

THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS

In September of 2019, just one year after The Bahamas presented its first Voluntary National Review (VNR) to the United Nations, Hurricane Dorian made landfall on the islands of Abaco and Grand Bahama where entire towns were destroyed by Category 5 winds and storm surges of over 20 feet. As a Small Island Developing State, the effects of climate change impact us the most, even though we contribute to it the least. Hurricane Dorian was a devastating example of just how strong these effects have become.

In September 2019 Government authorities responded quickly by creating the Ministry of Disaster Preparedness, Management and Reconstruction, thus, making a significant step towards strengthening the national disaster preparedness and response capabilities. The new ministry is comprised of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the Disaster Reconstruction Authority (DRA) which work together to facilitate mitigation planning, community preparedness, public information-sharing and recovery coordination.

Many organizations and countries lent a hand to assist with building The Bahamas back better. NEMA coordinated emergency response with support from the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), and various countries and agencies including those in the UN System, particularly the humanitarian agencies. During his visit to The Bahamas, the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres commended the Government's response to the disaster and pledged the full support of the United Nations. These partnerships were instrumental in The Bahamas' recovery efforts.

In March 2020, the Government of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas announced the first confirmed COVID 19 case. Immediately, the country began to prepare for the varying effects of the pandemic. This came in the form of Emergency Orders from the Prime Minister that instituted, *inter alia*, a lockdown schedule for the country. Mandatory mask-wearing and increased sanitation protocols were made mandatory along with nightly curfews and the shutdown of all non-essential businesses and organizations, commercial sailing, public transportation, and gatherings. The COVID 19 Protocols were also accompanied by the creation of a COVID 19 Enforcement Unit (CEU) which is located within the Royal Bahamas Police Force. The purpose of the Unit is to curb breaches of quarantine protocols and to patrol public spaces to ensure health guidelines are being adhered to.

Like many other countries, The Bahamas was shaken in unprecedented ways by the global COVID 19 pandemic which is occurring while the country is still rebuilding and recovering

from the most catastrophic hurricane experienced in the country, to date. Both historic events have affected progress towards the implementation of the SDGs. While there has been some set back, The Bahamas remains resilient and has responded quickly and strategically towards the nation's ongoing efforts to achieve Vision 2030, The National Development Plan.

The Bahamas' economy is heavily dependent on tourism and financial services. COVID 19 brought the tourism industry to a halt, creating a domino effect on hotel and tourism-dependent jobs. To mitigate the stress caused by the lack of employment, the Government of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas launched the National Food Distribution Taskforce which delivered emergency food assistance. To date, it is one of the largest public-private social care initiatives in The Bahamas. To facilitate the packaging and distribution of food items, the government partnered with Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The Ministry of Social Services and Urban Development also provided emergency food assistance and made special provisions for tourism workers. The National Insurance Board paid out over \$45 million in unemployment benefits to assist those in need.

The Small Business Development Centre (SBDC) was launched and has invested over \$2 million into over 550 small businesses through their grant programmes which remained accessible throughout COVID 19. The SBDC serves to provide existing and budding entrepreneurs with the resources and funds needed to open and maintain a successful business. Through their Access Accelerator programme and other initiatives, the SBDC ultimately works to improve the economy.

Notwithstanding the varying challenges of the past two years, The Bahamas reaffirms its commitment and the high priority attached to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in national programmes and policies. The country is making strides across all sectors to ensure that we create the sustainable future that we wish to see and that we remain committed to leaving no one behind.

The Bahamas' delegation looks forward to participating in the High-Level Political Forum of the Economic and Social Council of July 2021 and values the opportunities that will be garnered from the productive exchanges with other delegations and stakeholders.
