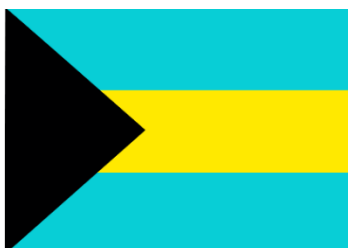




REPORT

CARICOM ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION (CEOM)

GENERAL ELECTIONS OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF
THE BAHAMAS



12 MAY 2026

**REPORT
OF THE
CARICOM ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION
TO THE
GENERAL ELECTIONS OF THE COMMONWEALTH
OF THE BAHAMAS
12 MAY 2026**

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Prepared by:

**Mr. Herman St. Helen
Chief of Mission
6 August 2026**

CARICOM Election Observation Missions are comprised of experts nominated from CARICOM Member States and provide independent expert analysis. The CARICOM Secretariat provides administrative and logistical support. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the Chief of Mission and the team of observers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The General Elections of The Bahamas were held on 12 May 2026, with advanced polling on 30 April 2026. At the invitation of the Bahamian Government, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) deployed a 12-member CARICOM Election Observation Mission (CEOM), comprising electoral officials from nine Member States and three members of staff of the CARICOM Secretariat. The Mission was led by Mr. Herman St. Helen, Chief Elections Officer of Saint Lucia.

Key Findings

Below is a summary of the key findings of the CEOM.

- **Pre-Election Environment:** Stakeholders raised concerns about the integrity of the voters' register, citing duplicate registrations, inadequate address verification, and administrative errors. The Parliamentary Registration Department (PRD) faced criticism for limited preparedness, weak communication, and insufficient civic education efforts. Stakeholders called for greater independence of the PRD and the Boundaries Commission to avoid perceptions of political bias. Concerns by stakeholders also included campaign financing gaps, limited media impartiality, and youth disengagement from the electoral process. Instances of xenophobic rhetoric regarding the Haitian community were further noted as potentially undermining voter confidence among Bahamians of Haitian descent.
- **Election Day Observations:** CEOM observers were deployed across New Providence and Grand Bahama, covering 317 of 322 polling divisions on both islands. Most polling stations opened on time, with adequate police presence and election materials. Voting was conducted peacefully, with the secrecy of the ballot maintained. Minor inconsistencies were observed in voter identification and ink-checking procedures, but these did not disrupt the process. Party agents were present, although smaller parties and independents had more limited representation at the polls. Overall, voters were able to cast their ballots in an orderly manner.
- **Post-Election Context:** The CEOM assessed the elections as peaceful and credible, despite logistical challenges and stakeholder concerns. The CEOM also noted the peaceful acceptance of the election results.

Recommendations

While the 2026 Bahamian elections were peaceful and broadly credible, systemic reforms are recommended to safeguard electoral integrity and inclusiveness. In this context, the CEOM wishes to make the following key recommendations:

1. Establish an independent election management body separate from government ministries.

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2. Implement campaign finance legislation to regulate funding and guard against misuse of state resources.
3. Enhance civic and voter education, particularly targeting youth and under-represented populations.
4. Improve media access and impartiality through regulatory frameworks; and
5. Strengthen logistical preparedness and continuous operations of the PRD to ensure accuracy of the voters' register.

This Report of the CEOM is presented to Dr. Carla Barnett, Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community, for onward transmission to the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, and the Parliamentary Registration Department of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

The CEOM expresses the hope that the government, electoral stakeholders, and the people of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas will give due consideration to the recommendations outlined in this Report. We propose these recommendations with the aim of further strengthening the integrity and effectiveness of the electoral process, while maintaining the country's reputation as a stable parliamentary democracy within the Caribbean region.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The General Elections of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas were held on 12 May 2026, with advanced polling taking place on 30 April 2026.

At the invitation of the Governor-General of The Bahamas, Her Excellency Dame Cynthia A. Pratt, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) deployed a 12-member CARICOM Election Observation Mission (CEOM) to observe the conduct of the elections.

The CEOM comprised electoral officials from nine (9) Member States, as well as three (3) officials from the CARICOM Secretariat, who provided technical and administrative support. The CEOM arrived in The Bahamas between 5 and 8 May and departed between 14 and 15 May 2026.

The Mission was led by the **Chief of Mission**, Mr. Herman St. Helen, Chief Elections Officer for **Saint Lucia**. The other Members of the Mission were as follows:

- (i) **Barbados** - Ms. Debra Hughes, Chairperson, Electoral and Boundaries Commission (**Deputy Chief of Mission**);
- (ii) **Antigua and Barbuda** - Mr. Alrick Daniel, Member of the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission;
- (iii) **Dominica** - Ambassador Felix Gregoire, Chairman, Public Service Commission;
- (iv) **Grenada** - Ms. Theron Lashington, Assistant Supervisor of Elections;
- (v) **Haiti** - Mr. Peterson Pierre-Louis, Secretary-General, Provisional Electoral Council;
- (vi) **Jamaica** - Ms. Denese Coley-Hines, Regional Field Manager, Electoral Commission of Jamaica;
- (vii) **Saint Vincent and the Grenadines** - Ms. Kadean Williams, Systems Supervisor, Electoral Office; and
- (viii) **Suriname** - Mr. Cecil Valies, Member of the Independent Electoral Council.

The CEOM was supported by the following CARICOM Secretariat staff:

- (i) Ms. Shae-Alicia Lewis, Programme Manager, Community Relations.
- (ii) Mr. Cameron Clarke, Project Officer, Foreign and Community Relations; and
- (iii) Ms. Denise Morgan, Administrative Assistant I, Foreign and Community Relations.

In addition to the CEOM, the elections were observed by other international stakeholders, including the Commonwealth Observer Group and the Organization of American States (OAS).

The elections were conducted by the Parliamentary Registration Department (PRD).

Scope of Services

The Scope of Services of the CEOM, as specified by the Appendix to the *Handbook for CARICOM Election Observation Missions*, is outlined below.

General

- (a) **Observe** the entire electoral process in the host country starting with the observation of the environment/atmosphere ahead of the polling and the level of preparedness of the body responsible for conducting the polls.

