



National Address

**The Most Hon. Dr. Hubert Minnis
Prime Minister**

17 August 2020

Fellow Citizens and Residents:

Good evening.

Around the world and here at home, the COVID-19 virus continues its aggressive assault on the lives of millions of people who have been infected and hundreds of thousands of people who have lost their lives.

Let me note that the number of people who have been infected and who have died

is likely much higher than official international statistics.

Tonight, I once again report to you on the battle we are waging to aggressively respond to this killer virus.

COVID-19 will continue to spread uncontrollably if we do not immediately take more aggressive and comprehensive measures, most of which are also being taken by other countries.

I fully appreciate the burden of many of these measures on you and on our country.

But, I assure you, they are being taken to save the lives of you and your loved ones, and to restore our economy and society as much as possible during this global pandemic.

This is my solemn and constitutional duty as your Prime Minister.

We are in an emergency.

The surge in cases has put exceptional strain on our healthcare system.

We must act now, and aggressively to prevent our healthcare system from collapsing.

If our hospitals collapse, we will have many more deaths.

We are all at risk from this deadly virus.

None of us are immune.

We are more than fellow citizens and residents.

We are all children of Almighty God, equally and wonderfully made in God's image and likeness.

We are our brother's and sister's keepers. We belong to each other.

What binds us together as Bahamians and as fellow human beings, including the love of life itself, is stronger and more powerful and more resilient than our differences and our wonderful diversity.

Today, I spoke with the Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Philip Brave Davis, who has tested positive for COVID-19, and who is in hospital.

He and I may lead different political parties. But we are Bahamian brothers and we both have important constitutional roles.

We spoke for about 15 minutes.

I assured him of my support, my friendship and my prayers.

I ask you to offer him your prayers and your support for his full recovery.

Let us also pray for all of those who are in hospital or at home, who have tested positive.

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Today, the Ministry of Health reported 14 new cases. This bring the total number of confirmed cases to 1329. These cases include:

- 731 on New Providence;
- 461 on Grand Bahama;

- 45 cases on Bimini, inclusive of Cat Cay;
- 44 cases on Abaco;
- 14 cases on the Berry Islands;
- 8 on Cat Island;
- 5 on Exuma;
- 1 on Eleuthera;
- 2 on Inagua; and
- 1 on Andros.
- Pending locations 17

There are 1,116 active cases, 191 recovered cases and 32 hospitalized cases. Nineteen deaths have been confirmed to date.

I once again offer condolences to the families of those who have died. Our prayers and our sympathy are with you during this very painful and difficult time.

Based on health indicators and risk criteria, the Government has taken a localized response to the fight against COVID-19.

Differentiated treatment for our family of islands is being applied depending on the indicators and risk criteria identified by our health professionals.

There are three categories:

Level 1 –

These islands have each been individually assessed by health professionals and have been deemed to have minimal risk in the face of the COVID 19 pandemic.

This is either because there are no cases, there is no suspected COVID 19 activity or the other indicators are such that there is no heightened risk when considered cumulatively.

These islands presently have no lockdown or curfew in place. But they are required to exercise physical distancing protocols, sanitization, and mask wearing.

These presently include: Mayaguana, Inagua, Chub Cay, Crooked Island, Acklins,

Long Cay, Long Island, Rum Cay and
Ragged Island.

Level 2 –

These islands are considered to have high risk in the face of the COVID 19 pandemic, based on the performance of the indicators being monitored by our health professionals.

These islands are presently under the current restrictions found in the Emergency

Powers (COVID 19 Pandemic) (Lockdown)

Order 2020.

Level 3 –

The health professionals have found it necessary, based on the present indicators, to recommend that a third category be designated.

This would reflect islands where critical risk in the face of the COVID 19 pandemic exists.

This would warrant greater restrictions to fight the pandemic than are presently found under the Emergency Powers (COVID 19 Pandemic) (Lockdown) Order 2020.

Based on the number of new cases and other indicators regularly reported on by the Ministry of Health, we are all aware that the two islands in the most grave of situations are New Providence and Grand Bahama.

I am pleased, and personally relieved to say that health officials are beginning to see progress on Grand Bahama.

They have recommended a continuation of the present level of restrictions to control and slow the spread of COVID-19 on the island.

As such, the present lockdown restrictions will continue in respect of Grand Bahama for a period of seven days commencing tomorrow, 18 August 2020.

The current restrictions will continue to apply to all other islands presently under the Emergency Powers (COVID 19 Pandemic) (Lockdown) Order 2020.

However, the data on New Providence and the advice of health officials is extremely clear.

More restrictive measures are absolutely necessary in order to bring the virus under control on New Providence.

Health indicators on New Providence show a very large number of new cases, an increase in hospitalizations and unfortunately an increase in deaths.

If further restrictive measures are not taken to control and to slow the spread of COVID-19 on New Providence at this time, it will take a very long time to bring the virus under control.

The sooner we bring the virus under control the shorter the time will be to return to few restrictive measures.

Unfortunately, too many people are not taking the current lockdowns and health measures seriously.

Some people are gathering in groups in their neighborhoods; some are going out when unnecessary; some are not following health guidelines when out in public; some are going out visiting friends and family.

