



**STATEMENT BY H. E. RHODA M. JACKSON
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TO THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE AND
OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN GENEVA
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Mr. Chairman,

Permit me to extend my congratulations to you as Chairman of this 105th Session of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Council and to express our appreciation for your leadership in conducting the affairs of this Council. I also extend congratulations to the other members of the Bureau, The Ambassadors of Belgium, Australia and Chile. I take this opportunity to thank your predecessor, Ambassador Luis Enrique Chavez Basagoitia of Peru for the excellent work undertaken during his tenure as Chairman. I also wish to commend the Director General for his leadership and Laura Thompson for her re-election to the post of Deputy Director General.

The Bahamas wishes to welcome the Independent State of Samoa as the 157th member of the organization and the many intergovernmental organizations who have been granted observer status during this session. It is particularly heartening to see the many UN agencies who have now become observers, and who continue to play a critical role in partnering with the IOM to address the challenges of migration. We look forward to even greater achievements as global partnerships are forged to holistically address these challenges.

Mr. Chairman,

In his address to the United Nations General Assembly in September, the Hon. Frederick Mitchell, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Immigration of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, noted that “the control of illegal immigration is central to our survivability as a country...” The Minister stated that the Government of The Bahamas would seek strict adherence to measures undertaken to stop the flow of undocumented non-nationals into Bahamian territory. In an effort to address this matter in a transparent and fair manner, The Bahamas has entered into agreements with its immediate neighbours, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, the Turks and Caicos Islands and Haiti, with a view to identifying positive solutions to the challenges of illegal migration, while reaffirming the good relations which exist between our countries.

In the reports of both the outgoing Chairman and that of the Director General of the IOM, The Bahamas was pleased to note the reference to “Taking Geneva to the field.” The Bahamas considers that a strategic initiative to give greater attention to the challenges on the ground, of those who are forced to leave their home country due to natural disasters or political or economic hardship is of the utmost importance. The many migratory concerns which arise from unhealthy environments, limited food, water and shelter, xenophobia on the part of those in the host country and those who arrive on their shores, make it imperative for an

effective and efficient migration management Programme aimed at improving conditions for those who are displaced and those who are most vulnerable.

Mr. Chairman,

The Government of The Bahamas continues to grapple with the enormous burden of illegal migration. In this year alone, some 3000 persons have been repatriated at an unsustainable cost to the Government. Nevertheless, The Bahamas has worked with receiving governments for the smooth return of their nationals. The Government announced on 1 November, 2014 that in an effort to address this vexing situation, persons who legally reside and work in The Bahamas are required to be in possession of supporting documentation, such as a valid work permit, a national passport or a residency permit.

The Government of The Bahamas has taken steps to stem the tide of boatloads of migrants who arrive illegally on its shores with the acquisition of ten patrol vessels of which two vessels have already been commissioned and the expectation is that over the period of the next seven years the remaining eight patrol vessels will be brought into service. This matter remains a national security concern and the Government is resolute in its decision on this matter.

Mr. Chairman,

Within the margins of the UNGA earlier this year, The Bahamas' Minister of Foreign Affairs and Immigration and the IOM Director General signed a Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen existing cooperation between the Government of The Bahamas and IOM, in matters of mutual concern in relation to migration management, including that of identifying measures to assist and protect vulnerable migrants. The Bahamas will continue to collaborate with the IOM to enhance disaster risk reduction and resilience in the face of climate change and environmental degradation.

The Bahamas wishes to express its appreciation to the IOM for its commitment to this agreement which was demonstrated by the recent visit to The Bahamas by Deputy Director General, Laura Thompson, from 16 to 19 November, 2014. The Bahamas took the opportunity to reiterate its commitment to the initiative on "Regional Cooperation and Law Enforcement Integration to Combat Irregular Migration and Smuggling between Haiti, The Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Islands," an initiative to support the Government of Haiti in addressing irregular migration. The IOM's programme for Voluntary Repatriation and Reintegration and the opportunities available to exchange views and best practices among regional partners, through the Regional Consultative Process were also considered.

The Bahamas therefore, takes this opportunity to commend the IOM for the important work undertaken around the world to assist countries in their efforts to manage migration, in particular, The Bahamas, as it continues to partner with IOM and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to alleviate this problem. The Bahamas reaffirms the wish to strengthen its association through further cooperation in the area of capacity building and the promotion of sub-regional programmes between The Bahamas and its neighbours. Again, The Bahamas reiterates the need for increased dialogue between the sending, transit and destination countries to ensure that effective measures are identified to reduce the flow of illegal migrants.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, The Bahamas wishes to support the IOM as the principal global agency for migration management. With respect to the on-going dialogue on the IOM-UN relations and the IOM Strategy, The Bahamas underscores the need to ensure that migrants are granted the necessary assistance, as currently provided by the IOM and that there is not a shift away from this support, given a revised structure.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.