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CONTROL COMMISSION**

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**Statement by Honourable Perry Christie, MP, Prime Minister of
The Commonwealth of The Bahamas at the CICAD 60th Regular
Session Inauguration Ceremony**

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Mr. Luis Almagro, Secretary General, Organization of American States; Dr. Bernard Nottage, Minister of National Security, Ms. Angela Crowdy, Assistant Executive Secretary CICAD, Senior Government Officials, CICAD Secretariat Staff, Member States, visiting delegates, meeting observers and local stakeholders, Good Morning.

I want to begin by honoring the wonderful acts of kindness and sentiments expressed by Member States to The Bahamas as a result of the recent passage of hurricane Matthew which has had a profound impact on the infrastructure of our country but not the resilience of our people. We are indeed grateful for your support and say thank you.

I also want congratulate the Organization of American States and more specifically it's Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), for the decision to spend your thirtieth birthday in the most beautiful place in the world. Over the last 3 decades, your hemispheric objective for the goal of a drug free world and your endeavours to assist member states in addressing drug use and abuse in the hemisphere has been meaningful, full and impactful.

Since the inception of CICAD, my country has partnered with the Commission and has aligned its National Anti-Drug Strategies and other initiatives in drug control with our national efforts. This affiliation improves each year and demonstrates cooperative action and shared responsibility at the highest level. Our new National Anti-drug Strategy 2017-2022 will be strategically aligned with the new hemispheric plan of action.

Today, it takes the form of this historic occasion, the hosting of the 60th Regular Session and, hopefully for The Bahamas, to serve as the Chair of CICAD for the ensuing year.

This is indeed another example of the level of leadership and serious commitment put forth by the Government of The Bahamas to improve collaborative efforts at the regional and hemispheric level. It is clear that effectively combating the world drug problem with its myriad challenges requires multilateral approaches and the pooling of resources. Due to the geographical location and the archipelagic make up of our islands and cays coupled with the vast expanse of our territorial waters, our country is used as a major transshipment point. As a result, for us in The Bahamas, interdiction efforts continue to be a critical aspect of our strategy to ensure that our nation remains safe and tranquil.

I want to expand a bit more on the efficacy of Operation Bahamas Turks and Caicos (OPBAT) mentioned by my Minister of National Security. Within in the last five years, OPBAT operations seized nearly 4,000lbs of cocaine and 5,000lbs of marijuana that were moving through our borders destined for North America.

In November of 2014, the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator (USIC) and The Interdiction Committee (TIC) traveled to New Providence to present the 2013 USIC Award in the Joint Operations category to Operation Bahamas, Turks and Caicos. OPBAT is the first-ever recipient of the prestigious award in this category. The annual USIC awards recognize significant contributions to the continuing effort to counter the increasing international and asymmetric threat posed by the trafficking of narcotics and other illicit substances.

We have embarked on several major investments at the local level to improve border security. The most significant and impactful of these is the Sandy Bottom Project, a \$232 million dollar investment upgrade to the Royal Bahamas Defence Force.

A major component of this project has been the acquisition of nine patrol vessels; the refitting of two existing crafts; dredging and modernization of harbours; development of two existing bases and the construction of a new base on an island

on our southern border. Decentralization of operations at strategic locations in the northern, central and southern Bahamas has resulted in increased air and sea patrol. As you are aware, tackling the drug problem requires intervention not only on the supply side but it requires the appropriate allocation of resources to reduce demand, especially among our youth.

The protection of our youth is of paramount concern, as they are one of the most vulnerable groups in the world drugs problem. In recent times, some drug and tobacco manufacturers and distributors have focused their attention on marketing a variety of products to the young in not to subtle ways as healthy alternatives to cigarettes but in the end some of these products contain toxins and carcinogens found in regular cigarettes and other down market products are nothing more than a gateway for their users to engage in illicit drugs use. Locally, we have directed our efforts to counter this trend by increasing opportunities for young person's to be exposed to drug education and prevention.

Annually, the month of October is observed as National Youth Month and is filled with various activities for our youth to be celebrated for their achievements and contribution to social development. We also set aside the third Monday each October as National Drug Free Schools Day where schools all over The Bahamas, at the tertiary, secondary and primary levels take time out to focus and raise awareness about the use and abuse of drugs. This day also provides an opportunity for school children, college students, educators, parents and local anti-drug stakeholders to engage and have meaningful dialogue on the subject of drugs, and its effects on the individual, family and society.

I call upon all of us to always keep the youth in mind in our discussions, crafting, implementation and evaluation of strategies to counter the drug problem. The Citizen Security and Justice Initiative, as mentioned by the National Security Minister, seeks to reduce unemployment among youth. The labour reform component of this initiative provides job skills, soft skill training, personal development and other kinds of pro-social behavior modification programs.

In closing, I wish to assure you of The Bahamas' continued support of CICAD and its work in drug control. May the proceedings of this 60th session create

dialogue and result in decision making that draws us one step closer in creating a society free from the perils of drug abuse and illicit trafficking. I would also ask that while attending to this serious business of drug control, do enjoy our beautiful country and the hospitality of our friendly people.

Thank you.