Some people are even having socials and parties.

The virus is spreading rapidly because of the failure of many to adhere to life-saving and preventative measures.

But I also again acknowledge and thank all of those who have followed the health guidelines over the many months.

Thank you sincerely for your cooperation.

I also thank those who have offered advice, constructive ideas and assistance, and a spirit of love and unity during these difficult months and days.

We continue to ask for and welcome your advice, which you may send to the Office of the Prime Minister website, opm.gov.bs, where many Bahamians and residents have already offered helpful and positive suggestions.

Fellow Residents of New Providence:

Tonight, I am announcing further measures to more aggressively battle COVID-19 in New Providence.

The restrictions I am about to announce will apply for a period of seven days.

They are effective immediately.

At the end of seven days, health officials will make an assessment, and a

determination taken on whether an extension is required.

The new measures are as follows:

Public healthcare, all hospitals and, for emergencies, private medical facilities will continue to operate.

Public offices will be closed except for essential staff.

Public Officers are to work remotely, except those who have expressly been

identified in the Orders as essential workers or identified by the permanent secretaries of their respective ministries.

Only the following essential services will be continued:

- Any hospital, public healthcare, public medical facility and public pharmacies;
- Private medical facilities for emergencies only;
- Public Hospitals Authority and its agencies

- Royal Bahamas Police Force;
- Royal Bahamas Defence Force;
- Bahamas Customs Department;
- Department of Immigration;
- Department of Correctional Services;
- Department of Environmental Health Services;
- Waste disposal and sanitation services
- Bahamas Civil Aviation Department
- Utility Corporations for emergency and critical services only
- National Food Distribution Task Force

The provisions that will apply in respect of commercial activities are as follows:

Hotels will be permitted to operate with essential staff, provided the names of the employees are submitted to the Royal Bahamas Police Force.

Essential media personnel may operate. However, they will be required to contact the Royal Bahamas Police Force 311 number

when they are required to be on the streets
of New Providence.

Construction will be permitted.

Financial institutions which are required
to carry out urgent transactions from within
the institution may contact the 311 hotline for
permission to travel to and from the office.

International shipping, freight forwarders and domestic freight will be permitted to continue.

However, goods and supplies are to be stored during this period.

If approval is needed in an emergency for businesses to collect such items, businesses must contact 311 hotline for permission.

All other businesses and commercial activities will be closed, and are required to work remotely.

Provisions for other essential, social and spiritual needs of our communities are as follows:

The National Food Distribution Task Force will continue our food distribution program on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, as previously scheduled.

Please contact your respective Zone leaders if you have questions during this period.

The Royal Bahamas Police Force will have lists by Zones of all registrants of the programme and will be checking vehicles to ensure that only one representative per household goes to the specific distribution centre.

I thank the food wholesalers and retailers who have given the Government tremendous discounts for the food program.

The following hotlines have been established for COVID 19 medical emergencies:

- 502-7382 from 9am to 5pm
- 376-9350 from 8am to 8pm
- 376-9387 from 8pm to 8am

For other medical emergencies please call 919 or 911.

The Royal Bahamas Police Force will check all vehicles to determine where persons are headed and to confirm that these individuals contacted the Royal Bahamas Police Force emergency contact number for approval to be on the streets.

This includes all Government red plates. Those who do not comply will be fined according to the Emergency Powers Order.

Everyone who wishes to move in the case of an emergency must contact the Royal Bahamas Police Force at 311.

Let me say again: If an individual does not have a valid reason or approval to be on the streets, they will be fined.

Persons who tend to sheltered or farm animals will be permitted to do so.

However, they will be required to contact the Royal Bahamas Police Force 311 number when they are required to be on the streets

Subsistence and commercial fishing from New Providence is discontinued during this period.

Graveside funerals, which had been previously planned and scheduled during this period, may continue.

Weddings will not be permitted during this period.

Churches may continue to live stream from their premises on Saturday and Sunday, with a maximum of ten persons present at the sanctuary.

These persons will be required to contact the Royal Bahamas Police Force before departing to go on the streets.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Church and people of The Bahamas for your prayers and words of encouragement.

My Government and I greatly appreciate your prayers and the undergirding that we feel as we seek to lead our Nation through this pandemic.

Persons may exercise in your immediate neighborhoods in the mornings between 5 a.m. and 8 a.m. daily.

You may also exercise in your yards, if applicable, at any point during the day.

Diplomatic Missions will continue to be permitted to be open.

However, members of the public required to utilize their services, for example nationals of the respective countries needing services and students seeking visas, will be required to contact the Royal Bahamas Police Force

311 before travelling to and from a diplomatic office.

Operation Bahamas Turks and Caicos will be permitted to carry on its service.

Provisions that will apply in respect of international domestic travel are as follows:

There will be no international flights or vessels permitted to enter New Providence.

Only in exceptional and urgent circumstances will permission be granted by the Director General of Civil Aviation or the Chairperson of the Bahamas Maritime Authority for such flights or vessels to enter New Providence.

International flights and vessels will be able to depart from New Providence.

