



PRESS REMARKS BY

**THE HONOURABLE TOMMY TURNQUEST
THE MINISTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY**

ON

LAUNCH OF

NATIONAL ANTI-DRUG STRATEGY 2012 - 2016

AT

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POLICE HEADQUARTERS
EAST STREET
NASSAU, THE BAHAMAS
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Please check against delivery

This morning I am pleased to launch our National Anti-Drug Strategy for 2012-2016. This is the framework in which action will be taken over the next five years to counter the illicit production, trafficking and abuse of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Its principal focus is on “***Building collaborative partnerships to curb demand, reduce supply, disrupt trafficking networks, and promote healthy drug-free lifestyles, especially among youth***”.

The Strategy is comprehensive and coherent; it is balanced; it is realistic; and it is implementable. It has been systematically formulated to translate the courses of action it sets out into substantial results. It gives priority to building the strong partnerships and structures essential for these purposes.

In developing the Strategy, we took as our starting point the fact that the serious drug problem with which The Bahamas has wrestled since the 1970s still looms large. Drug traffickers continue to use our territory for the transit of their destructive cargoes from source and supply centres in Central and South America and the Caribbean to lucrative markets in North America. Our archipelagic configuration and strategic location off the southern coast of the United States and on air routes to Europe makes us a particular target for this illicit transit trafficking.

We know, however, that today we fight drug abuse and illicit trafficking in a markedly different and more dangerous environment. We understood how important a new and critical appraisal of the drug problem was to the Strategy exercise, so as to come to terms with the new manifestations of the drug problem that would be incorporated into the Strategy. Consequently, we turned to those having direct responsibilities and interest in the area of drug abuse and illicit trafficking.

This Strategy is, therefore, the product of an extensive series of consultations with professionals in relevant Ministries/Agencies of

Government and Non-Government Organizations in areas including law enforcement, criminal justice, education, social development and treatment and rehabilitation. Their critical insights assisted in defining and analyzing the country's drug problem and in thoroughly evaluating key issues in this area. The outcomes of those consultations are encapsulated in the Strategy's courses of action.

The analysis of the drug problem indicates that while drug seizures, particularly of cocaine, have plummeted since the 1970s and 1980s, we should not misread these developments. The Bahamas still has a very serious drug problem, manifested in the abuse of marijuana, especially among young people, the trafficking in marijuana as well as cocaine, and experimentation with the domestic production of marijuana. Attitudes are also driving the drug problem, particularly the thinking that marijuana is not a dangerous drug, but a recreational one. The abuse of prescription drugs is also a matter for concern.

With changes in the drug problem has come a host of new challenges for The Bahamas. Crimes associated with drug abuse and illicit traffic committed by perpetrators engaged in the illegal trade, and by persons that commit crime to support their drug use and addiction, are a challenge to the criminal justice system. A significant number of persons currently in Her Majesty's Prison have been sentenced or remanded on drug charges.

The numbers of illegal activities increasingly being associated with the drug problem are well known. They include illegal immigration, migrant smuggling and the trafficking in illegal firearms. The trafficking of illegal guns is particularly egregious, because of the crime and violence they engender in the country.

I want to emphasise here that countering drug trafficking and drug abuse is an integral part of the Government's stepped up wider crime strategies. The objectives of our crime strategies are to stop violence

crime, especially murder, that a small group of wrongdoers are inflicting on our country, and bring them to justice.

Let me turn now to some of the specific courses of action in the Strategy and premises on which it is built.

The first of these is Government leadership at the highest political level, in an area in that demands political consensus. A Ministerial Committee comprising Ministers with responsibilities in core areas of drug control will have oversight of the Strategy.

The Ministry of National Security's National Anti-Drug Secretariat (NADS) has been given an important role to play in the implementation of the Strategy. NADS will be allocated the resources required to ensure that it can effectively carry out its responsibilities.

The Government intends to invest significantly in the success of this Strategy, and to do so in a balanced way. As the Strategy indicates, law enforcement agencies will continue to be given the equipment, assets and personnel needed to vigorously counter drug and related crime. Appropriate resources will also be provided to the judiciary. Laws will be constantly reviewed, updated and will be strictly enforced.

This Strategy is focused on the broader picture, and investments will be made taking into account the multifaceted nature of the drug problem and the need to take a balance approach in this area. Particular focus is given to the need to protect our young people from the vagaries of drug abuse and illicit trafficking. Targeted investments will support youth in areas including education, youth development, youth employment, health and social services.

Under the Strategy, the Government will also fund academic and specialist training for professionals in various areas of drug control, including treatment and rehabilitation; research, in which we expect institutions such as the College of The Bahamas to become actively

involved; capacity building; and the upgrading of treatment and rehabilitation facilities. Also, as a matter of policy, grants will be awarded to NGOs for the implementation of agreed, targeted, results-oriented projects and work in drug control, and other support will be provided to them.

A practical institutional framework has been developed that ensures that all partners play their necessary part in ensuring the success of the Strategy. New institutional arrangements have been put in place, and include an Inter-Ministry Group on Drug Control, and a Drug Policy Advisory Committee and a Heads of National Security Agencies which will advise the Ministerial Committee.

Drug abuse and illicit trafficking is a global, transnational problem, and progress in countering this problem requires international cooperation. The Strategy commits The Bahamas to bilateral, regional and international cooperation in drug control, and in particular, the implementation of international treaties and agreements on drug control.

The United States is a long-standing partner in our efforts to counter drug abuse and illicit trafficking. We have committed in the Strategy to continuing to work closely with the United States, particularly in OPBAT and the Joint Task Force, as well as in the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) and other regional initiatives.

We intend to closely monitor the Strategy, so that it may be evaluated and adjusted as necessary over the five years. A programme of work will be developed for each year of the Strategy. All partners would assume responsibility for scrutinizing their own operations in the framework of this Programme. The various reports will be used to accurately assessing and report on progress made in implementing the Strategy.

We have referred to this Strategy as a “Results-based” one. It foresees a role for a wide range of partners, including Government

Ministries/Agencies, civil society including NGOs and faith-based organizations, and the private sector. A special role is also foreseen for the media. Above all, however, the Strategy requires strong public support.

This Strategy is a blueprint for a national consensus that sends a strong message that we will not permit drug abuse and illicit trafficking to endanger the present, nor jeopardize the future, of our country.