

HON. KENRED DORSETT, M.P.,
MINISTER OF THE ENVIRONMENT
AND HOUSING

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

PAUL H. FARQUHARSON CONFERENCE CENTRE
THE ROYAL BAHAMAS POLICE FORCE
HEADQUARTERS
22ND APRIL, 2015

NASSAU, BAHAMAS

SALUTATION:

- Judges
- United States Embassy Official
- Father Hugh Bartlett
- Mr. Romi Ferreira, proprietor of Ferriera & Company Environmental Attorneys and Consultants
- Teachers
- Students
- Ladies and Gentlemen

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Today is the 45th anniversary of EARTH DAY, and its organizers have chosen to focus on the role of leadership in forging meaningful links between economic growth and sustainability.

Kevin Kruse, a contributor to Forbes Magazine, defines Leadership as “a process of social influence which maximises the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal “. Leaders are those who influence our emotions, opinions or behaviour through a persuasive line of reasoning to get us to give our best to produce a desired outcome to achieve a specific goal. That is the hallmark of good leaders.

In the annals of environmentalists, Senator Gaylord Nelson was a good leader who galvanized students in schools, local communities, wire services and the New York Times to hold a grassroots demonstration in 1970 to include environmental matters in political discussions. Through his leadership, he got 20 million Americans to share their concerns about their role in the environment, and from that year, the environment began to receive political attention. So you can see why the celebrants of Earth Day, along with some one billion people in 192 countries around the globe have chosen today to commemorate leadership.

Today is a day for inspiration and appreciation of the earth’s natural resources. The Earth Day Network contributed to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency in the United States, which led to the passage of the Clean Air,

Clean Water and Endangered Species Act. Now, with some 22,000 partners and organizations all over the world, the Earth Day Network continues to advocate for a healthy environment that can sustain life.

As part of its Global theme, “It’s Our Turn to Lead”, the Earth Day Network points to a new direction that includes showing citizens how they can -

- use clean energy solutions instead of fossil fuels;
- encourage their country to commit to a low carbon future;
- insist that governments think sustainably when considering ways to increase economic growth; and
- Urge government leaders in their country to pass the Climate Change Treaty in Paris at the end of the year.

The environment is of utmost importance to all of us as it underpins every single activity of life. Yet many children today are growing up without much direct interaction with the environment and with little appreciation of its beauties and even less awareness of the threats it faces. Like their counterparts worldwide, children in The Bahamas today are growing up indoors. Too much of their lives are spent in the virtual world of computers, computer games, social media and the like. We have seen the health of our children decline; and we have seen them plagued with attention difficulties, obesity, under utilization of their senses and hyperactivity. They have not been able to appreciate their Creator and all his creation. Many have become detached from Nature and as a result do not understand and value it. Sadly, many are unaware of the impact of negative behaviours on the environment, or how they can make a difference.

We need to all become excited by the endless possibilities of nature and then we will be more careful of how we treat our environment.

Our children have the biggest stake in the future. They will bear the consequences of economic, social and environmental decisions and actions that are not harmonious with nature. It is important for parents, teachers, and the community to equip our children with the knowledge and skills necessary to conduct our lives, including how we do business, in a manner that sustains our environment. This means getting them to change their attitudes about the environment in which they live and to acquire values that permit them to live healthy and sustainable lives. In our homes, at schools we must include consideration of the environment in all that we do and teach.

We live in a country where our biggest economic activity depends directly on a good, clean, pristine environment. That is how we market our islands. Yet during the Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 at the College of the Bahamas, soon to be University of The Bahamas, only 26 students enrolled into the environmental Bachelor's Degree Programme called *Small Island Sustainability*, while 335 students were enrolled for the Bachelors Degree programme in Biology with a minor in Chemistry. And in the other environmental courses, *Environment and Ecotourism* and *Environment, Ecotourism and Maritime*, only 19 students have been accepted in this area.

