Civil Aviation Authority on the number of individuals allowed to enter the country prior to the return this week of 183 Bahamians and residents.

As may be recalled, I informed you last week, that on Wednesday, 29th April, 2020, six individuals arrived in The Bahamas by private aircraft.

This afternoon, in response to the questions which have arisen, I wish to advise that over the emergency period a total of six (6) other persons, comprised of two Bahamian citizens, one permanent resident and three work permit holders (being skilled technicians contracted to conduct specialized emergency work for utility services) were permitted to enter The Bahamas.

I am also advised that all these individuals were screened by health officials and were placed under self-quarantine.

One of those Bahamians was permitted to exit the country and to re-enter The Bahamas after medical care over the course of a 24-hour period.

This individual was administered a COVID-19 test upon re-entry, and was placed under self-quarantine.

The second Bahamian obtained the COVID-19 test prior to entry and was also placed under self-quarantine.

One permanent resident was permitted entry, who obtained a COVID-19 test prior to arrival, and was placed under self-quarantine.

A total of three work permit holders were permitted entry for emergency and essential purposes.

Two of these individuals were needed to service BPL generators here on New Providence.

These individuals were placed under self-quarantine, which was the policy at the time of their arrival.

The other work permit holder was an engineer required on a private island. He obtained the COVID-19 test prior to arrival in The Bahamas, and was also placed under self-quarantine.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

As I noted last week, I will temporarily serve as Minister of Health until a new minister is appointed.

It was my privilege to previously serve in this portfolio along with a number of the professionals now on the frontlines of the fight against COVID-19.

Our dedicated COVID-19 response team is led by Dr. Merceline Dahl-Regis, a former Chief Medical Officer of The Bahamas, and a public health expert with extensive knowledge and experience in epidemiology.

Dr. Dahl-Regis and our public health team have done an outstanding job during this time.

They have advised my Government on measures to slow the spread of the virus and to enhance our public health infrastructure to help respond to COVID-19.

Dr. Dahl-Regis and the public health team have kept Bahamians informed on a regular basis as to what is happening with the pandemic.

They have helped to save and to protect lives.

Most of the country is deeply impressed with the collection of medical minds and expertise on our public health team. I share this sentiment.

During this crisis you have been able to meet these health experts at the Ministry of Health's press conferences.

You will continue to hear from Dr. Dahl-Regis and the team.

As Prime Minister and temporarily Minister of Health you will hear from me in various ways and in various places.

Sometimes it will be in national addresses. Sometimes it will be in Parliament.

Sometimes it will be at the Ministry of Health press briefings, or briefings at the Office of the Prime Minister.

Our country is blessed to have such a talented public health team. They are all highly capable.

This stellar team will continue to keep Bahamians informed.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Mother's Day is a very special occasion when Bahamians and people around the world celebrate and remember their mothers, both living and passed.

We remember our birth mothers, stepmothers, foster mothers and guardians.

We remember our grandmothers, aunts, sisters, godmothers, spiritual mothers, church elders and all of those women who have shown us a mother's tender care and love.

Telling someone, "Happy Mother's Day", is an expression of respect.

It is an expression of gratitude to someone who has shared their gift of motherhood with us.

It is an expression of love for someone who has shown us kindness or who has offered loving advice and correction even when it was sometimes a hard lesson or advice.

A good mother not only holds our hands. She also uses strong and firm hands pushing us to do better and to be better.

A mother's love is a refuge we seek during the storms of life.

In the spirit of First Corinthians, Chapter 13: A mother's love: "always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

On Mother's Day, Bahamians call their mothers no matter where we are in the world.

We send flowers and gifts.

We go to church with our mothers. There are special or favorite meals at home or at restaurants.

I recently heard the story of a daughter in her 70s whose recent birthday gift to her 90-some year-old mother this year was a new dress for her to go to church in.

