



**Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**

**Information received from the Bahamas on follow-up to the
concluding observations on its sixth periodic report^{*,**}**

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

** The annexes to the present document may be accessed from the web page of the Committee.



I. Introduction

1. The Government of The Bahamas is pleased to present to the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the updated information on measures undertaken to implement the follow-up recommendations. Follow-up recommendations were issued to The Bahamas in October 2018, to provide further information for the Sixth Periodic Report.

II. Constitutional and Legislative Protection of Women from Discrimination

Follow-up information relating to paragraph 12 (a) of the concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of the Bahamas (CEDAW/C/BHS/CO/6)

2. The Government of The Bahamas has not set a clear time frame for constitutional reform, as constitutional amendments require democratic referendums. However, the Government continues to address protection from discrimination through policy regulation and legislation.

3. In August 2012, the Prime Minister of The Bahamas appointed a Constitutional Reform Commission to review the constitution. The Commission recommended that Article 26 of the constitution be amended to include the word “sex” as a discriminatory ground. In this regard, the government and cross sections of society collaborated and executed comprehensive educational and awareness raising campaigns. While the campaigns were necessary steps toward the provision of constitutional protection, it is appreciated that it was up to the Bahamian voters to support the referendum to amend the constitution, which was last defeated in 2016.

4. Although the Government has not reformed the constitution to include ‘sex’ as a discriminatory ground, it has showed progress toward eliminating discrimination in the following ways:

(a) In 2017, the Government established an independent Citizenship Board to review applications for citizenship. The Board would guard against political interference and encourage a transparent process by removing Cabinet Ministers and politicians from the application decision process. The Board had processed over 100 applications, beginning from its establishment to May 2018. The work of the Citizenship Board has continued to date;

(b) In 2018, the Government introduced a draft Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill, which is currently in consultation. The Bill aims to repeal the Bahamas Nationality Act and the Immigration Act, reform laws on nationality and immigration, to make provisions for asylum and will speak to other connected purposes;

(c) In May of 2020, in a landmark case, Supreme Court Justice, Ian Winder ruled that children born out of wedlock in The Bahamas to a Bahamian father and foreign mother are citizens at birth. These children would not have to apply for citizenship at the age of 18. Justice Winder made a declaration on the construction of article 6 of the constitution. It was decided that article 6 should be construed without applying article 14(1) to the provision. The ruling sets a precedent that would allow children born under these circumstances to be entitled to Bahamian citizenship at birth, subject to the father’s proof of paternity.

5. The National Machinery has not yet carried out another Constitutional Reform Campaign nor educational campaign, since the 2016 referendum, however, pockets

of advocacy exist through civil society. In 2014, Equality Bahamas, an NGO, launched a “Gender Equality Referendum Educational Campaign”, centred on women and youth, to educate its audience on the constitution, its functions, process, interpretation of laws, and the effects of the proposed amendments in the 2016 referendum. Discussions with government and academia for a comprehensive initiative to galvanize public support for constitutional reform began in July 2020.

A. National Machinery for the Advancement of Women

6. Consistent with commitments made under the Beijing Platform for Action, the Department of Gender and Family Affairs (The Department) was established in October 2016. It expands on the work of the Bureau of Women's Affairs to include promoting the advancement of women and girls, and men and boys. The Department falls under the portfolio of the Ministry of Social Services and Urban Development, which is headed by a Cabinet Minister. The Government continues to enhance the institutional architecture of the national machinery for the advancement of women through implementing projects, programmes, policies, conducting research and creating partnerships. Staff at the Department has participated in regional and international conferences and regularly reports to regional and international bodies. The Department's mandate promotes women's human rights and includes promoting: (i) gender-based violence prevention, (ii) advocacy for women in leadership, (iii) gender mainstreaming, (iv) education, training and awareness raising.

Expansion of the Department

7. In 2018, the Department increased its technical and support staff from three to eleven persons. The Department's staff comprises a Gender-Based Violence Expert, Educational and Curriculum Officer, Male Programme Coordinator, Gender Officer, Research Analyst, and an Administrative Assistant. Technical staff have undergone relevant trainings. In July 2019, the Government invested in three (3) staff members to participate in a CEDAW Training, which was held in Trinidad and Tobago. The training was conducted by the Women's Human Rights Institute. It promoted Women's Human Rights Advocacy, informed the participants about the institutional structure and mechanisms of CEDAW, and provided participants with the capacity to train others.

8. A male desk was established within the Department in 2018. This desk complements and supports the programmes for women and girls. The Department's male programme coordinator serves, among other things, as an executive member of the Caribbean Male Action Network (CariMAN). CariMAN's global mandate includes “elevating the status of women” and its vision is to “achieve gender justice for all”. CariMAN partnered with the Department from the 10th to 14th February 2020, to conduct a workshop on the Prevention of Gender-Based Violence Intervention for Perpetrators to train persons in government and civil society.

