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MINISTER OF THE ENVIRONMENT & HOUSING

**24TH CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE
UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION
ON CLIMATE CHANGE**

RESUMED OPENING OF THE HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT

**OPEN PLENARY
DECEMBER 12, 2018**

Mr. President, Excellencies, Delegates, ladies and gentlemen,
Good Morning. I would like to express my most sincere
gratitude to the Polish Government and this COP Presidency,
for the WARM welcome extended to me and to The Bahamas'
delegation.

Over 25 years of negotiation has led us, to this point in
time. The decisions we make at this Conference of the
Parties, will create the course for the future we want. This
Polish Presidency has made a stand to relentlessly pursue
efforts to limit temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius
above pre-industrial levels. Needless to say, this will represent
a major victory for Small Island States, like The Bahamas and
other countries, who have been correctly making the case that
a 2 degree Celsius rise will be catastrophic and in fact, poses
an existential threat to our sovereignty, livelihoods and lives.

Bahamas Hurricanes (2015-2017)

In 2015, Small Island Developing States rallied together to
advocate for a global climate target of 1.5 degrees Celsius.

That same year, The Bahamas experienced Hurricane

Joaquin, a Category 4 hurricane with winds up to 120 knots

and 15ft storm surges. Later recorded as the strongest hurricane to hit The Bahamas in October since 1866 by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Joaquin intensified from a tropical depression directly into a major hurricane, bypassing all tropical storm metrics. Causing immense flooding, contaminating fresh water wells, destroying roadways and infrastructure, a post-disaster assessment by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), estimated Joaquin's total damages and losses were worth over \$120 million (\$120,637,340) USD. The following year, damages to the northern Bahamas from Hurricane Matthew, a category 4 storm when it made landfall estimated by The Bahamas Government to be at minimum \$600 million USD. At this time, many households had yet to recover from Joaquin the previous year, compounding the level of damage faced by ordinary Bahamians.

Matthew destroyed roofs, uprooted historic trees and pulled down power lines. Our electricity system was severely impacted as it took months thereafter for power to be restored safely to all homes and communities.

Challenged with not only restoring hope but opening the doors of our tourism sector and essentially getting Bahamians back to work so that they are able to assist their families, in 2017, we were again impacted by our third consecutive major hurricane—Hurricane Irma.

This Category 5 superstorm initiated the first mandatory evacuation in Bahamian history as some 5,000 residents from the northern, southern and western islands were transported to our capital, Nassau. The damage incurred on Ragged Island alone was estimated to cost The Bahamas \$7.8 million USD, impacting only 26 households (Pacific Disaster Center). Declared uninhabitable, to date, much of the infrastructure on Ragged Island is still in disrepair and must be completely rebuilt at a tremendous cost.

In a report published by Tufts University on the cost of climate inaction, The Bahamas is projected to use 6.6% and 13.9% of our GDP by 2025 and 2050 if WE fail to address climate change impacts such as the increasing intensity of hurricanes. Dominated by coastal communities which plays a vital role in our economic stability, climate change impacts such as

hurricanes, warming oceans and sea level rise threaten our fragile natural resources, infrastructure, roadways, and freshwater resources. Damage from hurricanes has even resulted in the temporary and sometimes even permanent closure of hotels, exasperating social issues such as unemployment, poverty, and crime.

The Bahamas, my home, is a special case. With over 100,000 square miles of marine territory, 700 islands and Cays, 30 inhabited islands, more than 50 ports and 30 airports, our vulnerability to the effects of climate change is onerous. Our Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement outline our commitment, as a middle income, highly vulnerable country. We are transitioning to green technologies, banning the importation and use of single-use plastics and expanding our MPA system, but we cannot and should not have to do it alone. The international community must understand this. The world has seen the amount of damage a single storm like Hurricane Irma, could have on Small Island Developing States. So, I stand before you today

to challenge you to be more ambitious with global climate targets.

The IPCC Special Report indicates that we have approximately 12 years to do what is necessary to remain below a 1.5 degree Celsius temperature rise. We must do it, and it must start today.

The Rolle's in Rolleville, Exuma, the Ferguson's in Acklins and Andros, the Knowles' in Long Island are all depending on us to deliver on that 1.5 commitment, and we must not let them down.

I thank you.

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