



**The Most Hon. Dr. Hubert Minnis
Prime Minister**

**National Report on Hurricane
Dorian Restoration Effort**

Wednesday, 12 February, 2020

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Good Evening:

Tonight, in my first National Report, I wish to update the country, on the reconstruction program in Abaco and Grand Bahama, a little over five months, since Hurricane Dorian struck our second and third most populated islands and economic centers.

In due course, I will address the nation on the progress the country is

making in a number of other areas, including job-creation, land reform, crime reduction strategies, the revitalization of Downtown Nassau, small business development, Family Island development, and other areas.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Five months ago, Hurricane Dorian hit, causing destruction across Abaco and Grand Bahama.

Homes and businesses were destroyed. Lives were lost.

Our hearts and prayers, still go out to all who lost loved ones.

Dorian, was the strongest hurricane to hit The Bahamas.

Its gusts of 220 miles per hour, and surge of more than 20, feet wiped out generations worth of infrastructure, and

progress, throughout Abaco, the Abaco Cays and Grand Bahama.

It is estimated that Dorian cost The Bahamas \$3.4 billion dollars in losses and damage.

The task of restoration ahead of us, is awesome, and wide scale.

We have never before, suffered this scale of destruction in our history.

However, I have every confidence that the Bahamian people, are up to the challenge.

Bahamian labour and creativity, built this chain of islands, into the most dynamic tourism economy in the region.

What Dorian destroyed, we will build back better and more resilient.

My Government's policies on coming to office, have placed us in a position to be able to assist.

When we assumed office in May 2017, public finances were in a disastrous state.

Our predecessors borrowed money in large amounts.

They also misspent money in large amounts.

We stabilized the country's finances through: honesty, discipline, rational budgeting, and a variety of financial reforms, that have been widely praised by respectable international institutions.

Those decisions now give us the headroom, to borrow, to help with reconstruction and renewal.

As the Minister of Finance told Parliament earlier this month, my

Government will borrow just under \$600 million dollars, to help with the Dorian response and essential capital, and other programs, to help spur economic growth and more jobs, and economic opportunities for the Bahamian people.

In times of crisis, it is the responsibility of Government to act – and we will.

This borrowing is essential and necessary, in ensuring that Bahamians have the help they need, as we emerge from the worst storm in our history.

Those who criticize the borrowing, seek to deny Bahamians in Abaco and Grand Bahama, the help Government should deliver in crises.

My Fellow Bahamians:

The Government and its agencies, have delivered aid and assistance in various forms, during the post-emergency phase of the Dorian response.

The Department of Social Services, continues to provide rental assistance to those displaced by the storm.

It has assisted some 514 families, and paid out, more than \$700,000 to Grand Bahamians.

Also, appliance assistance continues with some 300 applications, processed to the value of \$400,000.

Unemployment assistance, through the National Insurance Board, provided help to those employees, affected by the temporary closure of businesses after the storm.

Over \$1.7 million dollars in these benefits, has been paid to Grand Bahamians.

As the Minister of Social Services has advised, the shelter at the Kendal Isaacs Gymnasium, will be deactivated by the end of this month.

The shelter at the Bahamas Academy on Wulff Road, will also be deactivated as soon as possible.

The Department of Social Services, is working with shelter residents, to help them to move in with family members, to transition to rental units, or to

relocate to the islands from which they were displaced.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

There is widespread damage to homes across the disaster zones.

In an effort to assist Bahamians who need help rebuilding, my Government launched the Small Home Repair Programme this past Monday in Grand Bahama.

The Abaco program, will be launched next week.

There will be four categories for which vouchers will be granted.

Residents whose homes were assessed with minimal damage, will be eligible for \$2,500 in vouchers; those with medium damage, will be eligible for \$5,000 in vouchers; those with major damage will be eligible for \$7,500 in vouchers; and those whose homes

were destroyed. will be eligible for \$10,000 in vouchers.

Voucher recipients, will be able to use them for home improvement material, labor or a combination of both.

There will be online registration for the programme.

There will also be, in-person, sign-up locations in Grand Bahama, and

Abaco, for those unable to register online.

To qualify, an individual needs to be Bahamian, and to own the property in need of repair.

There must be proof of residence, as of August 31, 2019.

The property, must have been uninsured, and the property has to be in Grand Bahama or Abaco.

Under the program, tradesmen used for repairs, will need to be approved.

Materials purchased with vouchers, will have to be from approved vendors in The Bahamas.

We want to keep the money spent on this programme, in the country.

This will help Bahamian businesses.

Additionally, to assist those whose homes were totally destroyed, 22 domes are being erected in Spring City, Abaco.

More domes are being brought in for individuals, who would like one on their property, while they rebuild, or make major repairs.