On The Day of The Elections

- (a) **Observe** the entire electoral process, including the preparations for the start of the poll, the casting of votes, the closure of the polling stations, the counting of the ballots and the preparation of the Statement of Poll.
- (b) **Collect** information on the results at the voting tables to assist in the quantitative verification of results.
- (c) **Collect** qualitative observations regarding the voting process, comportment of the electoral officials and political actors, and on the overall electoral environment.

In The Post-Electoral Period

- (a) **Observe** and **assess** the outcome of the elections and the initial immediate impact on the social and political environment.
- (b) **Collaborate** in the preparation of the Report of the Observer Mission to be prepared by the Chief of Mission, through the submission of observation sheets, oral reports on their observations and findings on the day of the elections.

This report presents the findings and assessments of the CARICOM Election Observation Mission on the conduct of the General Elections of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, with reference to the pre-election environment, electoral management, voter experience, and post-election developments.

II. HISTORICAL, ELECTORAL AND POLITICAL OVERVIEW

(i) Geography

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas is located in the Atlantic Ocean, within the Lucayan Archipelago, north of the Caribbean basin. The country is considered an archipelagic state, with a land area of 13,878 square kilometres and a total estimated area of 100,000 square miles. While encompassing 700 islands, only twenty-nine islands are considered permanently inhabited. The country is divided into 32 local government districts with 41 constituencies.



Figure 1: Detailed map of The Bahamas

(ii) Country Profile

TYPE OF GOVERNMENT	Parliamentary Democracy
Head of State:	King Charles III (since 6 May 2023) Represented by Governor General, H.E. Dame Cynthia A. Pratt (since September 2023)
Head of Government:	The Honourable Philip Davis (since 17 September 2021)
Legislative structure:	Bicameral Parliament
Ruling Party	Progressive Liberal Party (PLP)
Major Political Parties	Democratic National Alliance (DNA), Free National Movement (FNM), Progressive Liberal Party (PLP)
National Day	10 July (Independence Day - since 1973)
Capital	Nassau
Population	401,283 (2024 est., World Bank)
Major Ethnicities	African descent (Black / Afro-Bahamian): ~90–91% White (primarily of European descent): ~4–5% Mixed ethnicity: ~2–3% Other ethnic groups (Asian, Hispanic, Middle Eastern, etc.): ~2% Unspecified: <1% (2010 Bahamas National Statistical Institute)
Major Religions	Christian 93%, No Religion 5%, other 2 % (2022 Bahamas National Statistical Institute)
Major Languages	English
Key Industries	Tourism, finance
Major Exports	Refined Petroleum (\$1.61B), Passenger and Cargo Ships (\$103M), Documents of title (bonds etc.) and unused stamps (\$95.2M), Special Purpose Ships (\$92M), and Other Sea Vessels (\$72.9M) (OEC 2024)

Major Export Partners	United States (\$987M), Zimbabwe (\$732M), Thailand (\$170M), Poland (\$100M), and Saudi Arabia (\$68.3M) (OEC 2024)
Major Imports	Refined Petroleum (\$3.77B), Special Purpose Ships (\$822M), Passenger and Cargo Ships (\$472M), Cars (\$190M), and Crude Petroleum (\$182M) (OEC 2024)
Major Import Partners	United States (\$5.23B), China (\$1.1B), Colombia (\$439M), Japan (\$277M), and Canada (\$178M) (OEC 2024)
Income Category	High income (ILO)
GDP per capita	US \$39,730 (IMF, 2025)
GDP (real growth rate)	2.2% (IMF, 2025)
Unemployment Rate	9.3% (IMF, 2025)
Human Development Index	0.82 Rank: 66 out of 193 countries (UNDP, 2023)
Currency	Bahamian Dollar (BSD)
Exchange Rate	1 BSD to 1 USD (pegged to USD)
Date of CARICOM Membership	4 July 1983
Last General Elections	16 September 2021

(iii) Historical Background

The first people arrived in The Bahamas around 300-400 AD from areas near present-day Cuba, with the Lucayan people later settling between 900 and 1500 AD. In 1492, Christopher Columbus arrived on San Salvador Island and named the islands “*baja mar*” (in Spanish), meaning “shallow sea”.

English Puritans seeking religious freedom settled in The Bahamas in 1649, establishing the first permanent European settlement there. The Bahamas would later become a British Crown Colony in 1717. In 1783, Loyalists from America migrated to the archipelago, bringing with them enslaved persons and skills in farming and shipbuilding. Slavery was later abolished in 1834.

The Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) was founded in 1953, as the first formal political party in The Bahamas. Economic developments during that period would coincide with growing political momentum toward self-governance, culminating in internal autonomy and the first legislative

elections in 1967. The archipelago ultimately achieved independence on 10 July 1973. The main opposition following independence was formed by the Free National Movement (FNM), which was established in 1972 by merging the United Bahamian Party (UBP) and alienated anti-independence PLP members. Since independence, the government has alternated between the PLP and the FNM.

Today, The Bahamas is a prosperous country with an economy that is primarily based on tourism and services. Thanks to its economic development, the archipelago attracts many migrants seeking better work opportunities, among them people from neighbouring Caribbean islands.

(iv) Electoral Framework

(a) Legislation

In The Bahamas, the Constitution and the *Parliamentary Elections Act (1992)* provide the basis for political representation and voting in general elections. Chapter V of the Constitution provides the basis for election to Parliament. The *Parliamentary Elections Act*, PART III, details the requirements for individuals to be registered as electors in a constituency, recognising he/she should be:

- “(a) a citizen of The Bahamas of full age and not subject to any legal incapacity; and
- (b) is and has been during the whole of the period of three months immediately preceding that day, ordinarily resident in premises in that constituency.”

Other relevant instruments include the *Local Government Act (1996)* and the *Constitutional Referendum Act (2002)*. The *Broadcasting & Media Regulations Act* and *Public Order Act* also include provisions on campaigning and political broadcasts.

In the regional and international sphere, The Bahamas is also guided by the relevant provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), as well as the CARICOM Charter of Civil Society, among other international legal and normative instruments.

(b) Constituencies

In January 2026, two new parliamentary seats were introduced, increasing the number to forty-one. Twenty-five constituencies are located on the island of New Providence, with five constituencies on Grand Bahama and eleven dispersed among the other Family Islands.

