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marketplace  
January 20-26, 2007



My Bahamas Marketplace  
Fuelled by Education, Propelled by Collaboration

Notes for a keynote address

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National Tourism Conference Opening Ceremony  
Wednesday, January 24, 2007  
Wyndham Nassau Resort Ballroom I & II  
Cable Beach  
Nassau, The Bahamas

Good morning.

I am happy to be here this morning and I thank The Ministry for inviting me.

I want to share some thoughts about the importance of the tourism sector and about how the College – soon to be the University of The Bahamas – can and should contribute to this key sector of our economy.

In preparing for this conference, I was reminded that tourism provides 63% of all jobs in The Bahamas and that it generates 50% of the Gross Domestic Product. These are really extraordinary figures.... Let us think through this again - half of the money generated in this economy comes from tourism and more than six out of every ten people work in this industry.

And it works. I checked out our economy in comparison with that of others in the region. The GDP in the region is \$7,400 and that of The Bahamas is \$16,851. It is clear that tourism makes a huge difference to our collective wealth and well-being.

When tourism does well, the country does well and its citizens prosper. Should tourism falter, the nation would stumble.

How then do we make sure that tourism does not falter and how then do we also make sure that the citizens of The Bahamas are reaping the greatest benefits from this industry?

Tourism is all about people - people choosing where to go, what to do and how much to spend doing it. More and more countries are seeking to attract the very same people – those with the interest and the means to travel. More and more people might be traveling but as they do, they are also more and more discerning about what they expect.

What do we offer in The Bahamas offer that no one else does? What is Better in the Bahamas than anywhere else?

There probably is a wide consensus that we have two precious assets: the beauty of these islands and the warmth and generosity of the people who live here.

Both of these assets are precious. They are also fragile.

Clean waters can become dirty. Marine life can be destroyed. Beaches can be eroded. People who are generous and warm can become intolerant and angry - especially they feel that what is theirs is being mismanaged or damaged.

When that happens, people can flock elsewhere to somewhere cleaner, prettier, healthier and where the people are happier to have them.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.uis.unesco.org/profiles/EN/GEN/countryProfile\\_en.aspx?code=440](http://www.uis.unesco.org/profiles/EN/GEN/countryProfile_en.aspx?code=440)

Such an alarmist scenario is not unheard of. There are countries that once were beautiful and are less so. There are countries where people who were once open to tourism and generous to visitors have become resentful and where tourists no longer go.

We are, I believe, at a critical point in our history as we seek to propel our single strongest industry forward through a number of major developments or anchor projects in New Providence and also in the family islands. This calls for care, creativity and innovation.

Throughout this day and indeed throughout this week, I hope there will many fruitful conversations about how we steward our resources, how we showcase them and how we ensure their sustainability.

As you have these conversations, I invite you to consider how The College/University of The Bahamas can be a partner in the sustainable development of this most crucial sector of our economy.

I offer you my views on this in the hope that it will stimulate your discussions.

A national university is a key partner in national development. We are not simply in the business of building an institution at The College, we are contributing to building a nation and that is how we hope you will experience our contribution.

Universities contribute to nation-building in three ways.

**First, we transmit knowledge through high quality academic programmes.**

For the last 30 years, The College of The Bahamas has been building high quality programmes, first at the Associate degree level and increasingly now at the baccalaureate level. Many in the tourism industry are our graduates – including, of course, our Hall of Famer Vernice Walkine who will be speaking to you later this morning.

The University of The Bahamas will continue to offer undergraduate programmes and we intend to make the undergraduate experience of our students better and better. That is why we have been seeking to find international partners who will with us create international student and faculty exchange programmes that will enrich the academic experience of both universities. Indeed, we recently signed an agreement with The University of Johannesburg to create such exchanges and we expect our first field of collaboration will be tourism and hospitality, given the high level of activity in this sector in both our countries.

Our presence has meant and will continue to mean that more and more Bahamians have access to a high quality university education without leaving home. This is a precious contribution since having a university education is the road to occupying higher and higher level jobs in all industries, including tourism.

Moreover, we want to work very closely with the country's main industries to make sure that the education we provide helps to shape the kind of people that can lead, create, innovate and drive success in their chosen fields. For example, we have a close partnership with the

Bahamas Hotel Association and I take this opportunity to thank the association for its financial support and its on-going commitment to us.

We also want to see an increase in the % of young people who actually attend a higher education institution. Currently, 14% of Bahamians between the ages of 18 and 24 participate in some form of higher education. If Bahamians are to benefit from the opportunities of our economy, then this rate must be much higher. The tourism industry – like so many others- can create high value jobs, but to fill these positions, you need well-educated candidates and you need them in greater numbers than we are currently providing.

I am encouraged to hear of so many employers who support the lifelong education of their staff. As a country, we also need to find ways to support more young people staying in school and understanding that good jobs require a good education. That is an area where we are prepared to our part and hope to find good partners.

