

## **PRESS CONFERENCE WITH ZNS 11<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST, 2020 AT 11AM.**

On 14th August, 2018 I officially assumed the Office of Confirmed Director of Bahamas Immigration, Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

From inception, it was very evident we had many challenges to overcome but I've never been one to shy away from a challenge.

My background is in Law Enforcement and so it is a natural transition for persons of my level of experience and training to be proactive, as opposed to being reactive to any situation.

1. At the conclusion of 2018 - My newly appointed Research and Planning Unit produced a groundbreaking ANNUAL REPORT for the Agency, which clearly displayed all that we had achieved over the year 2018. The records will reflect our tremendous successes, for your information. (A copy is available for your viewing, as is a copy of our Annual Report 2019).
2. In 2019 Our Agency's Main Goals were clearly spelt out from our Annual Report 2018 and practically every goal we had control over were achieved and then, 1st September 2019 brought in the devastating Hurricane DORIAN at Category (5) five, which changed the entire dynamics of the Nation in a very unique way.
3. In response, My Agency was practically the 1st set of "Boots on the Ground" both in Abaco and on Grand Bahama, with rashings, relief and senior support staff to lend support to our badly battered and in instances traumatized resident teams. That was pro-activity!

Clinical Psychologist Dr. Greg Swann was employed as a retainer on Grand Bahama and Reverend Palacios was engaged in New Providence for the support of all our Officers and their respective families affected by Dorian, where they thought necessary.

4. Throughout the ensuing 3rd quarter of that year and early into 2020, the Government suspended enforcement Efforts and repatriations for humanitarian purposes and rightly so.
5. As fate would have it, for months there were no illegal landings that affected our nation.
6. In March of 2020, enforcement efforts resumed as the first set of illegal migrants landed on South Inagua. Our enforcement operations resumed likewise, in response. We returned to our previous protocol of arresting; processing; capturing biometrics of offenders; placing them before the Courts on whatever island they were captured on; conducting lawful trials by a visiting magistrate, and upon securing convictions for adults, (We do not charge children) repatriating said migrants from the island upon which they were found, via our National Flag Carrier. This proved very effective and any convicted migrants discovered returning to our country illegally, faced jail time as repeat offenders. Due to Biometrics taken at initial arrests, any and all repeat offenders were easily identified, via our very effective digital border system.
7. In March, the nation became afflicted by the dreaded COVID-19 Pandemic and the Agency was forced to once again become proactive in providing safety and protection for staff and

customers alike, at all our local ports of entries but more specifically, for our front line officers who are exposed daily to physical interactions with others.

8. Immediately following the Government's shut down in May 2020, we focused as an Agency on staff safety by employing the following initiatives, as staff and customers were disallowed into our work environment:
  - a) Installation of standing sanitization stations at Ports of Entries, HQ, and Monarch House
  - b) Providing Plexiglas at all major Ports of Entries and Lynden Pindling International Airport (LPIA). On Grand Bahama at the C. A. Smith Building, the building by design was equipped with Protective Glass, however, at FPO Harbor and GB International Airport, Plexiglas were installed.
  - c) At our New Providence Hawkins Hill Location and Monarch House (Citizenship and Permanent Residence high traffic areas) the Department's very first digital wall mounted infrared Thermometers were installed for staff and customer edification. Temperature checks are now mandatory, for the protection of staff and preservation of our sterile environment with another is en route to the Grand Bahama District.
  - d) Hand Held Thermometer devices were issued at less heavily trafficked areas, serving the very same purpose for staff and customer protection.
  - e) Every Station/Unit has been issued adequate supplies/complete PPEs, consisting of gloves, masks, hand sanitizers, face shields, medical gowns, caps and booties as well as PPE's given to Enforcement, Escort and frontline at risk Officers.

It is important to note that all of the above listed were done prior to re-opening of our doors to customers on Government's direction 29th June, 2020.

In the family of islands, it is the normal practice for family island Administrators, in conjunction with all family island stakeholders, including Government Officers in charge, Immigration being no exception, to meet and identify any and or all needs, exclusive to their individual environments and where unavailable, those needs are conveyed by COMPSTAT or phone if urgent, by Officers in Charge to the OIC Family Islands Assistant Director Dwight Beneby and his able bodied Deputy - Superintendent King-Burrows, who supply those needs; that is protocol.

Prior to re-opening our offices to staff and customers, acting in consultation with Government's Environmental Health Agency, our main headquarters/Mount Royal House and Monarch House were fogged and sanitized by professional cleaning services, air-conditioning ducts and systems included

This Director has an Open Door Policy and as such engages via website, whatsApp or email, subordinate staff regularly for interaction and motivational talks where necessary. In this COVID-19 environment, Zoom meetings and WebEx have substituted for physical meetings, still very effectively, for obvious reasons.

Bi-monthly WEBEX meetings are now conducted for **ALL AGENCY** Heads, Family Island heads included, for continuity and fact finding discussions.

On 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2020, a nationwide seminar on protocols, policies and procedures for dealing with suspected COVID-19 patients was conducted via WEBEX by the Government's COVID-19 Task Force, hosted by Dr. Brennan and Dr. Rolle. In attendance were all Family Island heads of the Immigration Department, all Senior Executives and a representative from all ranks of the Agency, for educational purposes. Said Seminar lasted for one (1) hour and thirty-six (36) minutes, after which, questions and answers period was conducted.

A similar seminar was conducted on the island of Grand-Bahama, hosted by the Government's foremost Authority on the island in the person of Dr. Bartlett. Said seminar was conducted at the C. A. Smith Building, involving all Immigration Officers available at that time but more specifically those suspected exposed to a migrant inmate suspected to have been COVID-19 positive.

