



*The
Bahamas*

**STATEMENT
BY**

**THE HONOURABLE D SHANE GIBSON, MP
MINISTER OF IMMIGRATION,
LABOUR AND TRAINING
OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS**

**AT THE
HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT
OF
THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**UNITED NATIONS
NEW YORK**

14-15 SEPTEMBER 2006

Please check against delivery

Madame President:

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas welcomes the holding of this High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, which brings international migration, with all its many facets to the table for discussion and dialogue between Member States. The Bahamas would also like to align itself with statement made by the Honourable Minister of South Africa on behalf of the G77 and China.

The Bahamas fully supports the establishment of a better way to match the supply with the demand for migration in a safe, legal, humane and orderly way to maximize the societal and human development potential of global labour mobility, with the involvement of public and private stakeholders. The Commonwealth of The Bahamas is an archipelagic nation with seven hundred (700) islands and more than two thousand limestone formed islets and cays. Our southernmost island, Inagua, is sixty (60) miles northeast of Cuba, while Bimini is only fifty (50) miles southeast of Florida. The territorial waters of The Bahamas are some 100,000 square miles with land mass of 5,400 square miles. Thirty (30) of our islands are inhabited and we have a total population of approximately 308,000 -- almost two thirds of which reside in our capital, New Providence.

Madame President:

The preceding remarks were designed not only to sensitize member states as to how small we are in size and population, but to also make you aware of how vulnerable we are in terms of policing our vast borders.

The Bahamas, has an economy which is based principally on tourism and financial services, with very small inputs from the agricultural and industrial sectors. We welcome more than five million visitors annually and the financial sector is mainly comprised of foreign banks. It is evident therefore, that migration has positively impacted The Bahamas in many respects. However, Madame President, as noted in the Report of the Secretary-General, there are many challenges in managing migration, including the prevention of irregular or unauthorized migration. In this connection, the negative side of migration for The Bahamas is that for the past sixty (60) years we have been plagued with illegal migration. In addition to the normal regularization of non-citizens either for visits, business, employment, family, education, training, asylum, etc., a large amount enter by simply running their vessels aground in shallow waters and taking up residence with the assistance of non-citizens, with or without status, already in the country. The illegal immigrants then become a serious burden on the social and educational services of the country because their numbers are not taken into account when we are planning for new schools and health services. The end result is that the institutions are not able to adequately accommodate citizens and legal residents for whom they were built. The illegal immigrants also become a serious national security issue, because some of those who enter our country are either convicted criminals or fugitives from justice.

For these and many other reasons, it is necessary for states to implement comprehensive migration policies and have constant dialogue with neighbouring states in order to establish workable solutions when matters of mutual concern affect them.

Opportunities in our country have provided a comfortable standard of living for citizens and legal migrants; however, no country can feel totally safe when there are significant numbers of strangers within its borders who are also reaping benefits designed only for its taxpaying public. In this respect, irregular migration has for many years negatively impacted The Bahamas.

During our brief stay in New York, we will begin dialogue with relevant states with a view to coming up with workable solutions to these most vexing problems. We would like to again welcome this forum to allow member states to discuss matters that concern us all.

Madame President, fellow delegates, I thank you for your attention and it is my sincere hope that we can all work together to come up with workable solutions to ease the burden of illegal migration on receiving States.

Thank you.