Quite a number of people have already called to request domes.

The Disaster Reconstruction Authority, is accepting names for those who would like a dome on their property.

Those who qualify, and are in need of a dome, should contact the Reconstruction Authority.

Due to the extensive damage caused by Dorian, significant debris cleanup is ongoing.

In the few days, the storm hovered over Grand Bahama and Abaco, it caused decades' worth of debris, including of older structures.

To further expedite the debris removal process, the Disaster Reconstruction Authority, will issue new debris removal contracts, with new terms of reference, effective February 17th.

To enhance the efficiency of operations, the Authority, will also add resources to the debris management sites, at Spring City, Treasure Cay, Pelican Point, McLean's Town and High Rock.

There has been significant clean up, in all settlements in East End and Freeport, Grand Bahama.

Removal of debris and road repair efforts are ongoing.

The Fishing Hole Road Bridge, which remains structurally strong, received significant damage to the approach roads.

The Ministry of Works, has received approval to proceed with the repair of this thoroughfare.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Dorian's ferocity, caused extensive damage to the electricity networks in the disaster zones.

In Grand Bahama, all customers whose premises are ready for power, now have power.

Commercial and residential customers, that are not ready for power, suffered serious building damage, primarily due to flooding.

Their premises, require extensive renovations, in order to be ready to safely receive power.

Dorian destroyed major parts of the Bahamas Power and Light infrastructure, in central Abaco and the Abaco Cays.

As previously reported, BPL, is powered up in South Abaco to Wilson City.

Spring City is also powered up.

Green Turtle Cay was powered up before Christmas.

On Elbow Cay, a restoration team has been assigned, and work is ongoing.

Sixty percent of high voltage overhead work, has been completed.

Seventy percent of the low voltage systems, have been replaced.

The high voltage cable from the mainland, is being tested and repaired.

On Man-O-War Cay, a restoration team, has been assigned, and work is also in process.

High voltage overhead lines, are 95 percent completed.

Low voltage systems are 60 percent completed.

Poles are being delivered to Guana Cay.

In Marsh Harbour, extensive work is needed, and is underway.

Essential services, are powered up. Work in the downtown area, is taking place.

Portions of Central Pines, are powered up, and 75 percent of poles are planted in Murphy Town.

Considerably more work is needed in Dundas Town, with only five percent of poles planted.

BPL, continues to work along the airport road.

Poles are set and dressed.

Teams are running wires.

From Marsh Harbour heading north, a section of 500 poles remains down.

A Request for Proposals is out for this work.

Treasure Cay, is still not powered up.

BPL, has to run power from the Green Turtle Cay Ferry Dock, to the entrance of Treasure Cay, in preparation to bring power to the settlement, once work has been completed there.

An additional 150 solar lights, are expected to arrive shortly.

They are to be placed in Murphy Town, around Marsh Harbour, out to THEairport, and elsewhere in Abaco.

To date approximately 50 solar streetlights, are installed in central Abaco.

Despite the progress that is being made, there is still much work to be done, to restore electricity.

Due to the extensive damage caused by Dorian, areas remain without service, and we are working toward full restoration of electricity to Central Abaco.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Getting schools in the disaster zones fully operational, is essential. Many schools were damaged, some severely.

Families who have left the areas, need schools open, and fully operational in order to return.

We are working to reopen schools that closed, and to fix those, that are open with damage.

Fox Town Primary School in Abaco, has undergone a significant electrical upgrade.

Further work is scheduled to be completed, by the end of February.

Repairs on the Cooper's Town Primary School, are expected to be completed at the end of the month.

The S.C. Bootle High School in Cooper's Town, is expected to be completed before the end of the school year.

The Disaster Reconstruction Authority, has received drawings for proposed upgrades, to the Amy Roberts Primary School on Green

Turtle Cay. These plans are under review.

Work has commenced, on the Central Abaco Primary School.

It is anticipated, that it will be completed by the end of April.

Patrick J. Bethel High School in Central Abaco, was significantly damaged.

The Ministry of Education, Ministry of Works, the Disaster Reconstruction

Authority, and NGO partners, are reviewing a program, to have the school ready for the upcoming school year.

In Grand Bahama, the plan is to construct one school campus, to serve East Grand Bahama.

All other public schools on Grand Bahama, are expected to have upgrades during the summer.

The Disaster Reconstruction Authority, continues to evaluate the needs of other schools, throughout the disaster zones.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

The international community, has been kind and generous to The Bahamas since Dorian.

Assistance from the United States, the United Kingdom, CARICOM, the Netherlands, Canada and other countries and international partners,

saved lives, and helped to relieve suffering, in the worst days following the storm.