(c) Electoral Institutions

The Bahamas Parliamentary Commissioner and Parliamentary Registration Department were established under Section 12 of the *Parliamentary Elections Act (1992)*. The Department, which falls under the Ministry of National Security for administrative purposes, is staffed by the Parliamentary Commissioner, Deputy Parliamentary Commissioner, and other staff appointed by

the Governor-General, based on the advice of the Public Service Commission. Mr. Harrison Thompson is the current Parliamentary Commissioner.

(v) Political Context

(a) Introduction

Under the Bahamian Constitution, the Head of State is represented by a Governor-General. The Bahamas has a bicameral parliament with a 16-member Senate constituting the Upper House and a 41-member House of Assembly constituting the Lower House.

Members of the House of Assembly are elected for five-year terms in single-seat constituencies. Election to the House of Assembly is on a first-past-the-post basis. The parliamentary opposition is the largest minority party following the general elections and is headed by the Leader of the Opposition. Prior to the 2026 elections, the Progressive Liberal Party held thirty-two seats in the House of Assembly, while the Free National Movement held six seats, and the Coalition of Independents held a single seat.

(b) Political Parties

The Bahamas is a stable democracy, with no recent politically motivated violence or civil disturbances. Elections are generally peaceful and deemed fair; political parties can organise freely; and there is a history of peaceful transfer of power.

The PLP and FNM have been the dominant political parties throughout The Bahamas' history. Other smaller political parties at present include the Bahamas Constitution Party, Democratic National Alliance, United Coalition Movement, Kingdom Government Movement, Coalition of Independents (formed by members of Bahamian Evolution), and the Grand Commonwealth Party.

(c) 2026 Elections

Following Nomination Day on 16 April 2026, 139 candidates were registered for the 2026 elections. This included three political parties and 17 independent candidates. The table below indicates the number of candidates per political party/affiliation.

PARTY	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES
Progressive Liberal Party (PLP)	41
Free National Movement (FNM)	41
Coalition of Independents (COI)	40
Independent	17

III. PRE-ELECTION DAY OBSERVATIONS

(i) Stakeholder Consultations

As part of its pre-election observation methodology, the CARICOM Election Observation Mission consulted with stakeholders from a wide cross-section of the Bahamian society to gather perspectives on the electoral environment and assess preparations for the elections. In this context, the team held engagements with the following stakeholders:

- The Honourable Philip Davis, Prime Minister and Leader of the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP);
- Mr. Michael Pintard, Leader of the Opposition and of the Free National Movement (FNM);
- Mr. Lincoln Bain, Leader of the Coalition of Independents (COI).
- The Most Honourable Dr. Hubert Minnis, Independent Candidate.
- Ms. Shanta Emily Knowles, Commissioner of Police; and
- Mr. Harrison Thompson, Parliamentary Commissioner.

The CEOM also met with representatives of the media fraternity, along with the following organisations:

- Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers' Confederation;
- Bahamas Constitution Party (BHP);
- Bahamas Youth Ambassador Corps/Bahamas Youth Parliament/National Youth Advisory Council;
- Civil Society Bahamas (CSB);
- Equality Bahamas;
- Organisation for Responsible Governance (ORG); and
- United Association of Haitians Living in The Bahamas (UHAB).

(ii) Issues Raised by Stakeholders

Below is a summary of the key issues raised by stakeholders.

(a) Integrity of the Voters' Register

Stakeholders raised concerns about the integrity of the voters' register and administration of the voter registration process. Allegations included the presence of foreign nationals on the voters' register connected with the fraudulent acquisition of voter identification cards and passports.

There were also concerns raised about non-existent or inadequate address verification for new voters, reportedly due to constraints faced by the Parliamentary Registration Department in meeting the election timelines. Other concerns included the perceived failure of the Parliamentary Registration Department to meet the statutory deadline for issuance of the voters' register, as well as purported administrative errors, such as the exclusion of registered individuals

from the list, a number reported to potentially be in the thousands, and the assigning of voters to incorrect polling locations.

- **Preparedness of the Parliamentary Registration Department**

Many stakeholders expressed concern about the overall level of preparedness of the Parliamentary Registration Department, while recommending that the Department work on a continuous, year-round basis to ensure that it is fully able to deliver on its mandate. The challenges relating to the voters' register were cited as indicative of the Department's constraints. It was also suggested that the compressed election timeline may have limited the ability of the Department to complete key preparatory activities, including the comprehensive training of poll workers.

Within this context, stakeholders also highlighted several logistical challenges during advanced polling. These included reports of long lines and extended waiting times, the concentration of several constituencies into a single polling location, the purportedly illegal extension of the voting hours, and insufficient accommodations for vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, pregnant women, and persons with disabilities.

- **Independence of the Parliamentary Registration Department**

The importance of establishing an independent election management body emerged as a recurring theme among stakeholders. Acknowledging the current institutional framework, some stakeholders observed that the reporting relationship of the Commissioner and staff of the Parliamentary Registration Department to a Government Ministry may give rise to undue political influence over the Department's decision-making processes, particularly during the electoral period.

In this context, some stakeholders expressed the view that challenges related to the voters' register and the conduct of advanced polling were deliberate attempts to influence the election process in favour of the incumbent. Concerns were also raised regarding the attempted movement on 5 May 2026 of ballot boxes from advanced polling day to the Parliamentary Registration Department, without what was perceived as sufficient notice. This was viewed by some stakeholders through the lens of the broader apprehensions about the Department previously mentioned. Additionally, reference was made to perceptions of political alignment and the potential influence of the Government in staff recruitment within the Department, further reinforcing calls for enhanced institutional independence and transparency.

- **Independence of The Boundaries Commission**

Concerns were raised by some stakeholders regarding the recent constituency delimitation exercise. One stakeholder noted that the number of electors in a particular constituency appeared virtually unchanged following the exercise, while another expressed the view that the available demographic data did not clearly justify the adjustments made. Considering these

observations, stakeholders underscored the importance of strengthening the independence of the Boundaries Commission to enhance public confidence in its work.

