

MESSAGE FROM THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

Dear Friends, the year 2009 has drawn to a close, and as usual I would like to take a few moments to review the achievements of the past year and reflect on the challenges that would greet us in the New Year. The High Commission has been working extremely hard to advance the interests of The Bahamas and the Bahamian people over the past year and I would wish to share with you a few highlights of some of our most notable achievements.



High Commissioner and Mrs. Farquharson greet guests at the 2009 Independence celebrations held at Bahamas House.
Photo by Roland Kemp

On 28 May 2009 the Government of The Bahamas signed the "Short Stay Visa Waiver Agreement" with the European Community. The signing of this agreement permits visa-free travel for Bahamians to twenty-five of the twenty-seven countries that are currently members of the European Union, and vice versa. Negotiations for this waiver agreement had been in progress for a number of years, and the Government of The Bahamas was pleased to see this matter through to its successful conclusion in May of this year.

Late last year the Government of The Bahamas presented the candidature of Dr. Davidson L. Hepburn, OBE, to the Post of President of the 35th General Conference of UNESCO at elections which were held in September 2009. Dr. Hepburn is a seasoned Bahamian Diplomat having previously been posted to The Bahamas Permanent Mission to the United Nations for fifteen years, ten of those as Permanent Representative. Dr. Hepburn was successfully elected to the Post against the very distinguished candidate from Argentina. I was personally honoured to witness the confirmation of Dr. Hepburn as President of the General Conference on 6 October, signalling the first instance that a Caribbean country has held this very prestigious Post. The High Commission looks forward to assisting the efforts of Dr. Hepburn in his capacity as President of the General Conference during his two year term in Office.

In November The Bahamas sought re-election to the Council of the International Maritime Organization under Category "C" during the 26th Regular Session of the IMO Assembly in London. I am pleased to report that in conjunction with The Bahamas Maritime Authority and Bahamas Tourist Office, The Bahamas was successful in its election bid to the Council after receiving a record number of votes. The Bahamas will



Photo by Mr. Peter Ramsay

sit on the Council for a two year term advancing the work of the Organization and the interests of the country. It was also during this Regular Session of the IMO Assembly that I was elected as First Vice-President of the Session aiding the President in his functions in the running of the Session. I am also pleased to announce that Ms. Judith Francis, Maritime Attaché, was re-elected to sit on the Staff Pensions Committee of the IMO.

CHOGM 2009 was also convened in November, in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and the High Commission was called upon to provide substantive and administrative support during this very important conference. The High Commission will play an active role in the follow-up to the



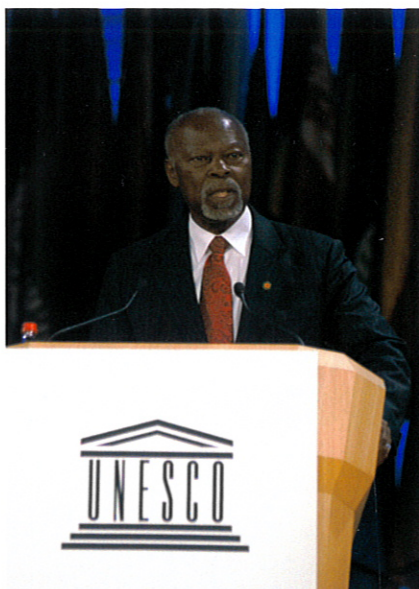
mandates set by Heads of Government in 2010 and beyond.

Following CHOGM Prime Minister the Rt Hon Hubert Ingraham left The Bahamas again on Monday, December 14, to present The Bahamas' position on climate change and related matters at the United Nations' 15th Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark. He joined fellow leaders of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Commonwealth to forge a consensus on one of the more "complex and pressing issues" he has dealt with during his three non-consecutive terms in office.

We were very pleased to welcome to London the Right Honourable Hubert A. Ingraham, M.P., Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, on two occasions: the first in October, at which time he was accompanied by his wife Mrs. Delores Ingraham, and the second time in December 2009. The High Commission also received a number of other high profile visitors from The Bahamas in 2009, including the Honourable T Brent Symonette, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs; the Honourable Earl Deveaux, Minister of the Environment; and Sir Michael Barnett, Chief Justice of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

From an economic point of view the past twelve months have been extremely challenging for The Bahamas but we continue forward, advancing the work of the Government of The Bahamas.

While The Bahamas has not feared as badly as some of our Caribbean neighbours during this economic downturn, the effect has been felt in the country. It is hoped that the New Year will bring renewed opportunity and prosperity to all Bahamians.



Dr. Davidson Hepburn delivers his acceptance speech.
Photo by Cyril Bailleul



Bahamian delegation to the International Maritime Organisation 26th Session of the General Assembly in London 24 November, 2009.

(L to R) Peter Goulandris, Vice-Chairman, Bahamas Maritime Authority (BMA); Ian Fair, Chairman, BMA; Earl Deveaux, Minister for the Environment; High Commissioner, Ms. Judith Francis, Maritime Attaché
Photo by Roy Fisher



The 58th Annual Miss Universe Pageant was held at the Atlantis, Paradise Island resort in Nassau on 23rd August 2009. The Governor General poses with Ministry of Tourism officials, contestants, and members of the Royal Bahamas Police Force.
Photo by Bahamas Information Services

The Royal Caribbean "Oasis of the Seas" arrived into Nassau Harbour on morning of Friday 11 December 2009 on its maiden voyage. The arrival of the new mega-cruise ship not only signalled the solidification of The Bahamas as the premier cruise destination in the Caribbean, but with the "Oasis of the Seas" also registering with The Bahamas' international ship registry it further solidifies The Bahamas' place as the world's third largest ship register.

