



*The*  
***Bahamas***

**United Nations Open-Ended Informal  
Consultative Process on Oceans  
and Law of the Sea**

**2 – 6 June, 2003**

**Statement by Cdr. Godfrey Rolle  
Head  
Drugs, Crime and Maritime Affairs Unit  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
The Bahamas**

**6 June, 2003**

Please check against delivery

Mr. Co-Chairman,

At the outset, my delegation wishes to express its gratitude to you and your co-chair for the astute and professional manner in which you have directed these proceedings. We are confident that under your able guidance, the recommendations coming out of this session, to be presented to the General Assembly, will be the consensus of this entire body.

In keeping with the theme of ways and means of enhancing cooperation and coordination on oceans issues, I wish to offer a few comments from the perspective of The Bahamas, as a State operating a major ships register, to whom cooperation and coordination are critical to the aims of safe maritime transport and the protection of our fragile maritime environment.

As an archipelago of some 700 islands, about 30 of which are inhabited, maritime transport of goods and people has always been an essential part of Bahamian life. At the same time its geological structure as one of the world's largest areas of coral reef has ensured that the protection of the marine environment has been given a high priority. Given The Bahamas' commitment to safe, economical sea transport and the need for environmental protection the Government of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas became a member of the International Maritime Organisation in 1976, soon after gaining its independence in 1973. Since that time, The Bahamas has pursued these themes at the IMO as well as other international and regional bodies.

The Bahamas has operated its ships registry since 1976, and there are now over 1400 ships worldwide registered under the Bahamian flag, totaling approximately 35 million gross tonnes. Accordingly, The Bahamas has the third largest ship register in the world, and is still growing, with a decreasing age profile of her ships. In fact, in the second half of 2002, more than 3 million gross tones were added to the register, while 1.3 million gross tones, representing old ships, were deleted. The Bahamas is also proud to state that her Registry's port state control detention record remains well below industry average and improves consistently each year. As the size of The Bahamas' fleet has grown so also has her contribution to the IMO's budget, with the result that The Bahamas is currently the third largest contributor to the IMO.

As a reflection of my Government's commitment to the safety of maritime transport and the security of the marine environment, The Bahamas has acceded to the major international Conventions administered by the IMO, the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS), the MARPOL Convention and the International Labour Organisation [ILO] Convention 147 (Minimum Standards in Merchant Ships). Equally, The Bahamas has steadily maintained active representation in all the Committees and Sub-Committees of the IMO.

Mr. Co-Chairman

At the national level, The Bahamas has taken several significant steps to implement its international obligations as a party to these Conventions and as a major ships register. In July 1995, the management of Bahamian maritime affairs was re-organised. A government-controlled body, The Bahamas Maritime Authority (BMA), was established to supervise and control safety and environmental protection on Bahamian ships. Many statutory surveys are delegated to eight of the leading Classification Societies but, in addition, a worldwide network of inspectors carries out inspections of all Bahamian ships every year. One of the functions of these inspections is to monitor the quality of work carried out by the Classification Societies as well as providing the BMA with an up-to-date picture of the quality of the fleet. The Bahamas exercises due diligence in this regard, and the BMA has clear, well-defined policies regarding

the de-listing of ships from The Bahamas register that do not meet national and international standards.

Indeed, quality is the underlying theme behind all of the Bahamian government's policies connected with the country's industries, whether it be tourism, finance or the maritime sector. This commitment to quality extends from the regulatory frameworks employed within the context of the ships' register to the facilities provided in The Bahamas for the maintenance of ships. Our two major ports, Nassau and Freeport, have undergone important developments in the past few years. Nassau has greatly increased and improved its facilities for cruise ships, thereby making it one of the favorite ports of call in the Caribbean region, and this is inclusive of the latest generation of cruise liners. Freeport has also improved its cruise ship facilities and, in addition, has expanded its range of maritime activities. The Freeport facility for example, currently operates two dry docks one of which is among the largest in the world and a wet berth ship repair facility. It was named "Yard of the Year" for 2002 and, can justifiably claim to be the world's premier cruise ship repair yard having completed fourteen (14) refits last year.

Mr. Co-Chairman,

As a responsible member of the shipping community, with a commitment to maritime safety and the protection of the marine environment, The Bahamas has served on the Council of the IMO from 1991 – 1995 and again from 1999 – 2003. The Bahamas has also recently announced its attention to seek re-election to the Council under Category 'C' at the upcoming IMO Assembly later this year. The Bahamas is presently the sole Caribbean State represented on the Council, and, as in previous years our candidature has been endorsed by the Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) at the meeting of the CARICOM Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR), held in May of this year.

While on the Council, The Bahamas has engaged in constructive cooperation with fellow members towards the implementation of IMO resolutions and decisions and by submission of constructive forward- looking proposals to foster the Organisation's goal of maintaining the highest standards of maritime safety efficiency of navigation and protection of the marine environment.

Examples of this cooperation and constructive engagement include The Bahamas' proposal that new large tankers and bulk carriers be made 'Survey friendly', by ensuring proper access arrangements to all parts of the ship. This proposal was overwhelmingly supported with subsequent amendments to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), and mandatory technical provisions have now been adopted and will enter into force in July 2004. There have also been recent papers, including one submitting proposals regarding Places of Refuge, an issue of critical importance to enhancing maritime cooperation between states engaged in maritime activity. Another proposal has been submitted in conjunction with Greece, on giving the IMO a greater involvement in the setting of basic standards for the building and equipping of new ships. The Bahamas' submission to the Council to involve all members of the IMO, not only Council members, in the strategic policy-making of the Organisation, culminated in Assembly Resolution A909 (22). The fruits of this Resolution are now being seen in the work of the Council's Strategic Policy Working Group and elsewhere in the Organisation.

Mr. Co-Chairman,

With regard to the protection of vulnerable marine Eco-systems, The Bahamas' exclusive fisheries zone covers some 260,000 square miles of islands, banks, reefs, shipping lanes and pelagic fisheries. Notably on the windward side of our islands are extensive fringing coral reefs. There are also considerable areas of patch reefs and sea grass beds to be found on the banks.

Collectively, the shallow seas of The Bahamas provide the largest body of coral reef and other marine organisms in the Atlantic/Caribbean region. The Government of The Bahamas, having realized from early on, the importance of maintaining a healthy and vibrant marine ecosystem, has established five (5) marine protected areas (MPAS) throughout The Bahamas, and has identified an additional eight (8) potential sites. In fact, Mr. Co-chairman, the largest of the established MPAS, the Exuma land and sea park, was established as early as 1959, some 44 years ago.

The constraints faced by The Bahamas in its efforts to protect and maintain these vulnerable marine ecosystems, are the same as those faced by every other developing country, but in particular, by small island developing states (SIDS). These are, inadequate human, financial and technical resources. In this regard we, and other island states of the Caribbean, would welcome any assistance in the area of capacity building, be it in relations to safety of navigation or protection of our fragile marine ecosystems.

Mr. Co-Chairman,

The Government of The Bahamas is strongly committed to cooperation and coordination with other States in the implementation of international regulations designed to ensure the safety of maritime activity and to protect the marine environment. In this context, The Bahamas welcomes processes such as UNICPOLOS, where all States may engage in constructive dialogue and make concrete recommendations to achieve these ends.

Thank you Mr. Co-Chairman.