9. The Department received an allocation of three hundred and eighty-nine thousand dollars (\$389,000.00) in the 2019/2020 budget. This amount was reduced during the 2020/2021 budget due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. However, twenty-six million dollars (\$26,000,000.00) was injected into the Department of Social Services budget to assist existing and new clients, most of whom are women with food vouchers. Additionally, the National Insurance Board benefit was increased and five million dollars (\$5,000,000.00) was provided by the Government for rental assistance.

Partnerships

10. Following the approval by the Cabinet of the National Strategic Plan to Address Gender-Based Violence, the Department collaborated with other agencies to implement programmes to mitigate against gender-based violence. In October 2020, the Department conducted awareness raising sensitizations and trainings on gender and sexual violence prevention for government officers, non-governmental organizations, and civil society. The trainings were a part of the Department's gender mainstreaming initiatives.

11. In November 2019, the Department and Zonta Clubs of Nassau and New Providence, engaged the legislative branch of government to observe the 16 Days of Activism to end Gender-Based Violence.

12. The Department has enhanced its network with relevant stakeholders to promote Women in Leadership and Decision Making (in fulfilment of SDG Goal 5). The Department partners with the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership (CIWiL). They aim to sensitize, educate, and prepare women for decision making positions. In August to September 2020, CIWiL and its partners conducted a five (5) part Webinar series on, "Strategies to Attract and Prepare Women for Political Leadership".

13. In the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian, which devastated The Bahamas in September 2019, the Department partnered with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for a capacity building programme on Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies (GBViE). The programme incorporated a gender perspective. The Department received a \$20,000 grant from the UNFPA to conduct trainings and sensitizations sessions for frontline and service workers, the migrant community in Abaco as well as focus group sessions for potential victims. Sessions were held in New Providence, Grand Bahama and Abaco; the islands most affected by the hurricane. The trainings were geared to mitigate the risk of GBViE. It focused on GBV causes, risks and consequences. A survivor centred approach to sexual and reproductive health and rights were addressed.

14. Two hundred fifty-seven (257) individuals (201 females and 56 males) were trained, including frontline workers and key stakeholders from different Islands. The programme aimed to improve safe access to health care services, psychosocial support and psychological first aid, among others, through the establishment of referral pathways to respond to the needs of GBV survivors. Consistent with CEDAW's General Recommendation No. 35, the Department continues its awareness-raising programmes on gender-based violence against women.

15. The Covid-19 pandemic necessitated alternative methods of gathering data. The Department partnered with the University of The Bahamas to conduct an online survey on Family Safety. Over seven hundred (700) responses were fielded from New Providence, Grand Bahama and a few Family Islands. Results indicated that there was a slight increase in domestic violence within the home during the pandemic. In response, the Department, in partnership with stakeholders, including Government and Non-government agencies, created anti-gender-based violence messages on social media and for printed distribution.

The Department's Policy Advancement

16. The draft Gender Equality Policy remains a vital tool for the advancement of women by providing roadmaps for gender mainstreaming and empowering women. While not yet passed, some policy goals and targets are implemented. Goal Two (2) of the Gender Equality Policy "Develop and Implement Integrated Measures to Alleviate, Prevent and Manage Gender-Based Violence" is being addressed through the development and implementation of the National Strategic Plan to Address Gender-Based Violence. Goal Seven (7) of the Policy "Promote a Gender Perspective

in all Policies, Planning, and Programmes in Respect to Climate Change, Environmental and Disaster Management”, supports the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13 on Climate Change. The Department of Environment Policy and Planning has formed a partnership in 2019 with relevant stakeholders to support gender-responsive climate actions.

17. Representatives from the Department of Gender and Family Affairs serve on the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) Committee, which partners with the Caribbean Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA). A comprehensive country programme, inclusive of a gender perspective was provided by CDEMA.

B. Gender-Based Violence against Women

Follow-up information relating to paragraph 24 (b) of the concluding observations

18. The Bahamas recognizes recommendations for comprehensive legislation on Gender-Based-Violence, including recommendations from the UN’s Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women following her official visit to The Bahamas in December 2017.

19. The Gender-Based Violence Bill (GBV Bill) was drafted in May 2016. It addresses the recommendation of the Gender-Based Violence Task Force to establish and implement a Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence, and to establish a comprehensive law that addresses Gender-Based Violence. The draft GBV Bill provides a clear definition of gender-based violence and seeks to repeal existing legislation on gender and related matters. To adopt the GBV Bill, the existing Domestic Violence Protection Orders Act needs to be repealed. This is a lengthy process.