Early in 2010 the High Commission will begin the process of updating the infrastructure in the Mission to start the enrolment and issuance of Biometric (e-passports.) E-passports are now being issued in the Passport Offices in Nassau, Freeport and Abaco and are being offered through the Consulates in Miami, Atlanta, Washington and New York. It is hoped that the Mission will be able to offer these passports to all Bahamians in the United Kingdom and Europe by the end of the first half of 2010.

I am also pleased to announce the creation of the Mission's first website: www.bahamashclondon.net. The website will not only serve British and European communities, but will also assist Bahamian nationals through the dissemination of information and will act as a central portal for all matters relating to the Bahamas High Commission and Europe.

Finally, I am delighted to have been able to complete the remainder of my non-resident accreditations in 2009. I presented my Letters of Credence to the King of Belgium on 29 April; to the President of France on 2 July; and to the President of Germany on 29 October 2009.

The High Commission has big plans for the New Year, but like all



Bahamian Missions abroad, is suffering from economic and human resource constraints. In 2009 we said goodbye to two diplomatic officers, Counsellor Julie Campbell and First Secretary Nicole Archer, and warmly welcomed back Second Secretary Michael Guy, who previously served in the High Commission in a different capacity.



The Prime Minister hosted a reception for Bahamian students on 9 October 2009 at Bahamas House. Gerald and Lesley Alticosalian and the Rt. Hon. Hubert A. Ingraham

The High Commission is determined to continue to provide the same level of service as in previous years, despite our being fewer in numbers.

The Mission is committed to assisting the Diaspora and facilitating the work of the Government but will only be able to achieve its goals for 2010 with the assistance of all its friends and constituents. I encourage you to engage actively with us in the New Year and wish you all the best during this holiday season. May God richly bless each and every one of you.

Paul H. Farquharson, QPM
High Commissioner
Permanent Representative,
International Maritime Organization



The Rt. Hon. Hubert Ingraham and Prime Minister Gordon Brown at the CHOGM 2009 hosted by Trinidad and Tobago. Photo by Commonwealth Secretariat

TRAVEL NEWS



A number of nationals have enquired as to whether there is a deadline for converting passports to the new biometric passport. According to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) which sets the standards and recommended practises for travel documents, countries are required to begin issuing machine readable passports (MRPs) by 1 April 2010. As nationals would be aware, The Bahamas has begun this process

and is in compliance with ICAO requirements. The High Commission will announce at a future date when it will begin accepting applications for new biometric passports. Until such time the High Commission will continue to issue manual passports. Persons wishing to obtain biometric passports must apply for them in Nassau, however nationals should be aware that processing will take at least six weeks.

The High Commission wishes to advise that this will be the final edition of The Bahamas High Commission newsletter. For updates and news from the High Commission and from The Bahamas please visit our website www.bahamashclondon.net



Earthquake in Haiti

On behalf of the people and Government of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, the Bahamas High Commission would wish to extend its deepest condolences to the bereaved people and Government of Haiti for the loss of life and property in the wake of the earthquake which struck on 12 January 2010.

The Government of The Bahamas is actively monitoring developments in Haiti, and any member of the Bahamian public who is aware of relatives travelling in Haiti should contact the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at 242 502 9530 or 242 322 7624 ext. 268 and provide the information to Undersecretary Carlton Wright.

Bahamian citizens visiting Haiti should be aware of the address of the Embassy of The Bahamas:

12 Rue Goulard
Place Boyer, Petionville
Port-au-Prince
Telephone No. (509) 256-4407/257-8782
Fax No. (509) 256-5729
Mobile No. (509) 372-2982

As communications to and within Haiti are difficult, persons in Haiti are asked to call the mobile number in the first instance. Persons in The Bahamas and abroad should channel enquiries via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nassau so that the Embassy numbers are kept free for persons in Haiti trying to communicate with The Bahamas.

The Bahamas Government has established a Special Haiti Emergency Assistance Fund with a view to providing an organized and safe way for members of the Bahamian community to contribute towards emergency assistance and restoration efforts in Haiti.

The Government will undertake to ensure that donations received are directed to the Government of Haiti for use in its recovery efforts or to identified international charities and first response organizations rendering assistance on the ground in Haiti.

The Government advises that assistance to Haiti is being coordinated with the member states of Caricom and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA). Caricom efforts are likely to be coordinated from The Bahamas Embassy in Port-au-Prince which fortunately did not sustain damage during the earthquake.

Prime Minister Ingraham has urged Bahamians to be "generous" in their donations. "Natural disasters impact all of us at one time or the other and it is important that we give when we are able." Funds received will be made available to the Haitian government or other international relief agencies in Haiti," he said. "We will seek to ensure that donated funds reach the agency best able to assist the largest number of Haitian victims of the earthquake."

To assist in this effort the High Commission launched a fundraising appeal on Friday, 22 January 2010, at Bahamas House. For more information, please contact the High Commission.

Bahamians in the United Kingdom who were not able to attend the event can still donate by either sending a cheque made payable to the "Bahamas High Commission" (please indicate on the cheque that it is for the "Haiti Relief Effort"), or by making a deposit to the following bank account:

Barclays Commercial Bank
BHC Government Ministries Account
Account Number: 30444979
Sort Code: 20 65 82

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Bahamians, who encounter difficulties in any country where there is no Bahamian Embassy or Consulate present, should contact the nearest British Embassy or High Commission for assistance.