We also believe that all our undergraduate programmes are important to the nation's development. We need more nurses, more teachers, more special education experts, marine lawyers, planners, accountants, historians, musicians, artists, archaeologists, public servants, – and we are committed to providing high quality programmes so that we continue the work of our predecessors who knew that the best way to increase the presence of Bahamians in these fields was to provide the education and training locally.

As we pursue our journey, we are seeking to add a select number of graduate programmes in fields where we can expect to achieve and deliver excellence. At the moment, for example, we are exploring the creation of our own MBA programme. The University of The Bahamas would then expand its role in the development of highly-skilled workforce and Bahamians would have greater local access to graduate education.

**Our second contribution is research.** For 30 years now, we have been mostly transmitting knowledge created elsewhere. There have been some very interesting research projects over this time – in history, music, culture to name only a few, but research was not part of our core purpose in a systematic way. It is now.

Our journey now leads us to aspire to creating new knowledge through research.

We want to build a strong marine and environmental sciences programme to produce the kind of scientists and the kind of scientific research which should drive decision-making with respect to the sustainability of our marine and environmental resources. The Bahamas is particularly well-placed to do this and this kind of research is critical to making well-informed choices about tourism development.

For example, The Gerace Research Centre in San Salvador has been successful for over thirty in attracting American and Canadian university students and researchers to study one of the country's richest research sites in marine biology, in history, in archaeology. On an annual basis, there are up to 15,000 student night stays at Centre and research carried out there is published in some of the most prominent research journals.

Andros is another place where we can attract students and faculty alike to carry out field studies and to do research and we hope to support the wishes of Androsians to see growth in the eco-tourism sector.

We are focusing our efforts around defining a limited number of inter-disciplinary research themes that would allow us to build new knowledge for the good of the country and also for the world. We see these themes as very closely linked to national development issues.

Marine and environmental sciences, maritime law, tourism and culture, development and quality of life, financial services, challenges of small island developing states – all of these must be integrated into the broad research themes we will encourage our colleagues to pursue.

Already, we have launched a National Policy Research fellowship programme to help increase the level and quality of public policy research being carried out in The Bahamas. We also believe that too many consultancy fees leave the country – we want our faculty and our university to be contributing to good decision-making and good policy-making and we want to build the expertise here,

**Our third contribution is through service to our community.** We have done this through our Continuing Education department for years now, encouraging Bahamians who might have missed out on the chance to pursue higher education to come back.

As we move to University status, we see an increase in the service component. We have created a new portfolio which we call Outreach and our major goal in this portfolio is to increase our presence in the nation.

We want no family in the Bahamas to be left untouched by our work. We currently have two campuses – one in Oakes and one on Grand Bahama and new construction is underway on both. We also have a learning Centre on Exuma where we want to grow and I have already mentioned our two research and field study stations. We want to increase available distance education across the archipelago. We will need partners to do this but we think this is a propitious moment given the level of planned activity across the country. We want to ensure that Bahamians can aspire to all the jobs, from those requiring the least education to those requiring the most.

We also are working to design and deliver some signature training programmes where we are working closely with an employer to design a programme that meets employee and employer needs. Our first partner in this respect is the Public Service Commission, but I hope we will be able to be of service to others. We are willing to work with partners on the development of such made to measure programmes on the understanding, of course, that we need to have the resources to do so.

We also provide service by building a vibrant academic community.

Last fall, we launched an International Languages and Culture Institute, one that offers instruction in a number of foreign language and also hosts cultural and public interest events. Last fall also, we launched the new Anatol Rodger Lecture series. We operate a

great bookstore, we hosted Jazz Night, a Band Festival and we are about to open a new Performing Arts Centre.

These activities contribute to the quality of life of Bahamians but we also want to reach out to the visitor market.

We are exploring how we might do this. Part of the attraction of coming to The Bahamas might then include academic programming for visitors who would enjoy getting to know this country, its history, its heritage, its people – through the lens of a short course or brief seminar in history, music or cooking.

Our service contribution might also include partnering with others to showcase artifacts of history, culture and the arts in a way that represents what we most value about country and culture. The creation of the sacred space at Clifton, for example, might benefit from development which includes historical information panels and a guided tour. We can work with others to offer guests in this country an opportunity to get to know the people as well as the beaches.

Our service contribution exists also by virtue of the jobs we create, the economic activity we generate and the extent to which we keep Bahamian dollars at home.

Because there is a symbiotic relationship between tourism development, education, prosperity and national development, we also look for support from the tourism sector as we carry forth our nation-building purpose.

In support of our mission and goals, we have asked the government to create a National Endowment for The University of The Bahamas which would be funded from contributions from major projects. This endowment would be managed by its own independent board of trustees and provide income on an annual basis for The University of The Bahamas.

As you continue throughout this day to reflect on the growth and development of our core industry, I invite you to see the The College/University of The Bahamas as a key partner in this industry's success and in this nation's future prosperity and well-being.

Thank you.