On January 13, governments, NGOs, multilateral institutions, companies, and individuals, came together at a private sector pledging conference at Baha Mar.

This was the first, such high-level private sector pledging conference after a disaster, in The Bahamas.

Due to this being new to our country, there was, and still remains some confusion about the event.

Firstly, it was open to the media, and hundreds of people attended.

Pledges were made in the open, in front of attendees and the media.

By the end of the event approximately \$1.5 billion in recovery financing, in-kind services, and some donations were pledged.

I must emphasize, that this was not all cash, and that these were offers, each of which, we will carefully examine.

Political mischief-makers, are deliberately trying to confuse Bahamians about the event.

The pledges, included initiatives in: homebuilding and repair; educational assistance; renewable energy partnerships; relief aid; grants; direct

assistance to storm victims; parks restoration; loans and financing.

It was a mix of many types of possible assistance.

The Government, is examining what may be most beneficial to The Bahamas.

We will only pursue offers, that are in the best interests of the residents of the areas affected by the storm, and in the best interest of The Bahamas.

The offers we accept, will be laid out for the Bahamian people to see.

It is essential, that we promote a culture of transparency with disaster relief assistance, especially, because of questionable, and corrupt practices with hurricane funds, as we have seen in the past.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

In order to restore the lives of the people of Abaco and Grand Bahama, we must boost economic activity and development, on both islands.

On March the 2nd we will sign a heads of agreement for the sale of the Grand Lucayan Resort and Casino.

This will help with the long-term recovery and renewal of Grand Bahama.

It will result in scores of jobs during reconstruction and development, and long-term employment, business and entrepreneurial opportunities for the residents of Grand Bahama.

This project, could mean approximately two to three thousand jobs for Grand Bahama.

Further, I am pleased to announce tonight, that the National Economic Council, has approved the project for the construction of a five-star residential, resort and marina development in South Abaco.

The capital investment, is approximately \$300 million dollars, and

will help in the reconstruction and revival of Abaco.

This development, will include branded hotels, and a full-size golf course.

The heads of agreement for this development, is scheduled to be signed tomorrow in Abaco.

The project, is expected to employ approximately 600 people during the construction phase, and thereafter.

The project, will provide a variety of entrepreneurial opportunities for Abaconians, and Bahamians in a number of areas, including: agriculture, fisheries, heritage tourism and many other areas.

We will also expand and enhance the Sandy Point Airport.

Fellow-Bahamians and Residents:

As a part of recovery efforts, as of February 5th, the Small Business

Development Centre, has approved a total of 74 applications for funding: 31 in Abaco, and 43 in Grand Bahama.

Approximately 600 applications have been received and are being processed.

Total funding, of \$2.2 million dollars has been approved for both Abaco and Grand Bahama businesses, out of a total allocated of \$10 million dollars.

I encourage small business people in Abaco and Grand Bahama, to visit the Small Business Development Centre, and to take advantage of this program.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

The work of rebuilding and restoration will take years.

There is no quick fix. Dorian was a historic storm.

By wind speed, it was the second strongest storm ever recorded in the Atlantic.

Anyone who professes quick-fix solutions to the catastrophic damage caused, is not credible.

After Dorian struck, my Government knew, that no small island developing state could respond on its own.

We welcomed in help from foreign governments, NGOs, charities,

multilateral agencies, churches and individuals.

Our response, is still in unison with these partners.

As your Prime Minister, I pledge, that we will be there with you, at every stage of this massive rebuilding and reconstruction effort.

We will help Bahamians in need, in Abaco, the Abaco Cays and Grand Bahama.

The Disaster Reconstruction Authority, has held a series of town hall meetings on both islands.

We want to keep you updated on the work we are doing.

We want to hear your questions. We want to hear your concerns.

We are not afraid of criticism.

If there are aspects of this reconstruction, and rebuilding that we need to improve on, we will take your suggestions.

Where we have failed to properly, or regularly communicate with you on ongoing work, we pledge to improve our outreach.

I understand the frustrations, and I assure you, that we are working very hard, to reconstruct public infrastructure, and to aid in the reconstruction of businesses and homes.

We remain, the People's Government.

We are servants of the People, who elected us to serve.

As Prime Minister, I pledge to you the full effort of the Government, to restore Abaco, the Abaco Cays, and Grand Bahama.

We are One Bahamas, one people, one nation!

When any part of our Commonwealth is affected, we are all affected.

To make our country whole again, we must continue the long, and hard work, to restore, to renew, and to

reconstruct the second, and third most vital economic centers of our Bahamas.

Let us be united, and of one accord, with resilience, in the work of renewal and reconstruction.

May God continue to bless the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

Thank you and good night.