



# News Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Civil Society Bahamas

## **Civil Society Bahamas Public Statement on Electoral Reform – It is Not Too Late!**

Civil Society Bahamas (CSB) speaks to the nation in the spirit of the historic ethos of civil society as the conscience of a society, demonstrating the empathy and selflessness of the 'Good Samaritan'. The signs which point to the imminence of a general election should not only provoke excitement and euphoria, but also reflection and a focus on fundamentals! A general election is a trumpet call not just for potential change, but more importantly for an evaluation of stewardship on the part of every bona fide citizen, ordinary or policy contributor/implementer, every leader, current or aspirant. Evaluation based on what? Current and proposed political platforms? No. An evaluation based on our national foundation and values enshrined in the Constitution of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas, especially its Preamble, our 'National Bill of Rights', our de facto, already approved though largely dormant, succinct National Plan. Proposals for electoral reform should be directly evaluated against the principles in The Preamble:

- An independent Boundaries Commission as guarantor against the manipulation of political slavery or bondage;
- Accompanying enumeration of voters for transparency beyond permanent registration;
- Campaign Finance Reform which honours unity rather than eroding it through financial advantage and
- Consolidation of democracy by mandatory responsiveness to citizen needs through Member of Parliament Recall.

We ask the nation: Are your politics and parties contributing to reinforcing the foundation stones of our Preamble, or dislodging them as deemed archaic and worthless? Is the superstructure of this foundation Category 5+ resistant or the facade

of a movie set? We still have time to repair the breaches, and contribute to building a nation whose strength, design and longevity can rival the pyramids!

To this end, Civil Society Bahamas reiterates and recommends the following planks for an Electoral Charter for Good Governance:

**A. Amendment of the Constitution to:**

- **Enshrine the Right to Vote;**
- **Establish an Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), initially by Act of Parliament, as a constitutional Commission, and replacing the Parliamentary Registration Department and**
- **Provide for the enumeration of voters to replace the registration of voters.**

**B. Composition of the IEBC to consist of nine (9) Commissioners, appointed by the Governor General with two (2) Commissioners to be recommended by the Prime Minister; two (2) Commissioners to be recommended by the Leader of the Opposition, and four (4) Commissioners to be recommended by Civil Society Organisations and the ninth Commissioner to be the Chairperson of the Commission, on recommendation of the eight appointed Commissioners.**

**C. Commissioners to be appointed to ten (10) year terms, except in the first instance, when four (4) of the Commissioners will be appointed to seven (7) year terms.**

**D. All expenses necessary for the functioning of the Commission to come from the Consolidated Fund.**

**E. All Political Parties must register with IEBC.**

**F. All Independent Candidates must register with the IEBC.**

**G. Terms of reference of the IEBC shall also include:**

**(i) Refinement of the Permanent Register of Voters by:**

- **Cross-referencing with the Register of Births and Deaths and the Records of the Bahamas Department of Correctional Services, for regular removal of the deceased and prisoners.**
- **Prior publishing of names before removal.**
- **Restoring names of persons who had their voting privileges suspended because of being sentenced to prison, once they have completed their sentence.**
- **Updating voter's cards and election materials.**
- **Maintenance of an accessible online register of voters.**
- **Consistent enumeration by trained enumerators.**
- **Confirmation or delineation of constituency boundaries every ten (10) years, in conjunction with the Census to eliminate gerrymandering.**
- **Public access to meetings of the Commission.**

**(ii) Creation of a website whose data shall include the complete Register of Voters.**

**(iii) Campaign Finance Reform with the following checks and balances:**

- **A limit on the amount a candidate or political party can spend individually, or in combination, on an election in a New Providence constituency with a slightly larger amount to be allowed for a Family Island constituency.**
- **A limit on the amount that a candidate can spend of his/her own money on an election campaign to ensure that elections are not reserved for, or 'bought' by wealthy individuals.**
- **Only Bahamian citizens can make financial contributions to candidates and political parties.**
- **Candidates and political parties to report annually to IBEC on all contributions received, and how the money was spent. Reporting to list the names of contributors, the amount of the contribution, and the date the contribution was received. The spending report will state the amount of the expenditure, the name of the recipient of the expenditure, and the services or goods received and the date of the expenditure.**
- **Reports to be published by the end of January each year, and a special report will be issued within two months after an election.**
- **The amounts of contributions to be agreed and political parties will be fined for violations of the campaign finance regulations.**
- **Party officials and candidates to be subjected to fines for gross violations of regulations, as well as imprisonment.**

**H. Accountability by Members of Parliament for their stewardship in accordance with the following Recall provisions:**

- **Twenty-five per cent (25%) of the registered voters of a constituency sign a recall petition within a period of ten (10) consecutive working days.**
- **Once the signatures have been verified by the Commission, the Member of Parliament will have to resign, and a By-Election held.**
- **The recalled Member of Parliament will be able to be a Candidate in the By-Election.**

**I. To improve political representation candidates are to be selected by the members of the constituency. The main loyalty of a Member of Parliament would then be to constituents, since it would be they who would determine his/her continuation as a candidate. The process of candidate selection for constituencies should, therefore, be removed from Central Councils to overcome perceived primary loyalty to the political party.**

The Bahamas has been shaken nationally by Dorian. She has been shaken doubly with the world by the Pandemic, COVID-19. Our Constitution, particularly, its Preamble, is not only inspirational, but prophetic. It speaks to our shakings: the response Bahamas is not "Reset", but "Return"! Your third chance is your upcoming general election. March on Bahamaland to a common, loftier goal! Carpe Diem!