

Remarks by the Hon. Glenys Hanna-Martin, Minister of Transport and Aviation
At a Reception on the Occasion of the 40th Anniversary of Independence in London
On Wednesday 17 July, 2013

Good evening,

I am truly honoured to be here tonight to join in celebration with you on our fortieth anniversary as a sovereign state.

Just a few days ago, throughout The Bahamas, thousands of Bahamians of all races and political persuasions came together in a stunning display of unity and love as we celebrated the anniversary of our nationhood.

I am grateful that we as a tradition celebrate these important historical benchmarks because it helps to reinstate a proper perspective of who we are. The commemoration of our national independence is one of the most important benchmarks in our history as a people.

Necessary things such as general Elections oftentimes are preceded by and subsequently followed by a bitter divide which seems to have an internal propulsion, infiltrating all things and frequently prejudicing sound reason and normal relationships.

This is not only the case in The Bahamas; you see it in countries all over the world, including the United States and in this country as well.

It is important, however, for leadership in all of these countries but in particular our own, to be mindful of the critical need to build a strong foundation for a united people.

For, how else can we as a new nation with tremendous challenges and limited resources overcome our challenges and take our people forward progressively? We cannot afford to be bogged down in insubstantial matters when we are charged in this generation with the important mandates that must be fulfilled.

The mandate of ensuring our children have access to an educational experience which allows them to develop and flourish socially, spiritually and intellectually. The mandate to advance the cause of excellent health care and a good standard of public health so as to have a healthy population both mentally and physically.

The mandate to create a fair, just and equitable society for all of our people and to eradicate poverty, suffering and disease.

We are mandated to reduce the vulnerabilities in our economic model and to expand the base of our economy to encompass new paradigms that provide new opportunities that are empowering to our people and which fill important global economic niches.

And in fulfilling these important mandates we must always be cognizant that we are a small nation comprising a series of islands scattered across the seas in a big world and we therefore have to equip ourselves with a bodacious attitude that ensures that we are not counted out.

As we say in The Bahamas – “We small in size but big in surprise”.

So that when we sit at the table of the international discourse we are able to present reasoned and principled positions which advance not only our own national interests but that of our planet.

And our compelling voice will be heard.

Every day we are reminded that there is no time for distractions and detours and silly rendezvous.

This 40th anniversary comes at a time when we have seen how our country’s economic wellbeing has been severely impacted by circumstances beyond our control, largely the result of domestic policy in big countries, policies which in hindsight were highly questionable.

This connectivity to disaster must give us pause for sober reflection.

But one thing this economic meltdown does make clear is that any mind-set that concedes or any assumption made that someone somewhere else whether it be the British parliament or the United States Senate or the National People Congress of China or wherever has a greater grasp on the complexities of the human condition and that we should therefore stay out of big people’s business is sadly misguided, to put it mildly.

We are called upon as a unique sovereign people to step up, exhale and flex our intellectual and creative muscles for the positive growth and advancement of our country and its people.

And if possible, and no I am not joking, influence the future path of our global fate.

In fact there is already in our history at least one spectacular example of this influence when The Bahamas hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Nassau in 1985.

Under the Chairmanship of our late Prime Minister Sir Lynden Pindling, a difficult and contentious conference was calmed and a consensus reached on the imposition of sanctions by the Commonwealth against Apartheid South Africa. This singular act, known as the “Nassau Accord” is credited as a significant contributing factor to the release of the great

Nelson Mandela who had been unjustly imprisoned for decades. In the vanguard of this intervention was a Bahamian man and one whose origins were on East Street. And his leadership at this Conference impacted world events in a most dramatic way.

And did you know that The Bahamas has produced three Rhodes Scholars?

I am told this is the highest per capita than any other country in the world.

The first recipient, who was also the first woman in the Commonwealth Caribbean to receive a Rhodes scholarship, is in the audience with us tonight.

Desiree's story is an inspiring one as she speaks of the clapboard house she grew up in off Wulff Road in Nassau and today we learn of her ground breaking research in creativity and health care in the United Kingdom.

The achievements of Bahamians are a strong signal of the incredible talent and possibility that is imbedded in the Bahamian people. And there are many other such strong signals in almost every area of endeavour.