No matter how old we are, no matter our life journey, no matter our successes or failures, a mother's love is a bedrock and foundation.

Many of us put flowers on the graves of our departed mothers, or flowers like lilies and roses next to photographs of their mothers who now reside in their heavenly home.

No matter whether our mothers are with us in spirit or on earth, a mother's love is enduring. It is everlasting.

Though my mother passed away many years ago, I also remember her in a special way on this day, as well as an older

departed sister who was like a mother to me.

Let us pray for and remember today all of our mothers, those living and passed who gave us the gift of life.

This year's Mother's Day is more different than any Mother's Day in most of our lifetimes.

We pray on this day for the souls of those mothers who have passed away because of COVID-19.

We pray for those mothers who are ill as well as those who may be near the end of their earthly journey.

We pray for all mothers during this global pandemic, including the many mother's on the frontline fighting this deadly virus.

What we are going through, together, is difficult for so many here at home who

cannot celebrate Mother's Day as we traditionally do.

Because many of our mothers are older we are unable to be with them in person, to hug them, to have a meal with them, to hold their hands to pray.

This time of physical distancing will pass. But what will endure are the expressions of love and hope we give each

other through acts of kindness and encouragement during this time.

For many of our elders, including mothers on this special day, this is a time of loneliness and feelings of isolation, anxiety and worry.

Even though this Mother's Day is different, it is in many ways even more important that we remember the love and sacrifices mothers make throughout a lifetime and throughout the year.

One way for us to celebrate Mother's Day this year is to enjoy photographs, videos, memorabilia and other memories of our mothers, whether living or passed.

Whether you are a younger person celebrating Mother's Day in person or you have an older mother you are celebrating with by telephone or online, make this as memorable a day as possible despite the very difficult circumstances we are all enduring.

On behalf of Patricia and myself, we wish a happy and blessed Mother's Day to all mothers in The Bahamas, including the mothers of Killarney.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

In a recent call for unity in the fight against the COVID-19 virus, former U.S. President George W. Bush said in a video message:

“We are not partisan combatants. We’re human beings, equally vulnerable and equally wonderful in the sight of God.”

“We cannot allow physical separation to become emotional isolation.

“This requires us to not only be compassionate but creative in our outreach.

“Let us remember that empathy and simple kindness are essential, powerful tools of national recovery.”

Another essential and powerful tool of national recovery is a spirit of thanksgiving and gratitude.

We were taught by our mothers and by Scripture to always show a spirit of gratitude.

In the words of Psalm 136:

“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever...”

Despite the struggles of the moment we have much for which to be grateful,

especially as we see the large numbers of deaths and the sick around the world because of this deadly virus.

We cannot ever stop thanking those who are doing so much to protect us and to care for us.

Think for a moment of the many sanitation workers and cleaners everywhere who are also on the frontlines battling this virus.

They too are saving and protecting lives, often at risk to themselves.

I am thinking today especially of those public and private sector workers doing waste collection and removal, and waste treatment.

This includes the employees of the Department of Environmental Health Services, the New Providence Landfill and the employees of other public and private waste facilities throughout the country.

As prime minister I thank all of these men and women on behalf of our entire country.

Our hearts are filled with gratitude for your service.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

As people of faith, may gratitude always be in our hearts and on our lips, as we are ever expressing gratitude for the gifts of the earth and the gift of each other.

Let us remember in thanksgiving all of those prayer warriors who spend countless and private hours in prayer, upholding the nation, and praying ceaselessly to the God who brings light out of darkness and new life from death.

If you will permit me a personal note.

With boundless gratitude in my heart, I thank all of you who continue to offer me their best wishes, prayers and support.

It is only with God's grace and your prayers that I am able to serve our country during this unprecedented time.

Lord of Life: May we never take for granted the gift of life and may a spirit of gratitude always be our constant companion.

May God bless all of our mothers, and
may God continue to bless the
Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

Thank you and good afternoon.