20. In 2016, a meeting was held with the Office of the Attorney General and relevant stakeholders, in efforts to advance the draft Bill. In April 2017, The Department led discussions with multi-sectoral stakeholders to review the draft Gender-Based Violence Bill and make recommendations for its adoption.

21. During 2018 and 2019, discussions with multi-sectoral stakeholders continued, with a goal to have the draft Bill tabled in Parliament. Until the draft Bill can be passed and come into effect, the Government of The Bahamas has endeavoured to implement as many of the provisions of the draft Bill as legally possible through policy changes.

National Strategic Plan to Address Gender-Based Violence

22. In August 2015, The National Strategic Plan to Address Gender-Based Violence was approved by the Cabinet of The Bahamas. In 2016, a Results and Resource Based Framework of the Strategic Plan was produced, which is a step toward the creation of a National Action Plan to address Gender-Based Violence. Since its approval, several of the Strategic Plan’s recommendations have been implemented, including the following:

(a) Establishment of the Department of Gender and Family Affairs: The Department was established in October 2016 as a short-term goal of the Strategic Plan. The Department recruited additional technical officers, trained in relevant areas. In 2019, staff were trained in Gender and Sexual Violence prevention and in the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse;

(b) The National Early Intervention Programme for Children Exposed to Violence: The Bahamas Crisis Centre established the programme in 2017. It tackles child abuse and traumatic incident response and prevention through intervention services, community education and leadership. It is funded by state and non-state actors. A 2019 report from The Bahamas Crisis Centre indicated that sessions are held every day responding to children aged 4 to 18, with up to 50 to 100 children per month;

(c) The Establishment of a Unified Family Court System: Progress has been made to establish a Unified Family Court System, which aims to facilitate family judicial matters in one place. In 2019, the Chief Justice and members of the Judiciary along with The Bahamas Crisis Centre travelled to Trinidad and Tobago to assess their integrated court system, with a view to implementing such a system in The Bahamas;

(d) The Gender-Based Violence Prevention – National Community Awareness Programme: The Department of Gender and Family Affairs in collaboration with multiple partners undertook a number of initiatives to address GBV. In February 2017, the Department, partnered with the University of The Bahamas to launch a Community Awareness and sensitization for university students;

(e) In August 2017, the Department, partnered with the U.S.'s State Department Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, and the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF). They held a Workshop on Cat Island (an island of The Bahamas) on "Preventing Gender-Based Violence". This initiative was a part of the Women's Initiative for Non-Violence and Development (WIND), which aims to improve the capacity of law enforcement, the justice sector, and communities that respond to and prevent gender-based violence in The Bahamas;

(f) Citizen Security and Justice Alliance Workshop: In November 2017, The Bahamas Government collaborated with the Inter-American Development Bank to launch the Citizen Security and Justice Programme (CSJP). The programme, which incorporates a gender perspective, aims to break down negative social and economic barriers in vulnerable communities, empower citizens to self-help and, to contribute to sustainable solutions. The programme aims to "improve (violent) behaviours to non-violent conflict resolution" and to "reduce recidivism rates among persons in the corrections system". In October 2019, technical staff of the Department of Gender and Family Affairs were among twenty-seven (27) local leaders who participated in a Train-the-Trainer programme. Trainers were instrumental in training a total of four hundred, thirty-eight (438) community members in a three-month period. To complement the trainings, local videos were created to give a national context to the issues of Gender-Based and sexual violence;

(g) Over the Hill Initiative: In 2018, the Office of the Prime Minister partnered with relevant stakeholders, including the Department of Gender and Family Affairs, for the Over-the-Hill Initiative which was designed to bring awareness of violence prevention to youth in inner city communities. Students from primary through senior high schools participated. The objective of the programme was to empower students to identify sexual violence and encourage themselves and their peers to speak out against such acts. Students created public service announcements for radio and television;

(h) The Reclaiming our Boys Project: The Reclaiming our Boys Project was launched in 2017. It trained facilitators that dealt with boys' projects and programmes. Participants included teachers, school guidance counsellors and mentoring clubs' facilitators. In 2019, the Department's male desk along with Urban Renewal, expanded on this project by forming alliances with ninth-grade male students at L.W. Young Junior High;

(i) Gender-Based Violence Intervention for Perpetrators: From 10th to 14th February 2020, the Department of Gender and Family Affairs along with the Caribbean Male Action Network (CariMAN), held a three-day workshop and a one-day symposium entitled “Perpetrators Violence Intervention and Prevention Workshop – Addressing Gender-Based Violence through Community Interventions”. The Workshop, which was conducted with a gender perspective, aimed to provide the capacity of trainees to effectively rehabilitate perpetrators of Gender-Based Violence and have them return to their families and communities as productive persons. A total of seventy-two (72) persons participated in the training, including thirty-four (34) government officers (15 men and 19 women), and thirty-eight (38) representatives from civil society and Faith-Based Organizations (11 men and 27 women);