- **National Minorities**

Some stakeholders criticised instances of xenophobic rhetoric directed towards the Haitian community and persons of Haitian descent, including reported scapegoating for crimes involving identity document fraud. It was noted that such narratives, including those attributed to one of the contesting political parties, had stoked fears among the affected communities and could potentially deter voters, particularly young voters of Haitian descent, from exercising their franchise.

- **Access to the Media**

Stakeholders noted that the governing party and the main opposition are allocated free airtime on state media for political campaigning purposes, a provision that does not appear to extend to smaller parties or independent candidates. More broadly, there was a general perception of limited media impartiality, with several media outlets viewed as aligned with the two principal political parties. Furthermore, there were allegations of at least one instance where ownership of a major media outlet was linked to a candidate in the elections.

In this context, stakeholders underscored the importance of developing appropriate regulatory frameworks to promote equitable access to the media and to guide media conduct during the electoral period, with a view to strengthening fairness, balance, and public confidence.

- **Inadequate Civic and Voter Education**

Stakeholders consistently expressed concern regarding the Parliamentary Registration Department's limited, untimely, and inconsistent communication with political parties and the public, attributing this in part to the early announcement of elections and a perceived lack of preparedness on the part of the PRD. Concern was raised about the inadequate dissemination of the voters' registration list and polling locations, while information on advance polling procedures, prior to and during the advanced poll, was deemed insufficient and unclear. It was noted that the PRD website also still prominently featured the 2021 elections, with minimal updates on the current elections. The use of social media by the PRD was acknowledged, although there were still concerns that some segments of society did not have sufficient access to information through those channels.

Some civil society stakeholders expressed interest in assisting with civic education and voter education activities but lamented the minimal resources at their disposal for this purpose.

- **Campaign Financing**

Comprehensive campaign finance reform and the enactment of corresponding legislation was underscored as a necessary change, with stakeholders noting substantial election-related spending by major political parties. Concerns were raised regarding allegations of vote buying, the use of state resources for partisan purposes, and the absence, as well as inconsistency, of requirements for the disclosure of interests in government contracts. Stakeholders further informed the CEOM that no campaign finance legislation is currently in place and expressed dissatisfaction with the exclusion of political parties from the provisions of the *Non-profit Organisations Act*.

- **Youth Engagement with the Electoral Process**

Stakeholders underscored the importance of strengthening youth interest and engagement in the electoral process, identifying it as a key area requiring improvement. While it was acknowledged that political parties maintain structured outreach to young people, including through youth arms, engagement was characterised as symbolic rather than substantive. Youth involvement in the electoral process was noted as being limited.

Stakeholders consistently emphasised the need for sustained, meaningful inclusion of young people, cautioning against tokenistic approaches. They underscored the risk of deepening disengagement and weakened confidence in democratic institutions due to limited youth engagement and called for structured avenues for youth participation.

(iii) Additional Observations

(a) Political Signage and Paraphernalia

It was also observed that there were several huge billboards and banners highlighting the candidates of all three parties and the independents contesting the general elections. What was apparent to the observers was the differentiation in the sizes of the banners and billboards for the governing party, the opposition and the independent candidates. The team's observations also confirmed reports about the substantial financial resources being expended for the elections.

(b) The Voters' List

As per the requirements of the law, all persons desirous of voting in the 2026 general elections had to be registered by 8 April 2026. For the 2026 general elections, the voters list reflected a total of two hundred and nine thousand, two hundred and sixty-four (209,264) electors. This figure represents an increase of 14,770 additional electors or a 7.59 % over the 194,494 electors who were registered for the 2021 general elections. The increase may reflect heightened public interest in the electoral process, particularly among younger voters, a trend that was referred to during stakeholder consultations.

IV. ELECTION DAY OBSERVATIONS

(i) Deployment of Observers

On Election Day, members of the CEOM were deployed to observe the polling process on the islands of New Providence and Grand Bahama, where they observed the opening of the polls, voting throughout the day, the closing of polls, and the counting and results tabulation process. Members of the team visited twenty-two (22) constituencies on New Providence and all five (5) constituencies on Grand Bahama, observing the various Election Day procedures at 317 of the 322 polling divisions on both islands. Five teams, each comprising two observers, were deployed to various constituencies for observations. The deployment schedule is outlined in **Appendix II**.

(ii) Opening of the Polls

In keeping with the requirements of the *Parliamentary Elections Act*, polling was conducted between the hours of 8.00 am and 6.00 pm. on Election Day. The observer teams arrived at the polling divisions prior to the opening of the poll. It was observed that:

- Polling staff were present and the necessary election supplies were delivered on time to ensure that polls opened promptly at 8:00 a.m. As a result, most polling divisions opened at the stipulated time, although three of the stations observed opened between 8:05 and 8:18 am.
- There was adequate police presence at the polling locations.
- Agents of all political parties were present at polling divisions; and
- The polling day staff carried out the opening of the poll procedures as required, ensuring that the ballot boxes were empty and inspecting the ballots prior to opening the polling stations.

(iii) Voting Process

It was observed that there were adequate supplies available at the various polling divisions visited. It was further confirmed that voters were able to cast their ballots in accordance with the provisions of the law.

(a) Information Management

At most polling locations visited, it was observed that a list of electors was available to facilitate voters' verification of their names and assigned voting locations. Information clerks were also present to assist voters, including by directing them to assigned polling divisions.

(b) Poll Workers

In general, the required number of six election day workers was present. Election day workers appeared adequately trained, courteous, and aided voters with disabilities and elderly voters. While some slight inconsistencies were noted in applying voting procedures and guidelines, overall, the inconsistencies were limited in scope and did not cause disruption to the voting process.

Observers recorded steady voter turnout in many polling divisions in the morning while noting a reduction in turnout by midday. Notwithstanding, polling staff remained focused throughout the required procedures, ensuring eligible voters were able to cast their votes.

(c) Polling Agents

It was observed that, in most instances, the more established political parties, the PLP and the FNM, had the permitted number of agents at the polling places.

