



*The
Bahamas*

**60th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

THIRD COMMITTEE

**AGENDA ITEM 67 – PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE
RIGHTS OF CHILDREN**

STATEMENT BY

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THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

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Please check against delivery

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to intervene on agenda item 67 on the 'Promotion and Protection of the rights of children', which remains one of the most important items considered by this Committee.

My delegation fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the distinguished representative of Barbados, speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community; however, I wish to highlight a few issues of critical national importance.

My delegation thanks the Secretary General for the comprehensive reports we have before us. My delegation is encouraged by the conclusion in the report on follow-up to the special session of the General Assembly on Children that there are greater signs of progress in implementing the outcome of the special session, and trusts that our consideration of this item at this session will contribute to the momentum of the critical follow-up process, and the full implementation of the obligations contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Mr. Chairman,

The reports before us offer a timely reminder that all of the actions undertaken by the international community ultimately have an impact on the world's children. Accordingly, the commitments we have undertaken at the major conferences and summits of the 1990s, and in more recent times, are about children. Most recently at the 2005 World Summit we have once reaffirmed our commitment to a series of actions that will truly test our commitment to facilitating social and economic development, to eradicating poverty, preventing environmental degradation and ultimately preserving our world for future generations. The Millennium Development Goals remain our critical point of departure in this collective exercise, and we call on all States to remain steadfast in their commitment to implementing these goals.

Mr. Chairman,

The Bahamas is a young nation, both in terms of its political independence, and in terms of its population. According to the most recent national census, 35% of the population is under the age of 18. Thus it is an imperative that actions be undertaken to safeguard the well being of this segment of our population. We recognise that our future development and prosperity depend on our children, and it is with this reality in mind that The Bahamas Government has sought to translate its commitment to children into a series of significant national actions. As an archipelagic state, The Bahamas faces peculiar difficulties in the delivery of social and other services to the populations of each of its twenty-two inhabited islands. Notwithstanding these difficulties, however, the Government of The Bahamas has committed itself to providing social and other services to the entire population of the country, a commitment that has necessitated duplication of infrastructure in each of the islands, and the allocation of scarce resources in this regard. This investment in our children emanates from the firm conviction that no child should go hungry, be without a home, remain illiterate, abused or abandoned, and that every child has the right to be respected and protected by the family, the community and the State.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child remains the overarching framework and benchmark for The Bahamas as it seeks to safeguard the well being of the nation's children, and meet its obligations in the areas of healthcare, education, and protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence.

The Bahamas recognises that without a healthy population, no real development and progress can be achieved. Accordingly, the Government of The Bahamas has devoted considerable resources to providing universal access to healthcare, in each of our islands. We are pleased that we have been able to secure a dramatic reduction in infant mortality rates over the last decade, and the Ministry of Health, along with its partners, is working to continue to reduce these rates. Considerable focus has also been placed on the importance of immunisation in halting the spread of preventable childhood diseases. Accordingly, immunisation rates stand at 90% for children under the age of five, and efforts are continuing to increase this figure.

Mr. Chairman,

Equal emphasis is placed on the importance of educating our children, to enable them to take their places as productive members of society and to contribute to the development of the nation. Accordingly, the Government of The Bahamas devotes the single largest share of the national budget to providing universal access to education for all up to the age of 16. Free primary and secondary education is available to all children in The Bahamas, on a non-discriminatory basis. The Government has also provided free pre-school education at many of its public schools. The Bahamas seeks to provide a well-rounded quality education, including technical and vocational training and access to information technology, to its children, to provide the best possible start for our young people, and provide them with the tools they need to make their way into the world.

The sad reality of abuse, violence and exploitation of children is one that none of us in the international community has been able to fully prevent. The Bahamas is, however, fully committed to eradicating the practices that would harm our children, and prevent them from enjoying their full human rights. The Bahamas has a legislative framework in place that seeks to protect children, and the Government is now working towards the strengthening of this framework through the preparation of a new comprehensive Act for the well-being and protection of children, which would cover the areas of children in need of care and protection, children in care, and children detained or brought before a Court. I look forward to sharing the results of this process with the Committee at future sessions.

Mr. Chairman,

As is well known, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has ravaged the world, and continues to threaten the development prospects of many nations. The Caribbean region is the second worst affected region in the world, and The Bahamas has not been exempted from this. The Bahamas Government has waged an intensive campaign against the pandemic, through the provision of care, treatment and prevention programmes, coupled with awareness-raising and education activities. Children are

perhaps the most innocent victims of this disease, and The Bahamas has sought to limit its impact on our children. Accordingly, The Bahamas continues to work actively towards the goal of providing universal access to anti-retroviral drugs, particularly for HIV-positive pregnant women, and has recorded a reduction in mother-to-child transmission rates to less than 2%. The Bahamas has also taken action with respect to the increasing numbers of HIV-orphans. While we cherish the extended family that continues to characterise our nation, the Government has also taken steps to intervene where that extended family cannot, to provide care and support for these children. Our commitment to combating HIV/AIDS, and particularly its impact on children, will not wane.

Mr. Chairman,

The promotion and protection of the rights of the child is an area where we cannot afford to fail. The world's future depends on the actions we take today to safeguard the welfare and well being of our children. Let us not fail them, and ourselves, and reaffirm our commitment to building a world that is truly fit for children.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.