Remarks by

The Hon. Tommy Turnquest, M.P.
Minister of National Security

At Opening Ceremony

for

Tourism Security Specialized Training Course

9:00 a.m.
14th November, 2011

Paul H. Farquharson Conference Center
Police Headquarters, East Street
New Providence, The Bahamas

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Salutations:

- Permanent Secretary, Ministry of National Security - Mr. Carl Smith
- Country Representative, Office of the General Secretariat Organization of American States - Mrs. Juliette Mallet-Philip
- CICTE Secretariat Programme Manager - Mr. Alejandro Diaz de Leon and other Course Facilitators
- Commissioner of Police - Mr. Ellison Greenslade,
- Deputy Commissioner of Police - Mr. Quinn McCartney,
- Assistant Commissioners and other Police Officers
- Executive Vice-President, Bahamas Hotel Association Mr. Frank Comito,
- Senior Vice-President for Security at Kerzner International and Chairman BHA Tourism Safety and Security Network (TSSN) - Mr. Douglas Hanna,
- Other distinguished guests
- Members of the media
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

I am pleased to participate in this Opening Ceremony for the *Tourism Security Specialized Training Course*, facilitated by the Inter-American Committee on Terrorism of the Organisation of American States (CICTE) and the Government of The Bahamas, with the financial support of the Government of Canada.

The main objectives of this course are:

(i) to identify the realities and crime threats of tourism locations in The Bahamas and the specific needs for training;

(ii) to improve participants’ understanding of concrete tourism security challenges; and

(iii) to raise awareness of the need to improve communication and coordination between the public and private sectors on tourism security.
The most important economic feature of activities related to the tourism sector is that they contribute to three high-priority goals of the Government of The Bahamas: namely, the generation of employment; revenue receipts to the Consolidated Fund; and foreign-exchange earnings. In this regard, the tourism sector plays an important role as the driving force in our economic development. Indeed, the tourism sector alone provides over 50% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and is responsible for the employment of more than half of the Bahamian workforce.

By its very nature, tourism is a global and highly competitive industry. Further, tourism is highly sensitive to perceptions of danger and lack of safety and security. It is in this context that a lack of safety and security and incidences of crime represent a more serious threat to travel and tourism than any other negative factor.

Visitor safety and security are vital to providing quality tourism. More than any other economic activity, the success or failure of a tourism destination depends on that particular country being able to provide a safe and secure environment for visitors. This was highly evident in the aftermath of the tragic terrorist events of 9/11 (11th September, 2001) when The Bahamas saw a significant reduction in the number of visitors to our shores with its consequential devastating effect upon our economy.

Again, safety and security play a major role in making travel choices. Indeed, peace is the best friend of travel and tourism while crime and insecurity are among its worst enemies. Hence, this training course on Tourism Security is of high priority as we must ensure that all of those who
are on the front line in providing security services in the tourism industry are well trained to effectively and efficiently respond to situations that may threaten the safety and security of our visitors.

The Bahamas has an enviable perception of being a safe country, and this is among our major assets as a tourist destination. It is a factor that has served us well and is expected to remain with us in the future only if we continue to ensure that visitor security is among our top priorities. However, we cannot be complacent, since there is an emerging consensus that crime - which raises safety and security issues - is a growing concern among tourism stakeholders who fear the potential damage that it may inflict on the perception of safety and, by extension, actually damage the industry.

Another area of concern is that of visitor harassment, which also impacts on the tourist's sense of safety. We must recognize that what matters most is the visitor's perception of harassment with all the negative aspects that such unhappy experiences are normally associated with. To this end, we must make certain that action is taken to contain visitor harassment.

The Government of the Bahamas fully understands the importance of having in place proper safety and security measures for the tourism sector. Through the collaborative efforts of the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Tourism and the private sector, we have taken steps to enhance security in the areas most frequented by visitors.

There is a well trained and highly equipped Tourism Police Unit, staffed with uniformed and plain clothes officers, that focuses on highly
trafficked visitor and resort areas. The Ministry of Tourism also has in place “Ask Me” Tourism Ambassadors who have easy and coordinated communications contact with the Tourism Police Unit to ensure prompt response in emergency situations.

During this calendar year alone more than $14 million has been spent on providing resources to the Police Force, inclusive of patrol cars, protective gear, bicycles and communication equipment, and the Tourism Police Unit has been fully resourced.

Additionally, the Government will shortly extend the use of close circuit television (CCTV) from its current coverage areas on Prince George Wharf, downtown areas and other frequently visited tours and attraction sites to encompass all major crime “hot spots” in New Providence. CCTV devices serve as both a deterrent and as a means of swiftly bringing offenders to justice. Notably, use of these surveillance measures has already resulted in the capture and prosecution of individuals who have committed crimes in our tourist areas.

It is in the interest of all that we [the government, law enforcement agencies and the wider community] co-ordinate our efforts and co-operate fully to ensure safety and security. We must recognize that when the environment is safe, the visitor is also safe. With an emphasis on security, the tourism industry is poised to continue to thrive despite the recovering economies worldwide.
I take this opportunity to commend The Bahamas Hotel Association’s (BHA) ‘Tourism Safety and Security Network’ for the pilot program it has launched in three (3) New Providence High Schools where high school students can attain certification under its Safety and Security Officer Program (SSOP). The proactive step taken by the BHA is indicative of the importance that it rightly place on safety and security and the necessity to have well trained persons engaged to provide such services in the industry.

The Government of The Bahamas has benefited significantly from training initiatives organized by CICTE and has partnered with CICTE to host a number of workshops aimed at promoting security in the region, through capacity building and training exercises.

By the end of this calendar year, some $265,000 would have been expended by CICTE on training activities that have taken place in The Bahamas or with participants from The Bahamas. These training activities have covered areas related to Maritime Security, Cyber Security, Aviation Security, Security of Major Events, Legislative Assistance and Combating Terrorism Financing, Document Security and Fraud Prevention and Tourism Security.

On behalf of the Government of The Bahamas, I wish to thank CICTE and the entire OAS organization for its continuing support of The Bahamas in its efforts to ensure the peace and safety of our citizens and visitors alike.

It therefore gives me great pleasure to officially open this training course, and I trust that all will fully participate in order to derive maximum
benefits. I am confident that the information shared will be most beneficial to you as we seek to ensure the safety and security in The Bahamas for visitors and citizens alike.

I thank you.