As stipulated by Section 55 (1) of the *Parliamentary Elections Act*, “the Presiding Officer shall not permit the number of persons who are in the polling place to exceed the number of compartments in that polling place and shall exclude all other persons except:

- (a) the returning officer, and the polling clerks appointed to attend at the polling place;
- (b) the candidates;
- (c) the permitted number of election agents for each candidate, being a number not exceeding three persons at any time;
- (d) the police officers on duty;
- (e) the friend of an incapacitated voter.”

In some polling locations, the COI and independent candidates did not assign agents.

(d) Identification of Voters

Voters were required to present their voters cards issued by the Parliamentary Registration Office upon entry into the polling station. Once the voter had presented himself/herself to poll day staff, particulars were verified to ensure that the information presented was that of the voter in the photograph. The voter card was further checked to verify that there were no previous stamps, ensuring that the voter had not previously voted. After voters’ identities were verified, they were permitted to cast their ballots. Observers assessed voting as conducted in the prescribed manner. In instances where voters were unable to provide their voters’ card, they were required to present another form of identification, i.e., their passport, biometric card, or national insurance card.

The CEOM Observers also noticed, in all polling places visited, party agents witnessing the identification of electors and satisfying themselves of the eligibility of each elector.

(e) **Checking of Fingers for Ink**

Inconsistencies were recorded in the manner in which Election Day workers checked for ink on voters' fingers. For instance, it was recorded that in some polling divisions, there were no such checks, while in others, this process was carried out consistently. Additionally, in some instances, the right thumb was dipped in the ink before the elector cast his or her ballot, while in other instances it was done subsequent to voting.

(f) **Secrecy of the Ballot**

Extreme care was observed regarding the secrecy of the ballot. Prior to receiving the ballot paper, the Presiding Officer issued clear and concise instructions to the elector, informing him/her to mark the ballot for the candidate of his/her choice. Voters were instructed on how to fold the ballot paper to prevent identification of their voting selections. Moreover, to further safeguard the secrecy of the vote, electors were requested to leave all bags, cell phones, hats, and other personal items in baskets at the entrance of each polling division.

(g) **Differently Abled Voters**

Observers recorded a significant number of persons (elderly and persons with disabilities) who required assistance in casting their ballots. Special arrangements were put in place to accommodate those persons on Election Day, with several polling divisions providing extra chairs for those with physical impairments. Persons who needed assistance were often given priority and, in most instances, escorted to the front of the line to cast their vote with minimum delay and impediment. It was observed that these voters were often assisted by family members, friends, or poll workers, particularly the Presiding Officer.

Additionally, it was observed that the majority of polling divisions were located on the ground floor, making entry and exit accessible to the elderly and voters with disabilities. Nonetheless, a few polling divisions were located on upper floors or had raised platforms that could pose significant difficulties for persons with mobility challenges.

(h) **Gathering and Campaigning at Polling Stations**

In keeping with the requirements of the law, no evidence was observed of persons campaigning or seeking to influence voters within 100 yards of the polling divisions. Gatherings were observed outside of the prescribed 100-yard demarcations, however.

(i) **Election Day Workers**

Election Day workers observed were adequately trained and experienced, carrying out their responsibilities in an effective and efficient manner. Furthermore, the Election Day workers'

conduct was noted as impartial, professional and non-partisan in nature, thereby contributing positively to the election process.

(iv) Close of Poll

The law regarding poll closure calls for a 6:00 p.m. closing, while allowing voters who are in line at the close of poll to still be able to vote. During the close of poll at the 2026 General Elections, security officers were on hand to ensure that no unauthorised persons gained access to the polling divisions after 6:00 p.m.

The teams observed the closing of the poll at the same polling divisions where they had earlier witnessed the opening of the poll. Teams arrived at these polling divisions in advance of the scheduled close. Notably, at 6:00 p.m., the majority of Presiding Officers declared the polling divisions closed. It was observed, in a few instances however, that additional time was allowed for voting if there had been a delay in the opening of the poll. At the close of the poll, observers noted little to no voters in line at most polling divisions. Where voters were present in line, they were allowed to exercise their franchise.

The CEOM team also witnessed additional close of poll procedures, including the counting of ballots, sealing of ballot boxes, securing of ballots and other electoral material, and the submission of electoral material for transfer to Holding Stations. The team was satisfied that the ballot boxes were opened in the presence of the polling agents, election day workers, officers and observers. Observers also confirmed that the ballots were counted and the voting results were provided to party agents and made public, in accordance with the established procedures.

(v) Counting of Ballots

Observers assessed the counting of the votes as being in accordance with the prescribed law. The law prescribes that, prior to the commencement of the preliminary count, all ballots issued to the Presiding Officer must be accounted for. Aligning with the law, accounting of the ballots in the presence of political agents, poll day workers and observers who were present was the first exercise immediately undertaken after the polls were declared closed. Once the poll day workers and the political agents were satisfied with the accounting of ballot papers issued, the counting of the votes cast commenced.

The counting was conducted in full view of all present, with each ballot shown to all present by the Presiding Officer. It was also observed that the counting process was done efficiently, with preliminary results being reported within an hour following the close of polls. The required forms, with necessary signatures, were also completed in accordance with the law. All ballot boxes and other supplies were observed to be properly packaged and delivered to the Returning Officers, in accordance with the law, in preparation for the official counting of ballots on the following day.

(vi) Preliminary Results (Including Transmission)

The preliminary results were announced to party agents, observers, and Election Day workers present in the various polling divisions, and subsequently made public, in accordance with the established procedures. It was announced that, at the end of the preliminary count, the Progressive Liberal Party had won 33 seats against the eight secured by the Free National Movement. Neither the Coalition of Independents nor any independent candidate was able to secure a seat.

(vii) Voter Turnout

Voter turnout for the 12 May 2026 General Elections stood at 66.4% compared to past voter turnout percentages of, on average, 88%. This percentage (66.4%) can, therefore, be considered relatively low. Notably, the decreases in voter turnout appear to be a phenomenon across CARICOM countries and globally.

(viii) Polling Day Conclusions

The CEOM is of the view that on Election Day, electors were able to exercise their franchise in a peaceful and orderly manner, and without significant incident. The polling day workers performed their duties professionally and in accordance with the rules and regulations. The police maintained law and order at the polling divisions and were extremely professional in their interaction with electors and various stakeholders. The CEOM considers the results of the 2026 elections to be aligned with the will of the people of The Bahamas.