There is no fluke going on here.

For those of you, our Bahamian brothers and sisters, who live here or elsewhere we claim you and know that you claim us.

Despite the thousands of miles which separate you from our beautiful country, there can be no distance between us and no distance between you and your country.

You must continue to be an influence and an asset to the positive growth and development of our country.

You are a natural resource which is positioned outside of our country. No doubt you are making outstanding contributions.

In our efforts to properly position our country, then, the national dialogue must therefore, move from the small to the large, the boundless.

We must enlarge our vision and be purposeful in our involvement whether it be at home in The Bahamas or wherever we may be.

In this our fortieth year we are called upon to look at ourselves as a people and a nation with fresh eyes.

To make the appropriate assessment of where we are, where we have come from and where we would wish to go into the future.

To make the appropriate policy formations that best positions our country in this complex global reality.

To look at our most important natural resource, our people and in particular our children and young people and through real investment in training and education enhance and develop the spectrum of gifts God has given our people and to use those gifts to take our country forward.

To look at our physical gifts such as the exquisite beauty of our country and the water and sunshine that exists in abundance and to look beyond their primary purpose and see great opportunity and potential.

To this end The Bahamas, as a maritime nation, has determined to create a maritime policy. This policy will cause for a full understanding of the multi-dimensional potential of this resource which occurs in abundance in our country. A policy which will provide guidelines and benchmarks for its sustainable exploitation in energy, science and technology, fisheries, industry, shipping and yes even oil exploration.

That work is well underway and we are being assisted with the Consultancy of the Commonwealth Secretariat. We believe we will have a framework over the next several months.

A significant factor in our maritime profile is our ship registry. We are seeking to enhance our registry which is managed by the Bahamas Maritime Authority headquartered here in London with offices in Nassau and New York.

We have achieved a sustained strength in this market place by upholding the highest standards and by providing efficient customer service and offering first class technical expertise.

Because of this The Bahamas has sat on the Council of the International Maritime Organization for many years and (where it is said by very reputable sources) that we make a significant contribution to the international dialogue and the development of sound policy for the maritime sector.

I believe we are uniquely suited to serve in this capacity. We have a major international fleet so we understand the responsibilities of maritime regulator. We are a big port state so we understand port state issues. We are a natural archipelago, so we have long experience with issues of domestic shipping. And we are a small country so we understand the issues faced by countries with limited resources.

We shall again be offering our country for membership to the Council in the upcoming elections in November.

I see here tonight many friends that supported our candidacy in the past. We thank you for that support and ask that you again support our candidacy. In return we pledge to you our close collaboration going forward at the IMO.

We are currently developing a new component of our ship registry namely the registration of luxury and mega yachts which we believe will bring a new and important dimension to our flag registry.

If you are keeping current with our national affairs you will know that there are new thrusts being made in the cultural and agricultural sectors which will further diversify our economic base and secure our national identity and move us closer to food security for our people.

And so, ladies and gentlemen I thank you for the opportunity to provide you with what is intended to be a reiteration as to the strengths of our commonality as a free and sovereign people:

The power of our shared history,

the wealth in our shared culture,

the beauty of our shared values,

and the indestructible force of our shared national identity as a rich and diverse people.

This commonality persists not only in our country at home throughout the islands of our precious archipelago but also when we are separated by different geographical boundaries.

Because despite this, as we say both literally and figuratively “ya navel string bury there” which denotes the connection buried deep in the rich earth of our beloved country.

I wanted to enlist from you on this the 40th anniversary of our nation’s sovereign status the commitment to always have a keen and insightful understanding of from whence we have come and where it is we are destined to go.

But we cannot just want it...to make it happen requires absolute resolve and a high degree of discipline and focused effort.

This commitment takes us from the narrow confines of the party politics which saturates much of our national dialogue to the high place which speaks to the advancement of a former colony largely made up of the descendants of former slaves. This high place brings an understanding that the interrupted development that comes from these terribly destructive economic and political systems of slavery and colonialism must mandate an accelerated recovery and a deliberate assumed path.

We have been for too long distracted from this course.

Now is the time.

Happy Independence my beloved brothers and sisters.