### **Migrant Interdictions.**

As you are aware, the Immigration Department is responsible for the management of the Carmichael Road Detention Centre and as such, our officers are mandated to perform shift duties 24/7 on normal (8) eight hour shift systems.

This area also houses our K9 Officers and Enforcement Unit.

Our protocols in this current COVID-19 era were reviewed proactively, for staff protection and are as follows:

1. When a suspect/s is taken into custody by any other Law Enforcement Agency on land or sea in New Providence or Grand Bahama, said migrant **MUST** be cleared by the COVID-19 Task Force on those respective islands, prior to coming into our protective custody
2. All such persons once cleared are initially isolated from any other detainee in the Refusals Dorm, to avoid physical interaction, for a period of fourteen (14) days and carefully monitored by on site medical personnel for any symptoms while in our custody. On the family islands the local medical Personnel are engaged to conduct clearances and assessments of such persons.
3. Visitations at the Detention Centre are suspended for detainees' medical protection and that of staff, other than by appointment to legal representatives and embassy representatives, once applied for in writing and approved by the Director or the OIC of Operations.
4. Collect Phone calls are allowed by appointment and all others considered, at the discretion of on duty Unit Commanders.

5. Once processed and placed before the Courts, the Magisterial Orders are executed post haste, once the home country approves the return of their citizen.
6. Unfortunately, there have been incidents of recent repatriations where our escorting officers have been mandatorily placed into fourteen (14) days quarantine. That number sat at thirty-one (31) as of yesterday 9th August, 2020, inclusive of twentytwo (22) on Grand Bahama and nine (9) in New Providence.

**Our positive COVID-19 Count today sits at seven (7). COVID-19 Testing continues.**

All of our affected officers on Grand Bahama and New Providence and their respective families have been advised of the availability of the Department retained services of Clinical Psychologist Dr. Greg Swann, for their exclusive group and or individual support as they deem necessary. I personally took the liberty as Director to open session one for our Officers in prayer, as I likewise was in session too, for the personal benefit of all our afflicted Officers. Grand Bahama and New Providence quarantined Officers participated via WEBEX.

I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge the fact that as late as week before last, I personally met with and entertained the president of The Bahamas Customs, Immigration and Allied Workers Union, Chief Immigration Officer Sloan Smith at my invite, in my Hawkins Hill Office; whereupon we engaged in amicable discussions for no less than two (2) hours of dialogue on a number of very relevant and thought provoking issues, and at NO TIME did the president indicate any outstanding concerns of particular, with respect to a lack of medical equipment or otherwise in our family of islands.

I am of the opinion that much has positively changed in this Agency since my assumption of Office and while this very serious issue of COVID-19 plagues us as a people and indeed a world, there will be issues of concern that will arise and require decisions, as such matters remain fluid!

If there are pressing matters that concern any officer or area under the management of any of my four (4) Assistant Directors, I am confident, if allowed the opportunity, the same can and will be addressed. As executives, my Assistant Directors are so empowered to act in the interest of our most important resource, our staff.

I further wish to advise that at present our Agency services remain available to our customers, though in lockdown at phone numbers: 242-604-0236 or 242-225-5337 for application updates or: [immigrationpublicrelationsunit@bahamas.gov.bs](mailto:immigrationpublicrelationsunit@bahamas.gov.bs)

For inquiries reference to Citizenship and Permanent Residency updates at phone numbers: 242-604-0256 or 242-604-0263 or email us at: [citizenshippr@bahamas.gov.bs](mailto:citizenshippr@bahamas.gov.bs)

For processing of extensions electronically for visitors: [www.immigration.gov.bs](http://www.immigration.gov.bs) under the COVID-19 Notices tab, labelled 20th April, 2020.

For electronic payments on approved permits: 242-502-0516 or email us at: [altheasmith@bahamas.gov.bs](mailto:altheasmith@bahamas.gov.bs)

For access to our Anti-Corruption, Intelligence and Complaints Unit anonymously Contact us at: [immigration.gov.bs](http://immigration.gov.bs)  
(Select Complaints and remain anonymous)

**Note: These numbers and websites also apply to Grand Bahama, Abaco and All Family Island Inquiries likewise.**

I wish to take this opportunity to thank our New Permanent Secretary in the Ministry Ms. Janice Miller for hitting the ground running as our Executive Leader in the Ministry and our Hon. Minister Mr. Ellsworth N. Johnson for his support likewise.

I likewise wish to thank our hard working, dedicated officers and civilian staff who have rendered exceptional services to our nation, in spite of the ravages and setbacks, of this COVID-19 pandemic.

In these trying times, there will always be voices of dissent that seek to create mischief - I say, let calmer heads prevail, in the interest of this nation.

We invite all and sundry to visit our Agency's website at: [www.immigration.gov.bs](http://www.immigration.gov.bs) for constant Agency and COVID-19 updates, as well as interactive conversations on any matters of mutual interest.

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Our population currently at the Detention Centre sits as follows:

1. Twenty-five (25) Chinese Nationals
2. Eight (8) from Cameroonians
3. Four (4) Nigerians
4. One (1) from Sierra Leone
5. One (1) Gambian
6. Two (2) Indians
7. Three (3) Jamaicans
8. One (1) Romanian
9. Two (2) Columbians
10. Eleven (11) Cubans
11. One (1) American
12. One (1) Frenchman
13. One (1) from Kazakhstan
14. Sixty-one (61) migrant inmates in custody!