It also noted that the negative experiences on Advanced Polling Day highlighted by stakeholders did not recur.

V. POST-ELECTION OBSERVATIONS

Observers noted broad acceptance of the election results, and the post-election environment remained peaceful and orderly. This was reinforced by the early concession of the Honourable Michael Pintard, Leader of the Opposition and the Free National Movement, who congratulated Prime Minister the Honourable Philip Davis and emphasised that, in a democratic society, the voice of the citizen remained the ultimate voice. The peaceful post-election atmosphere was further enhanced by Prime Minister Davis's gracious acknowledgment of Mr. Pintard's congratulations. The conduct of both leaders reflected a strong commitment to democratic principles and helped foster public confidence in the outcome of the elections.

Although there was widespread acceptance of the preliminary results by candidates, following the official count of the results in the Pinewood Constituency, COI candidate Lincoln Bain indicated his intention to pursue an electoral claim in court. He alleged irregularities during the

voting process and underhandedness regarding the safeguarding of ballot boxes. Notably, following the official count, the PLP's Myles Laroda retained the constituency.¹

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(i) Conclusions

In conclusion, after having observed the 12 May 2026 General Elections, the CEOM must commend the people of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas for the tranquil way in which the polls were conducted. Further, the CEOM salutes the patient and orderly way eligible voters presented and conducted themselves on Election Day. The diligence, professionalism, and dedication of the Parliamentary Registration Department staff were also noted, with special mention as well to the tireless work of the poll day workers to ensure a fair, transparent, and free election. It is the CEOM's view that the opening of poll, voting process, close of poll, and counting process at the polling places observed was peaceful and transparent, which provided an appropriate environment for electors to express their will.

The CEOM also wishes to make the following additional observations:

- (a) Electors cast their ballots without intimidation or fear;
- (b) Poll day workers were well trained and experienced;
- (c) Generally, polls opened and closed on time;
- (d) Electors were generally able to manoeuvre freely within the polling places to cast their ballots;
- (e) Poll day workers and security officials, as well as other stakeholders, were professional, courteous and helpful;
- (f) Polls were generally conducted as per the requirements of the laws of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas; and
- (g) Results of the 12 May 2026 poll reflected the will of the citizens of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

While recognising stakeholder concerns regarding voter registration and preparedness, the CEOM commends the Parliamentary Registration Department for its administration of the electoral process. The CEOM also commends the party agents within polling divisions, the polling day workers, and the Royal Bahamas Police Force, as well as the people of The Bahamas, for the peaceful, and orderly manner in which they conducted themselves on Election Day.

¹ In June 2026, the COI filed petitions in relation to the Pinewood and Fort Charlotte constituencies. The petitions are based on supposed irregularities on polling day in Pinewood, and concerns that newly elected Fort Charlotte Member of Parliament, Sebastian Bastian, held government contracts that were not properly disclosed in keeping with constitutional requirements. At the time of writing, the Mission is not aware of any final determination by the Election Court.

We further extend our appreciation to the Secretary-General of CARICOM for the invitation to participate in this Mission and the opportunity to continue to support CARICOM's role in strengthening democratic traditions across the region.

(ii) Recommendations

Based on information provided by stakeholders and the observers' own assessments, the CEOM wishes to make the recommendations below. These recommendations aim to strengthen electoral integrity, inclusivity, and transparency in The Bahamas and are also aligned with international best practices for electoral governance. It is our belief that acceptance and implementation of these recommendations will further strengthen the electoral system in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

- (a) Strengthening the Integrity of the Voter Registration Process:** Implement robust address verification systems and biometric checks to reduce duplicate or fraudulent registrations on the register. Regular audits of the voters' list should be mandated to build public trust.
- (b) Institutional Independence:** Undertake reforms to transition the Parliamentary Registration Department (PRD) into an independent election management body, with adequate legal and operational safeguards against political influence. Similarly, reinforce the independence of the Boundaries Commission to ensure that constituency delimitation is conducted in a fair, transparent, and impartial manner.
- (c) Continuous Preparedness:** Adopt a year-round operational model for the PRD, including ongoing training for poll workers and early logistical planning. Strengthening preparedness throughout the electoral cycle would help to mitigate operational challenges during elections, including long waiting times at polling stations and inadequate arrangements for vulnerable groups.
- (d) Campaign Finance Reform:** In order to enhance transparency, fairness, and public confidence in the electoral process, introduce legislation requiring disclosure of campaign funding sources, establishing limits on spending, and providing effective penalties for vote buying or misuse of state resources.
- (e) Equitable Media Access:** In order to reduce perceptions of bias and strengthen democratic competition, establish clear election-related regulations to guarantee airtime on state media for smaller parties and independent candidates, while enforcing impartiality standards for media outlets, through active monitoring and enforcement mechanisms.
- (f) Civic and Voter Education:** Launch sustained civic education campaigns, leveraging social media and youth networks to reach younger voters. Update official platforms regularly to provide accessible and accurate election information in an additional effort to reduce declining voter turnout.

- (g) **Youth Engagement:** Create structured avenues for youth participation beyond symbolic outreach, particularly through youth advisors, internships with electoral bodies, and youth inclusion in policy dialogues. This will help to counter disengagement and build long-term confidence among the youth in democratic institutions.
- (h) **Minority Inclusion:** Strengthen efforts to ensure that minority communities, particularly persons of Haitian descent, can exercise their right to vote in a safe and inclusive environment. Efforts may include targeted public education and stakeholder engagement initiatives to promote respectful campaigning practices.
- (i) **Operational Transparency:** Enhance communication between the PRD and stakeholders by publishing timely updates on voter lists, polling locations, and procedures, reducing confusion and reinforcing confidence in the electoral process.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

ARRIVAL STATEMENT

In response to an invitation by way of a letter dated 10 April 2026 from the Most Honourable Dame Cynthia A. Pratt, O.N., GCMG, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat has deployed a twelve-member team to observe the General Elections scheduled for 12 May 2026.

