

For Immediate Release
September 21, 2011

Remarks – Hon Earl D. Deveaux MP
Minister of The Environment

ABACO BUSINESS OUTLOOK 2011
New Vision Ministries, September 21, 2011
Theme: Shaping the Future: Investment, Invention, Integration

Salutations

My Colleague, Minister Grant could not be with you and graciously asked that I apologise to you and to represent him. So therefore on his behalf and mine, It is a pleasure to address this opening session of the Abaco Business Outlook.

This morning I will provide an overview of public infrastructure projects that will facilitate investment opportunities and the further development of the island of Abaco and The Bahamas.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Like other countries, the global economic slowdown has had significant impact on the islands of The Bahamas. The efforts by The Government, some of which I will address today, have been designed to minimise the impact of the recession and to prepare the Country and our people for recovery.

In an effort to counter these effects on the construction industry, and to prepare the country for the gradual economic upturn, the Government of The Bahamas launched an initiative to enhance public infrastructure and create employment. The public infrastructure enhancement initiative has resulted in Docks, Bridges, Road Works and other Capital works being executed on every major island of The Bahamas.

Airports and seaports are vital to promoting the economic welfare of Island nations. They are critical in an archipelago such as The Bahamas.

The Island of Abaco has had significant capital investment. I will highlight them to underscore the vital linkages they create to expand the vision of The Government for The Island and the Country.

Improved infrastructure, state of the art communications and technology and improved services are key components for attracting investment. All these components are either in place or well on the way here in Abaco. Abaco is poised for expanded development, investment and economic growth.

New BEC power plant and what it means for Abaco

You are all familiar with Wilson City Power Plant and the challenges it represented.

The Wilson City plant with 48 MG of installed power and power distribution system is intended to provide power supply to Abaco for the next several decades.

BTC and GSM Upgrade

BTC has carried out upgrades to the GSM network in Abaco and indeed throughout The Bahamas and lowered the rates. They have implemented an aggressive programme to improve telecoms in the Bahamas and are investing some \$43 million in a national 4G network over the next 2 years. By the end of this year it is expected that this network will be deployed in New Providence and Grand Bahama, but soon thereafter throughout the entire Bahamas. With this network The Bahamas will enjoy the most cutting edge and fastest mobile network in the region.

E-Government

The use of technology created by a more robust network will greatly enhance the delivery of services to the Bahamian public. With this in mind the Prime Minister on 28 July 2011 launched the Government E-government Portal

Initially the e-services will include:

- Renewal of Driver's License
- Real Property Tax payments
- Service-wide Customer Service
- Vendor Enquiry
- Application for Business Licence; and
- Payment of Business Licence Taxes

Over the next several years we will continue to offer the public scores of additional new services such as:
application for new work permits as well as renewals;
payment of customs duties;
payment of police character certificates;
payment of passport applications; and
payment of post office box rentals.

We are deepening and broadening the Government's efforts to create more of a service culture aided by cutting-edge technology and best practices in the public service.

And we are improving the means by which services will be delivered to businesses and the general public.

Construction

From a national perspective, construction indicators reflect a decline in construction starts over the past three (3) years.

The Building Control Division of the Ministry of Public Works and Transport recorded a significant decline in the number of construction starts, which is believed to be related to the recent global economic downturn, that has had a negative impact on The Bahamian economy. During the year 2008, these totalled 856 valued at \$418.7M, in 2009 the total was 611 valued at 331.7M and

in 2010 totalled 439 valued at \$127.5M. For the period January through August 2011 the total number of starts is 290 valued at \$85.3M.

On Abaco, construction projects undertaken over the past three (3) years' or currently underway include the paving of North Abaco roads, installation of sidewalks, construction of a technical block and administration building at Abaco Central High School, construction of the Government Administration Complex at Marsh Harbour, repairs to the Hope Town dock, construction of a bypass road from the Government Complex to the Marsh Harbour International Airport, and repaving of the Treasure Cay Airport runway and parking apron.

Earlier this month, a contract was executed for construction of concrete roads in Hope Town as well as for the new Marsh Harbour Airport Terminal, air traffic control tower and fire/crash facility.

This new airport terminal should be completed during the last quarter of 2012.

This airport construction project complements recent upgrades to the airside operations of this airport that were undertaken just over a year ago. These upgrades include construction of a new runway of 6,100 feet; conversion of the original runway into a taxi-way; installation of new signage and lighting; and the development of new flight procedures for the new runway to ensure compliance with ICAO standards.

The proposed China Export Import Bank financed projects at Abaco are also being further advanced. These include proposals for design/build services for the North Abaco Port and By-pass Highway and the Little & Great Abaco Bridge. Both these projects, especially the unique features of the causeway and its ecosystem are part of a comprehensive Environmental Assessment and investigation and mitigation.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Abaco has seventeen (17) registered docks and two (2) international airports. It is the third most populous island in The Bahamas. More than that, given that the Bahamas is an ideal cruising destination, then certainly the Sea Of Abaco, is a boaters paradise!

According to the 2010 Census the population of Abaco stands at 16,692 and reflects an increase by some 21% since the 2000 Census. There is evidence of this growth in population through the increased demand for various public sector services at some of the Government departments; the Marsh Harbour Airport (most acute) and the Docking facility all of which have all outgrown their current accommodations.

These major construction projects will therefore further enhance Marsh Harbour Airport's and the Government's Administration capacity to provide quality service to the growing number of Abaco residents, as well as visitors to this island who will use these facilities.

In addition to improved delivery of Government services, we expect that the residents of Abaco will take full advantage of the opportunities for entrepreneurship as a result of these projects. The construction of a larger airport that offers expanded and additional services is just one example of a project, from which many spin-off business opportunities will emerge on its completion.

I am certain that you will hear more from other presenters on the prospects that lie ahead as employers and employees on Abaco. Let me say however, The Government of The Bahamas has acted, during the worst global recession in living memory, to ration resources to help the needy, create an environment to propel economic growth, by expanding and rehabilitating the Country's infrastructure. We believe The Bahamas is well positioned to take advantage of opportunities that will emerge from entrepreneurs, investors, inventors. We are preparing our country and workforce accordingly.

Ladies and Gentlemen

As we all begin this exciting day, I congratulate the organisers of Abaco Business Outlook. I have noted that an impressive list of speakers has been assembled. I am therefore certain that the time that is spent by the participants and presenters here in Abaco will be very productive.

Please accept my best wishes for the continued success of this forum.

It is now my pleasure to declare the Abaco Business Outlook officially open.

Thank you.