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PM Davis and Delegation Return from 'COP26'

By Eric Rose

NASSAU, The Bahamas – During a press conference, upon his return from the World Leaders Summit which formed part of 'COP26', the 'UN Conference on Climate Change' in Glasgow, Scotland, on November 5, 2021, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance the Hon. Philip Davis thanked the “many Bahamians” who followed the proceedings and engaged with that global discussion.

“In our ‘Blueprint For Change’ document, which was our platform for the election in September, we made numerous references to policies and plans for the growth and development of the Blue and Green Economies here at home,” Prime Minister Davis said, at the press conference, held at the Lynden Pindling International Airport.

He added: “These are all based upon the underlying assumptions about the impacts of climate change in The Bahamas. Up until now, although we have made many references in the past few years about our vulnerabilities, we have not spoken so strongly and emphatically about risks for The Bahamas. We did so at COP26, and we will continue to do so, as the issues for our lives and livelihood are increasingly urgent.”

Among those present at the press conference, and greeting the return of the Prime Minister’s delegation, were Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Tourism, Investments, and Aviation the Hon. Chester Cooper; Secretary to the Cabinet Nicole Campbell; Commissioner of Police Paul Rolle, and other Government officials.

Prime Minister Davis pointed out that, even though the UN conference was still ongoing, and there was still uncertainty as to whether there will be the kind of action coming out of it that The Bahamas and other countries were calling for, he was delighted to report that in so many ways the nation was well-represented.

“On so many measures, our visit was a success,” he said. “We made a very strong impact and had the attention of the world. And rest assured, we spoke up loudly and often in promoting the interests of Bahamians and The Bahamas.”

“Before I speak to some of the detail, I want you first of all to understand the scale of the event: approximately 120 world leaders were present at the summit, and there were a number of forums and events during which we had a chance to have a series of meetings,” Prime Minister Davis added.

“In the wider conference there were approximately 25,000 delegates. To fully appreciate the scale, understand that it took about 20-25 minutes just to walk to some meetings, because they were in another part of the complex.”

He said that once one appreciates the scale, hopefully that gives one an idea how busy his delegation had been on behalf of The Bahamas.

“We had formal and informal discussions with leaders and representatives from virtually every continent,” Prime Minister Davis said. “I believe pictures of some of them I shared back home on social media.”

“There were meetings with many of our CARICOM friends in the region: Barbados, Jamaica, Guyana, Surinam, St Kitts and Nevis, Antigua, just to name a few,” he added. “I met for the first time the African leaders of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia, Togo and Niger -- as well as the Secretary General of The African Association.”

Prime Minister Davis noted that there were informal meetings with the nation’s “North American friends” President Biden of the United States and Prime Minister Trudeau of Canada, and some of “our European friends” from the United Kingdom Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Luxembourg and others.

“There was also a formal meeting with the Special Envoy from China, the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth and others,” he said. “I mention these just to give you a sense of the number and range of discussions that were held.”

Apart from meetings with leaders, Prime Minister Davis said, there were some significant meetings with prominent organisations such as The Nature Conservancy, The Green Climate Fund and IRENA, the International Renewable Energy Agency.

Outside of COP26, in Glasgow and London, the delegation also held conversations with financial and legal bodies to discuss the challenges The Bahamas was currently facing and to pursue opportunities to support national developments, he added.

“We explored ways of securing financial support to help with our current fiscal situation especially in relation to the management of debt and driving economic growth, technology and other support, and the need to improve our infrastructure and defences against the adverse effects of climate change,” Prime Minister Davis said.

“It would not be appropriate for me just yet to provide details of those conversations,” he added. “We don’t want to be premature in any way and embarrass partners with whom discussions are ongoing, and promises not yet concretised.”

Prime Minister David noted that some of the meetings had more specific purposes, such as the workshop on “Gender and Climate Change”, which were attended by his wife and the wife of the Minister of The Environment.

“I am happy to report that the ‘Office of the Spouse’ will be incorporating issues on climate as a top priority,” he said. “This will support the urgent work we need to do to sensitise Bahamians to the actions that are needed to make our country more resilient.”