The Mission is headed by Mr. Herman St. Helen, Chief Elections Officer of the Saint Lucia Electoral Department. The other members of the team include:

- Ms. Debra Hughes, Chairperson, Electoral Commission, Barbados (**Deputy Chief of Mission**);
- Mr. Alrick Daniel, Member of the Electoral Commission, Antigua and Barbuda;
- Ambassador Felix Gregoire, Chairman, Public Service Commission, Dominica.
- Ms. Therona Lashington, Assistant Supervisor of Elections, Grenada.
- Mr. Peterson Pierre-Louis, Secretary-General, Provisional Electoral Council, Haiti.
- Ms. Denese Coley-Hines, Regional Field Manager, Electoral Commission, Jamaica.
- Ms. Kadean Williams, Systems Supervisor, Electoral Commission, St. Vincent and the Grenadines; and
- Mr. Cecil Valies, Member of the Independent Electoral Council of Suriname.

The CEOM is supported by the following CARICOM Secretariat Staff:

- Ms. Shae Alicia Lewis, Programme Manager, Community Relations.
- Mr. Cameron Clarke, Project Officer, Foreign and Community Relations; and
- Ms. Denise Morgan, Administrative Assistant I, Foreign and Community Relations.

The Core Group, comprising the Chief of Mission, Deputy Chief of Mission, and the CARICOM Secretariat Support Staff, arrived in The Bahamas on **Tuesday, 5 May 2026**. The remaining members of the Mission will arrive in The Bahamas over the period **7-8 May 2026**. The Mission is scheduled to depart between **14 and 15 May 2026**.

While in The Bahamas, the Mission will undertake an impartial and comprehensive assessment of the conduct of the elections, as well as the pre-election and post-election environment. This will include the voting process on Election Day, the comportment of political actors, and the response to the outcome of the elections.

In the pre-election period, meetings are anticipated with a wide cross-section of stakeholders to assess the preparations for the upcoming general elections. To date, the CEOM has met with Ms. Shanta Emily Knowles, Commissioner of Police; representatives of various youth organisations;

and members of the media fraternity. In the coming days, the team also expects to meet with the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition; leaders of political parties; and independent candidates. Additionally, consultations are anticipated with the Parliamentary Registration Department and representatives from civil society and private and public sector groups.

On 12 May 2026, the team will observe the electoral process, including preparations for the start of the poll, opening of polling stations, casting of votes, closure of polling stations, counting of ballots, and preparation of the Statement of Poll.

Following the elections, the CEOM will issue a Preliminary Statement on its initial assessment of the electoral process and will subsequently prepare the Final Report of the CARICOM Election Observer Mission, to be submitted to the Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community. This Report will be shared with the Prime Minister of The Bahamas, the Leader of the Opposition, and the Parliamentary Registration Department. It will also be published on the CARICOM website.

The CARICOM Election Observation Mission welcomes this opportunity to support the democratic process in The Bahamas. The team expresses its appreciation for the warm welcome and cooperation received since its arrival.

HERMAN ST. HELEN
CHIEF OF MISSION
6 MAY 2026

APPENDIX II

CEOM TEAM DEPLOYMENT SCHEDULE

TEAM	CONSTITUENCIES
Team 1: Herman St. Helen/ Denese Coley-Hines	Killarney Mount Moriah St. Barnabas Marathon St. Anne's Nassau Village Pinewood St. James
Team 2: Debra Hughes/Felix Gregoire	Central Grand Bahama Marco City Pineridge East Grand Bahama West Grand Bahama
Team 3: Alrick Daniel/Therona Lashington	Fort Charlotte Garden Hills Golden Gates Golden Isles Free Town Fox Hill
Team 4: Peterson Pierre-Louis/Kadean Williams	Tall Pines Southern Shores South Beach Seabreeze Yamacraw
Team 5: Cecil Valies/Cameron Clarke	Englerston Centreville Carmichael Bamboo Town Elizabeth

APPENDIX III**ELECTION RESULTS**

Number	Constituency	Member of Parliament Elect	Party
1.	Bains Town and Grants Town	Wayde Watson	PLP
2.	Bamboo Town	Patricia Deveaux	PLP
3.	Carmichael	Keith Bell	PLP
4.	Centreville	Jomo Campbell	PLP
5.	Elizabeth	Jobeth Lillian Coleby-Davis	PLP
6.	Englerston	Glenys Hanna-Martin	PLP
7.	Fort Charlotte	Sebastian Johann Bastian	PLP
8.	Fox Hill	Frederick Audley Mitchell	PLP
9.	Free Town	Lincoln Deal	FNM
10.	Garden Hills	Mario Bowleg	PLP
11.	Golden Gates	Pia Glover-Rolle	PLP
12.	Golden Isles	Darron Pickstock	PLP
13.	Killarney	Michela Barnett-Ellis	FNM
14.	Marathon	Lisa Rahming	PLP
15.	Mount Moriah	McKell Bonaby	PLP
16.	Nassau Village	Jamahl Strachan	PLP
17.	Pinewood	Myles Laroda	PLP
18.	Saint Anne's	Adrian R. White	FNM
19.	St. Barnabas	Michael Halkitis	PLP
20.	St. James	Owen Wells	PLP
21.	Seabreeze	Leslia Miller-Brice	PLP
22.	South Beach	Bacchus Rolle	PLP
23.	Southern Shores	Sean Roberts	PLP
24.	Tall Pines	Michael Darville	PLP
25.	Yamacraw	Zane Lightbourne	PLP
26.	Central Grand Bahama	Frazette Isadora Gibson	FNM
27.	East Grand Bahama	James Kwasi Thompson	FNM
28.	Marco City	Michael Clifton Pintard	FNM
29.	Pineridge	Ginger Maria Moxey	PLP
30.	West Grand Bahama	Kingsley Valentine Smith Jr.	PLP
31.	Central and South Abaco	Bradley Ramorn Fox Jr.	PLP
32.	North Abaco	Kirk Daniel Cornish	PLP
33.	Central, Mangrove Cay and South Andros	Leon Edward Lundy	PLP

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34.	North Andros	Leonardo Lightbourne	PLP
35.	Bimini and the Berry Islands	Randy Emmue Rolle	PLP
36.	Cat Island, Rum Cay and San Salvador	Philip Edward Davis	PLP
37.	Central and South Eleuthera	Clay Glennford Sweeting	PLP
38.	North Eleuthera	Sylvanus C. E. Petty	PLP
39.	Exuma & Ragged Island	Isacc Chester Cooper	PLP
40.	Long Island	Sylvester Andre Rollins	FNM
41.	Mayaguana, Inagua, Crooked Island, Acklins and Long Cay	James Ferguson	FNM

APPENDIX IV

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

In response to an invitation from the Most Honourable Dame Cynthia A. Pratt, O.N., GCMG, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) mounted a nine-member CARICOM Election Observation Mission (CEOM) to the General Elections held on 12 May 2026.