(j) Corrections Department Transformation Programme: In 2019, a team of government and non-government officers conducted a three (3) months Programme “Engage Communicate and Transform” within the Bahamas Department of Corrections. A total of twenty-five (25) inmates participated in the programme. The goal of the programme was to address gender and sexual violence prevention;

(k) Cross Roads Radio Show: In August 2020, the Department hosted a “Men at Crossroads” radio show to address GBV issues men faced that were enhanced by the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns. The show engaged in multiple perspectives and featured senior health officials and security officers. It yielded approximately five thousand (5,000) viewers and eight hundred and ninety (890) shares.

C. Trafficking and Exploitation of Prostitution

Follow-up information relating to paragraph 26 (b) of the concluding observations

23. The Government of The Bahamas has made strides to enforce the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention and Suppression) Act. To carry out the vision of the Act, the following mechanisms have been maintained or introduced.

24. The Government regularly submits the Trafficking in Persons Annual Report to the United States’ State Department. The annual reporting period is from April 1st to March 31st, of the following year. Annex I detail The Royal Bahamas Police Force Screening results from 2018 to 2020.

25. The Bahamas Government also continues to uphold “Assistance and Protection for Victims” stipulated in the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention and Suppression) Act. Annex II details assistance given to victims in accordance with the Act.

26. The Government of The Bahamas has a National Action Plan to address Trafficking in Persons. The National Action Plan (NAP) is a five (5) year document, which delineates the country’s overarching goals, objectives, and planned initiatives. The National Action Plan was reviewed and came into effect January 1st, 2019, and will expire December 31, 2023. This National Action Plan guides preventative measures against Trafficking in Persons.

Budget

27. According to the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention and Suppression) Act, the Ministry of National Security has lead responsibility for Trafficking in Persons. The annual budget for Trafficking in Persons is incorporated within the budget of the Ministry of National Security.

28. During the reporting period April 1, 2018 to March 31, 2019, the annual Trafficking in Persons budget was one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000). During the reporting period April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020, the Trafficking in Persons Committee received a reduction in budget and was granted ninety-five thousand dollars (\$95,000.00) In September 2019, The Commonwealth of The Bahamas was impacted by Hurricane Dorian. Major recovery of Grand Bahama and Abaco remains a priority the Bahamian Government.

29. Although the Trafficking in Persons budget was reduced, funds were made available, upon request by the TIP committee. During the reporting period April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021, the world experienced a global pandemic. Coronavirus impacted The Bahamas' economic state. While still trying to revamp the economy after Hurricane Dorian, the Government of The Bahamas now had to assist its residents and citizens as best as possible with the economic impacts of Coronavirus. Through it all, the Government of The Bahamas managed to secure an annual budget of ninety-five thousand dollars (\$95,000.00) for the Trafficking in Persons Committee.

Establishment of the Secretariat

30. During the reporting period October 1, 2018 to March 31, 2019, the Minister of National Security sought to turn the previous year's reporting deficiency into a strength that would overtime reap incremental rewards. This newly established Trafficking in Persons Secretariat constituted the nucleus through which all trafficking in persons' initiatives, inclusive of Public Awareness, Training, forging of national and international partnerships, care and protection of victims and investigation and prosecution of traffickers, would emanate. The Minister of National Security additionally, supported the Trafficking in Persons Committee, in establishing a Ministry of National Security (MNS) Hotline, to support the other Hotlines, in the anti-trafficking campaign. This new (MNS) Hotline would make use of a land-line number (326-0133) during the day and a cellphone number (376-8477) (TIPS), during the night and weekends.

31. The Bahamas Government made Trafficking in Persons a priority and introduced a Delivery Unit. This Delivery Unit provided support and consultative leadership to the Prime Minister on initiatives, within critical Ministries like Education, Health, Transportation and National Security. The Prime Minister's Delivery Unit [PMDU] can monitor, offer guidance, material and human resources, and strengthen capacity within the prescribed focused areas to enhance successful outcomes. The Trafficking in Persons Committee has been identified as an area requiring on-going monitoring and strengthening, to yield optimum results. Each Agency has representatives that directly resumed responsibility for Trafficking in Persons matters but are not exclusively assigned to trafficking matters. The Agency exclusively dedicated to trafficking matters is the TIP Secretariat which oversees all aspects of trafficking, inclusive of all initiatives generated through the four pillars of prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership. Annex III details additional initiatives of the Secretariat.
