



## **BAHAMAS**

### **His Excellency Alfred Gray, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Local Government of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas**

Mr Chairman, I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election as Chairman of this distinguished Summit, and to assure you of the cooperation and full support of the Government of The Bahamas in the deliberations of this meeting. I also wish to express my appreciation to the Director-General of FAO for organizing this Summit, which seeks to strengthen the resolve of both developing and developed countries to continue the war against poverty. This is the first opportunity for me to represent The Bahamas in the international fora, as my Government has been in office for less than a month. It is my sincere wish and hope that at the end of these proceedings, we would have found a way to combine financial and technical resources to fight poverty and the attendant evils of hunger and malnutrition.

The concerns, which I have heard in the sessions I attended yesterday, mirror the concerns expressed in The Bahamas. The Bahamas is an island nation comprising seven hundred islands and cays, scattered across 100 000 square miles of the southwest Atlantic Ocean. Despite the reported levels of per capita income in The Bahamas, we face similar challenges in combating poverty as those expressed by many of the nations represented here, that is to say, inequitable income distribution, overdependence on one or more sectors of the economy and migration.

Since the last World Food Summit, my country has been hit by three major hurricanes: Hurricane Lilli in 1996, Floyd in 1999 and Michelle in 2001. The Bahamas is not a primary agricultural producer, and imports much of its food. Consequently, during and after each of these hurricanes, The Bahamas experienced problems with food security, particularly in urban households and at the rural community levels.

Damages to boats, bridges, docks, seawalls, warehouses and electrical supplies limited our ability to import, store and transport food effectively. Moreover, funds which were earmarked for national development in other areas had to be diverted to rebuilding, repairing and reconditioning infrastructure, including seawalls, roads, storage buildings, and restoring electricity and other communication systems.

Hurricanes are naturally-occurring phenomena, and we recognize the limitations of predicting the full extent of their impact. However, the effect of global warming may increase their frequency. My Government would, therefore, support increased resource allocations for the purpose of studying the implications of global warming on Small Island Developing States.

Our geographical position makes us equally vulnerable to poaching in our southern fishing reserves, and to encroachment by sports fishermen in the northern Bahamas. Both activities occur with no regard to fishing seasons and both threaten the sustainability of our marine resources.

The Bahamas has an open economy, which makes it vulnerable to the inadvertent introduction of pests and diseases that pose a threat to the agricultural sector. In the short-term, additional investment and training will be needed in pest and disease control and in surveillance and containment for plants and livestock. The prospects of increased globalization will also require increased investment and training to ensure that locally-produced, as well as imported foods, meet minimum international safety standards.

Our fight against poverty is made more complex by the rural-urban migration within the archipelagic Bahamas. Migration from the southeastern islands, particularly by the young people to the urban centres of Nassau on the island of New Providence and Freeport on the island of Grand Bahama, stretches the resources in the capital and leaves the rural communities devoid of the people energy needed for development. Fully 60 percent of the population of The Bahamas now reside on the island of New Providence.

In addition, political and economic instability in neighbouring countries has resulted in large numbers of desperate and hungry people making perilous journeys in unseaworthy craft to our shores. Many never make it to their intended destinations, and so remain in The Bahamas. The presence of a significant number of these illegal immigrants places an undue strain on our already-limited resources.

Despite these challenges, The Bahamas has achieved some success in increasing the agricultural output of targeted crops, expanding assistance programmes to school children and pensioners and improving the national health infrastructure. Further, in an effort to understand more clearly the

dynamics of poverty, a national poverty survey was recently undertaken, and the results are being compiled in order to direct the Government's focus toward the needy and indigent. In this vein, my Government supports the Regional Programme for Food Security, as this Programme can significantly contribute to the reduction of hunger and poverty.

Finally, The Government of The Bahamas acknowledges that the issue of poverty is complex. However, through land tenure reform, appropriate technology transfers, improvement in labour productivity and increased investment in primary and secondary industries, we believe that there can be "Food for All" in The Bahamas.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank you and the people of Italy for your kind hospitality. Please allow me to invite each of you to come to The Bahamas where you are bound to find rest and rejuvenation in our sun, sand and sea. For, as we say in The Bahamas «it just keeps getting better».