In respect of the entire country, there will be a further tightening of the entry

requirement for COVID-19 negative test results.

These test results will now have to be valid within five days of entry, instead of ten days of entry.

There will be no travel domestically between New Providence and the other islands of The Bahamas, except for freight and for emergencies.

Fellow Citizens and Residents,

I wish to say to again to the residents of New Providence that the week-long total lockdown will allow health officials to evaluate and monitor the spread of COVID-19 on New Providence.

I know this lockdown is a sacrifice and hardship for many Bahamians and residents, but it will assist with slowing the spread of COVID 19.

At the end of the lockdown period, officials will assess the data to help inform the way forward.

I will report to you again on the impact of the lockdown as soon as possible.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We are using a variety of measures to slow the spread of COVID-19, including lockdowns, curfews, contact tracing, permitting low-risk commercial and social

activities, all of which are being used by most countries in the world.

Democracies and countries everywhere are utilizing these measures, which have been recommended by global health officials, including the World Health Organization.

We have made significant advances in our contact-tracing program.

Since the Contact Tracing Command Centre was established at the Melia Hotel last month, the vast majority of contacts have been contacted.

Health officials are getting closer to identifying all cases and contacts. By identifying all cases and contacts this will help to bring the virus under control.

On Grand Bahama, 87% of COVID 19 confirmed cases have been contacted and

are being monitored, and 80% of contacts of COVID 19 cases have been identified.

On New Providence, 82% of the COVID 19 confirmed cases have been contacted and are being monitored, and 80% of contacts of COVID 19 cases have been contacted.

Aggressive contact tracing is ongoing.

Progress is also being made on clearing the backlog at the National Reference Laboratory.

The full resources of the Government are being used to contain this virus, including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of National Security, Ministry of Social Services, Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Finance, the Department of Immigration, the Department of Transformation and

Digitization, and other Government agencies.

We are also grateful to our private sector partners, Breezes Super Clubs, Aliv, BTC and the Melia Hotel.

Fellow Citizens:

The framers of the Constitution anticipated there would be times of emergency when some of our constitutional rights and freedoms would have to be

curtailed in the public's interest and for the public's safety.

Indeed, as noted by leading jurists in our country, the requirement for the constitutionality of various provisions is that they “are reasonably justifiable in the circumstances of the public emergency ...”

Indeed, our Founders fathers wisely placed in our constitution provisions allowing

the Governor General to declare
proclamations of emergency.

Such proclamations exist to allow the Government to act to protect the people in times of great national crisis.

We are in such a time. In this pandemic we face our worst crisis in our history as a sovereign nation.

If the Government did not have the Emergency Powers there would be mass death in The Bahamas beyond the imagination of most.

Those who tell you the Emergency Powers are not necessary are unserious and dead wrong.

The Government uses the Emergency Powers to enforce provisions that save lives.

This virus has caused so much death across our hemisphere.

Watching the international news there are stories of young people in neighboring countries whose entire households have died from COVID-19.

No more mother or father. No more grandparents. Just a child or two children left alone after the virus took away everyone else.

This is a pandemic the world has not seen in one hundred years.

We must harden our minds and make firm our resolve for a long fight with COVID-19.

Many countries are battling their second or third wave.

There will be more waves to come until there is a vaccine and most of the world has taken it.

Do not listen to those who come up with overly simplistic ideas telling you that if we just do certain things that everything will be normal again quickly.

The old normal is gone for now.

In time when there is a vaccine a new normal will emerge. Until then discipline and resilience are needed.

Many countries and jurisdictions throughout the world have implemented the same measures that your government has to control the spread of this virus.

If we simply fully opened our economy and society and carried on as usual, without

restrictions, more Bahamians would get sick and more would die.

Then the very same individuals who criticized government for the Emergency Orders will then criticize the government for not acting to save lives.

In these unprecedented times, no one, not even first world countries, have a full manual on how to manage this pandemic.

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

As difficult as things are in the moment, I assure you that if we work together with a spirit of courage, hope and resilience that we will beat this virus.

This is a marathon requiring unity, and love of and concern for neighbor.

I think of those who are lending their time, talent and treasure to help feed others.

I know of business people who have retained staff throughout the pandemic.

I continue to feel the power of prayer
warriors who pray without ceasing.

We all know doctors and nurses who are
putting themselves at risk to care for our
people.

There have thousands of acts of
kindness in our country.

I thank the heads of churches and
religious leaders, civic leaders, former
jurists, fellow citizens and others, who,
especially in the last few days, have joined
voices and hearts to encourage the nation.

In this moment, let us encourage each other.

Let us be voices and people of hope and renewal.

Even in the most difficult days of this pandemic, I have never wavered in my belief that we will defeat this virus.

I know this deep in my heart because I have seen and experienced the courage, the encouragement, the cooperation, the sacrifices and the fortitude of so many of you.

Please continue to lift up the country in your prayers, including our brother Brave Davis, and all of those affected by this virus, especially the poor and the most vulnerable in our Bahamas.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Thank you for your attention and your cooperation.

Thank you for your advice.

Let us continue to demonstrate a love of neighbor and a love of country.

May God continue to bless our Bahamas.

Good evening.
