

STATEMENT BY H.E. JOSHUA SEARS
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COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL, TENTH SESSION
18 – 20 MARCH 2009

Mr. President, Your Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Members of the Troika, Members of the Human Rights Council, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Secretary to the Council, and representatives of stakeholder organizations,

Allow me at the outset to extend the apologies of the Hon. Michael Barnett, Attorney General of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, who is unable to be here today due to pressing matters of state.

Mr. President,

My delegation wishes to extend congratulations to you on your election as President of this tenth session. I wish to assure you of my delegation's cooperation in the discharge of your duties.

Mr. President,

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas joined the international community some thirty-five years ago, and in doing so we gave our solemn undertaking to respect sovereignty and territorial integrity, human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. Indeed, we have at every important moment of international significance reaffirmed our commitment to these principles; principles and values which have played an indispensable role in the institutionalization and consolidation of democracy, political stability and economic and social progress and development of The Bahamas.

The Bahamas, the second oldest parliamentary democracy in the western hemisphere has a well-established record of democracy, the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. The Government of The Bahamas also fully understands and appreciates that respect for and the promotion and protection of human rights requires eternal vigilance and actions to ensure that these rights are effectively enjoyed by all members of our society. The Bahamas also acknowledges the vital role civil society must play in this whole process.

Mr. President,

The Human Rights Council, which has been mandated to ensure that all UN Member States comply with their obligations under international human rights instruments, has since its establishment laid a firm foundation for the implementation of this mandate and we commend the Council for its continuing work.

During the review of The Bahamas which took place at the third working session of the Working Group, held from 1 – 15 December 2008, my delegation committed to further review the recommendations contained in the report of the Working Group, in document

A/HRC/10/70, and to report on the status of the recommendations at this plenary session. I therefore wish to draw the Council's attention to the document which has been submitted by The Bahamas as a formal follow-up report.

I however, wish to highlight several points:

1. Firstly, the signature and ratification by The Bahamas of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [ICESCR] and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights [ICCPR] on 4 December 2008 and 23 December 2008. Both Covenants will enter into force for The Bahamas on 23 March 2009.
2. In addition, on 16 December 2008 The Bahamas signed the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment and Punishment.
3. I also wish to highlight the Police Amendment Act 2009 which permits civilian oversight, as indicated at page 4 of the follow-up report.
4. With respect to the Carmichael Road Detention Centre, the Government of The Bahamas continues to implement recommendations designed to enhance the environment and management of the facility and continues to maintain close collaboration and cooperation with UNHCR in this regard. The number of persons detained at the Centre is now 75.

Mr. President,

During the review of The Bahamas, my delegation indicated that we expected to submit outstanding reports due under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women by 31 December 2008. Unfortunately we have been unable to meet this self-imposed deadline, but I am pleased to inform the Council that the Consultative Process is almost complete, paving the way for the submission of these reports in due course. The preparatory process is also underway for the report due under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Mr. President,

I wish to reaffirm the commitment of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas to continue to work with the human rights treaty bodies and this Council to ensure that there is constructive dialogue and to enhance our capacity. I also wish to emphasise our recognition that the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms requires constant action on the part of Government and civil society. We fully commit ourselves to this task.

Thank you.