

## **Eldred Bethel, Bahamas**

### **VII Italy-Latin America Conference Speech**

Mr. Chairman,

I wish to thank you. It is a great honour for me to be here and to participate in this VII Italy – Latin American and the Caribbean Conference. I bring you greetings from the Government and the people of The Bahamas. I wish to thank the organizers of this Conference and for the kind hospitality to us all. This is a wonderful opportunity for us in Latin America and the Caribbean to strengthen our relationship with Italy.

There are no higher priorities for The Bahamas: the environment, fighting crime and containing illegal immigration. These matters for The Bahamas go to the very root of our existence.

Tourism is by far the number one economic activity for The Bahamas. The environment is central to that business.

For The Bahamas climate change is a serious business. This threatens our very existence. Here is what the scientists say:

Eighty (80) percent of my nation's land mass will be lost if the sea level rises 1.5 meters. They also say that a warming of 3.7-4.8 degrees C by 2100, as currently predicted, The Bahamas as we know would be no more.

The Bahamas accepts the science on this issue. We have signed on to all agreements, yet emissions into the atmosphere continue to grow.

Notwithstanding our negligible contribution to the issue, we are taking concrete steps to reduce our carbon footprint. We adopted a National Energy Policy, which includes the introduction of renewable energy goals of at least 30% of energy generation by way of renewable technologies by 2030.

We also continue to focus on adaptation to climate change, despite our limited access to grant and concessional funding. We have identified the National Policy for Adaptation to Climate Change and work steadily toward implementation with civil society and other key partners.

As we seek to expand our marine protected area, we have established The Bahamas Protected Area Fund (BPAF); and cognizant of the possible impact of climate change on our food security we have established The Bahamas Agriculture and Marine Science Institute (BAMSI) to operate a state-of-the-art comprehensive commercial teaching farm.

We have done this and more to enhance our resilience to the adverse impacts of climate change. We are a low lying archipelagic chain of islands and are painfully aware of the impact of sea level rise in our country. Every day the sea is rising, the coral reefs are dying; yet so far all that the world has done is talk. The fact is that nothing the world has done so far has stopped this upward trend in global emissions.

The Bahamas calls therefore for a sufficiently ambitious, comprehensive and inclusive, legally binding framework, with commitments strong enough to reverse present upward emission trends.

The survival of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) must be the benchmark for the 2015 Agreement.

If we do not resolve the climate change issues, there will be no Bahamas.

Secondly, I wish to stress the issue of citizen security and the adjunct to that public policy issue: the education and training of our young. There is a sense of hopelessness; there is a problem with joblessness among the young in our Region, which we must address. If we ignore it, we do so at our peril.

We, in the Region and in my country, are focused on what we can do to reverse the trend of citizen security. We sit astride some of the great international air and sea lanes for commerce. That accident of geography is both a blessing and a curse. We sit between drug producers on one side and the drug consumers on the other side. In between we bear the brunt of this problem. Our children are threatened by this nefarious trade, now extended to include human smuggling, human trafficking, and the illegal trade in small arms. We are pressed on every side.

Our budgets have to be increasingly dedicated to these security concerns. It is a real guns or butter decision. We know that if we do not address it, there will be no economy. This Meeting provides yet another opportunity to make this known.

I turn now to the issue of migration. I know Mr. Chairman that the migrant crisis here in Italy has become one of the top priorities for the Italian Government and an important issue for many of the States here today.

We face a flood of illegal migrants from the south of us. The evidence is that this is a carefully orchestrated criminal enterprise to export people and the price is not cheap. The result is that our country has to spend scarce resources trying to beat back an ever tide of illegal migrants. We have toughened the laws. We have spent monies increasing the size of our maritime forces.

We have appealed to border-states to stop the incursions. Yet the illegal migration continues.

All of the efforts around these themes are buttressed by our work to ensure that we have a robust, strong and sustainable economy. The truth is we must continue to work together. The call to do so and the need to do so are more urgent than ever.

Mr. Chairman,

I thank you.