

**Statement delivered by
The Honourable Michael Pintard
Minister for Agriculture and Marine Resources of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas
on the occasion of the
41st Session of the FAO Conference, Rome, Italy (22-29 June 2019)
25 June 2019**

Thank you very much Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Delegates,

I bring you warm greetings from the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.

On behalf of the Government and people of the Bahamas, I wish to extend thanks to Mr José Graziano da Silva for the tremendous selfless work he has done for a number of years here at FAO. We would also like to congratulate the Director-General elect, Dr Qu Dongyu, on his visionary campaign and successful election. The Bahamas and Caribbean look forward to strengthening our partnership with FAO and Member Countries as we work towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030 under your dynamic leadership.

The theme for this 41st Conference is of particular interest to the Bahamas, an archipelagic nation and a Small Island Developing State, especially since we are under tremendous pressure as a result of migration.

The 2010 census reports that between 2000 and 2010, approximately 27 000 Bahamians migrated throughout the Commonwealth of the Bahamas. 43 percent of them settled in the capital, New Providence. This movement away from the rural communities, the outer islands, left behind a vast amount of arable land and maritime resources. Which in turn, adversely affected the country's food and agricultural systems contributing to an increasing food import bill that now exceeds USD 750 million annually, and has consequently created food and nutrition insecurities within the Bahamas.

During the same period, 2000 - 2010, approximately 65 000 persons migrated to the Bahamas. Illegal immigrants from neighboring Caribbean countries have entered the Bahamas, in part looking for a better livelihood and in other cases, with intentions of moving to the United States of America. Our Government, while sympathetic to their plight, are vigorously pursuing cross-border initiatives and negotiations, both in the region and internationally to see how we might contribute to strengthening regional economies which we believe will have an impact on slowing illegal migration.

Mr. Chairman,

Many of the SDGs crosscut the issue of migration and I am pleased to say that the Government of the Bahamas has recently appointed a unit that is seeking to track and monitor the progress we are making with respect to our SDG targets.

We are resolute that the Bahamas Government will make progress in concert with FAO and others in achieving food security. We are committed to reducing our high food import bill ensuring that safe nutritious food reach our young people and adults. As a part of our fight against non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and obesity, we intend to step up national action. We are similarly committed to non-food agriculture and the range of products that emerge from these efforts. We are resolute in ending poaching in our territorial waters and are daily fighting against illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing.

Toward these objectives we are doing the following:

- Constructing a strategic plan for the entire agriculture and marine resources sector;

- Aggressively engaging our youth and young agribusiness persons to assist them with access to land, facilitating education, training and exploring pathways to funding, and of course exposing them to a range of employment opportunities in this sector. This summer, we are running three summer programmes on three different islands as a part of our newly launched Agriculture Youth Cadet Core Programme.
- We appeal to FAO and Member Countries to work with the Bahamas as we seek to launch and in turn sustain our E-agriculture initiatives. We believe that the use of technology applications are key to the future development of our country's food and agriculture systems. Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) are important and pivotal along all the food and agriculture value chains.

Mr Chairman,

Training is extremely important to the Bahamas Government. Training of good agricultural practices is essential for sustainable food systems. As my Ministry is undergoing a review of the country's agricultural extension services, I am requesting that FAO increase its Farmer Field School programme, which has worked successfully around the world, and congratulations to the team, but we seek increased support, not just for the Bahamas, but for the entire region.

Of course, finally, Mr. Chairman,

I would like to briefly address the issue of climate change. The Bahamas was hit in 2015, 2016 and again in 2017 with Hurricanes Joaquin, Matthew and Irma which impacted the entire archipelago of the Bahamas at differing times.

Mr Chairman,

The damages from these hurricanes amounted to more than USD 700 million. These catastrophic events have continuously demonstrated how vulnerable we are to the impacts of climate change and the jeopardizing of the state of our food and nutrition security.

One of the islands that was devastated, Ragged Island, where my father is from, is an island that the Government intends to use as a model of a Green Island. It is our hope, that FAO and Member Countries that are interested to partner with us as we try and transform this island by using integrated agricultural production systems using an agro ecological model for sustainable development on the island.

Of course, in closing, I wish to thank the technical staff at FAO for their assistance with past and ongoing projects. I also wish to extend thanks to the Italian Government for hosting this wonderful event, you have an absolutely beautiful city in Rome and it is my hope to see a bit more of the country before leaving. Together we firmly believe in the Bahamas that we can create a movement to save lives through food security and empower marginalized persons by ensuring that they have sustainable livelihoods.

It's been my pleasure.

Thank you Mr Chairman.