Prime Minister Davis pointed out that, just before leaving, he signed a key document called a “Nationally Determined Contribution” which allowed The Bahamas to “sit around the table” when critical decisions are being made.

“For example, The Bahamas can now sit at the table when the Ministers of Finance meet to discuss the issues of COP26,” he said.

“It is deeply regrettable that such things weren’t done during the past four and a half years,” he added. “Whether through ignorance or neglect, it means that The Bahamas lost out on a number of potential benefits, especially in terms of financial support, which will only now become available.”

Prime Minister Davis said that, outside of the specific objectives of COP 26, being in the company of so many world leaders, it was immediately clear to him that a critical objective his Government had to satisfy was to restore confidence in the Government of The Bahamas.

“We forget that the international community, both governments and private sector, are following things that are said and done here,” he said. “They have taken note not just of our economic situation, but also of how we arrived here, and are baffled by some of the decisions made during the previous four and a half years.

“They have taken note of the previous government’s poor response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and how that has contributed not only to the ongoing health crisis but also the economic crisis.”

“When set alongside the previous government’s decision not to attend COP26, and make no preparation for it, it is easy to understand why other countries did not find it easy previously to fully engage with us,” he added.

Prime Minister Davis said that all Bahamians must be mindful of what they say and do in public life.

“The world is watching, and what they see and hear informs their decisions about whether they want to do business in The Bahamas,” he said.

Prime Minister Davis pointed out that there were other, wider successes from COP26.

“I invited a number of world leaders to attend the celebrations for our 50th Anniversary of Independence,” he said. “Among those to say yes, I was pleased that Prince Charles was very enthusiastic, as was Prince William at another event. As Prince Charles represented the Queen at the original Independence Ceremony in 1973, this was a wonderful gesture.”

As the days and weeks move forward, Prime Minister Davis said, his Government would be releasing more news from COP26. He noted that, at that time, the technical team was still there until the end of the conference, on November 12.

“They will be making a big presentation about Hurricane Dorian on November 9th, and we keenly await the response to that,” he said.

Prime Minister Davis said that he was “deeply humbled and grateful for the strong, positive reception from around the world” to the Statement he made to the World Leaders that past Tuesday.

“This led to excerpts being widely quoted around the world, and requests for a number of interviews by major media outlets, especially those in the UK,” he said. “Of all the statements and commentary made on the day, I was especially flattered that the global media heavyweight ‘Bloomberg’ used an extract from my speech as ‘Quote of The Day’.”

“But these accolades are not mine,” he added. “They are for you the Bahamian people, whose voice now rings loudly on the international stage. This is how you gain friends and extend influence. We expect that the opportunities coming out of this trip will be amplified for many years to come.

“We have learned a lot and must now use all that we have gained to inform and improve all that we are doing to bring about that ‘New Day’ for the Bahamian people.”

Prime Minister Davis thanked colleagues at the Ministry of the Environment for their technical support before and during the trip, as well the Minister of State for the Environment Basil McIntosh and Parliamentary Secretary at the Office of the Prime Minister Leon Lundy.

“My thanks also to High Commissioner Greenslade in London and his Vice-Consul, who worked hard for these past few weeks and during our stay to facilitate so much for us,” he said.

He also thanked the members of the media who attended.

“We are extremely grateful for all your efforts in keeping the Bahamian people informed about this monumental global event,” he said.

Prime Minister Davis ended his statement by thanking Deputy Prime Minister Chester Cooper, and all members of the Government who had “kept the ship of state running while we have been away”.

“Although I have been kept abreast of all that has been taking place, I look forward to getting back to work,” Prime Minister Davis said.

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PHOTO CAPTION

NASSAU, The Bahamas -- Prime Minister and Minister of Finance the Hon. Philip Davis and his delegation returned to The Bahamas, on November 5, 2021, from the World Leaders Summit which formed part of ‘COP26’, the ‘UN Conference on Climate Change’ in Glasgow, Scotland. He also held a press conference at the Lynden Pindling International Airport, where he read a press statement and answered questions from the media concerning the event. (BIS Photos / Eric Rose)