Members of the Mission comprised electoral experts from the following nine CARICOM Member States: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Suriname. The CEOM was also accompanied by three members of the CARICOM Secretariat who provided administrative and logistical support. The Mission commenced on 5 May 2026 and will conclude on 15 May 2026.

PRE-ELECTION ACTIVITIES

As part of its pre-election observation methodology, the CARICOM Election Observation Mission consulted with a wide cross-section of the Bahamian society. In this context, the team held engagements with the following stakeholders:

- The Honourable Philip Davis, Prime Minister and Leader of the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP);
- Mr. Michael Pintard, Leader of the Opposition and of the Free National Movement (FNM);
- Mr. Lincoln Bain, Leader of the Coalition of Independents (COI).
- The Most Honourable Dr. Hubert Minnis, Independent Candidate.
- Ms. Shanta Emily Knowles, Commissioner of Police; and
- Mr. Harrison Thompson, Parliamentary Commissioner.

The CEOM also met with representatives of the media fraternity, along with the following organisations:

- Bahamas Youth Ambassador Corps/Bahamas Youth Parliament/National Youth Advisory Council.
- Bahamas Constitution Party (BHP).
- Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers' Confederation.
- United Association of Haitians Living in The Bahamas (UHAB);
- Civil Society Bahamas (CSB);
- Equality Bahamas; and
- Organisation for Responsible Governance (ORG).

During the engagements, stakeholders raised concerns about the following:

- Integrity of the Registration (Voters') List.
- Preparedness of the Parliamentary Registration Department.
- Logistical deficiencies in the conduct of the advanced polling process.
- Independence of the Parliamentary Registration Department and the Boundaries Commission.
- The issuance of fraudulent voter identification cards and passports.
- Inadequate civic and voter education.
- Inadequate communication by the Parliamentary Registration Department.
- Campaign financing; and
- Youth Engagement with the electoral process.

ELECTION DAY OBSERVATIONS

On Election Day, members of the CEOM were deployed to observe the polling process on the islands of New Providence and Grand Bahama, where they observed the opening of the polls, the voting process throughout the day, the closing of polls, and the counting and results tabulation process. Members of the team visited twenty-two (22) constituencies on New Providence and all five (5) constituencies on Grand Bahama, observing the various Election Day procedures at 317 of the 322 polling divisions on both islands. This represents approximately 85 percent of the polling divisions. The team's observations are outlined below.

OPENING OF THE POLLS

The observer teams arrived at the polling divisions prior to the opening of the poll. It was observed that:

- there was adequate police presence at the polling locations.
- polling staff were present and the necessary election supplies were delivered on time to ensure that polls opened promptly at 8:00 a.m., for the most part. A few polling divisions, however, experienced slight delays in opening.
- agents of all political parties were present at polling divisions.
- the polling day staff carried out the opening of the poll procedures as required.

VOTING PROCESS

At most polling locations visited, it was observed that a list of electors was available to facilitate verification by voters. Information clerks were also available to assist voters, including by directing them to the assigned polling divisions. In general, the Election Day workers appeared to be adequately trained, and courteous and aided incapacitated and elderly voters. While there

were some slight inconsistencies in applying voting procedures and guidelines, these were limited in scope and did not cause any disruption to the voting process.

It was noted that the voter turnout in many polling divisions was steady in the morning and towards the close of polling, while voter numbers experienced a significant reduction during midday. Notwithstanding, the polling staff remained focused as they steadily carried out the required procedures, ensuring that eligible voters were able to cast their votes.

Overall, the observers were satisfied that voters were able to cast their votes in a peaceful and orderly manner.

CLOSE OF POLL AND COUNTING OF BALLOTS

The teams observed the closing of the poll at the same polling divisions where they had earlier witnessed the opening of the poll. Teams arrived at these polling divisions in advance of the scheduled close. Notably, at 6:00 p.m., the majority of Presiding Officers declared the polling divisions closed. It was observed, however, that in a few instances, where the polling divisions had experienced delays in opening, additional time was allowed for voting. Incidentally, at the close of the poll, there were no voters in line at most polling divisions, and where there were voters present, they were allowed to exercise their franchise.

The CEOM team also witnessed the additional close of poll procedures, including the counting of the ballots, the sealing of ballot boxes, the securing of ballots and other electoral material, and the submission of electoral material for transfer to Holding Stations. The team was satisfied that the ballot boxes were opened in the presence of the polling agents, election day workers, officers and observers, and that the ballots were counted and voting results provided to party agents and made public, in accordance with the established procedures.

CONCLUSION

The CEOM is of the view that on Election Day, electors were able to exercise their franchise in a peaceful and orderly manner, and without significant incident. The polling day workers performed their duties professionally and must be commended. The police maintained law and order at the polling divisions and were extremely professional in their interaction with electors and the various stakeholders. The CEOM considers the results of the 2026 elections to be in keeping with the will of the people of The Bahamas.

We commend the Parliamentary Registration Department for its administration of the electoral process. We also commend the party agents within polling divisions, as well as the people of The Bahamas, for the peaceful and orderly way in which they conducted themselves on Election Day.

We further extend our appreciation to the Secretary-General of CARICOM for the invitation to participate in this Mission and the opportunity to continue to support CARICOM's role in strengthening democratic traditions across the region.

This interim statement is meant to provide an initial assessment of the CEOM's observations. In the coming weeks, a final report will be submitted to the Secretary-General of CARICOM outlining the team's findings and recommendations.

**HERMAN ST. HELEN
CHIEF OF MISSION
CARICOM ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION (CEOM) TO
THE GENERAL ELECTIONS OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS
13 May 2026**