We know that environmental education engages students in learning, raising test scores and encouraging youths to pursue careers in the environment and natural resources. Environmental education has been known to –

- help children to perform better in math, language arts, science and social studies;
- build critical thinking and relationship skills;
- teach how to be real world problems solvers; and
- Make students become self-directed learners.

The Bahamian economy is built on the assets of our environment. So, teachers, could you make it your aim to place more attention on sensitizing our students to the environment? Can you find more time in your lesson plans to develop skills and confidence in our students to explore the outdoors and become good environmental stewards? There is a career for those engaged in environment sciences too. Your host for today is an attorney with a special focus on environment issues. The Government, under its National Scholarship Programme, provides financial support to students wishing to pursue environmental sciences abroad at other Universities. To date, consideration is given in the areas of Conservation Management, Geographic Information Systems and Marine studies.

It is no secret that an environmental priority and concern of the Government is the effect of climate change. 88% of our people live within 10 miles of the sea and if the sea level rises due to an increase in global temperature, we will lose 80% of our land. Interestingly, as a part of these celebrations, the Earth Day Network is hosting Climate Education Week from 18th - 25th April, 2015, which will engage students on the topic of climate change, renewable energy, green jobs and a green economy. They are encouraging teachers to equip students with the latest

information and to ask them to recommend solutions to climate change. The network also provides lesson plans, short videos, activities and service learning packs that teachers can use to help students understand the impact of climate change. Teachers are invited to visit the site www.climatechangeweek.org for more information.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Ministry of The Environment & Housing is looking for bright minds to work with the government in sustainable uses of the environment to propel the country forward. We have a number of competent officers who execute their jobs well and manage environmental projects effectively. However there are too few of them. The Ministry has been challenged to find the competent officers to give capable support and assistance to help move project activities forward. Right now, The Bahamas Environment Science and Technology Commission, an advisory body to the government, needs competent environmental officers. Another agency in the Ministry, the Forestry Department, requires officers to assist in preserving and protecting the forest trees of The Bahamas. We need Bahamians who have studied the following areas:

- Natural Resources;
- Protection and Conservation of the Environment;
- Coral reefs, blue holes and natural history specimens;
- Oil and natural gas exploration;
- Renewable Energy; and

- Sustainable Development.

This is why I was so keen to speak here today. I was impressed to learn of your participation in the Earth Day Challenge. I understand there are some 10 schools here and 2 are from the Family Islands. I was encouraged about the future of earth sciences in our country when I learnt that not only were you required to complete science projects, but you have to defend them and also find out if there were any laws that encouraged the activities of your project. So now you can point out weaknesses to the Government and help us to make laws to support the environmental projects you studied!

I believe that participating in this environmental competition brought you benefits that you could never capture in a classroom. I'm sure many of you now have a greater appreciation for the environment, and understand some of the environmental challenges and issues our country faces every day. Perhaps, the most valuable life lesson learnt was the importance of working together as teams.

I wish to thank Ferreira and Company for this initiative, and the United States Embassy for sponsoring this event. Teachers and staff, I also commend you for the support and assistance given to students to bring out their best during the competition. Because of your collective efforts, The Bahamas has contributed to "Two Billion Acts of Green."

You are never too young to lead – your peers, your schools, your communities and your society. Felix Finkbeiner, an 11 year old German boy is an example of a young leader. Two years ago, his teacher asked his class to give presentations on the climate crisis. Felix had no idea how to do a Powerpoint presentation, and his parents were unable to assist. Nevertheless, Felix did research. He learnt about

Wangari Maathai, the coordinator of the Green Belt Movement, who planted some one million trees in Africa. So he figured that he could do the same in Germany. With help from his parents, he started planting trees. Recognizing that each tree absorbs 10 kilos of carbon dioxide a year from the atmosphere, Felix decided that he would begin to give presentations on carbon justice. He explained carbon justice as the right of every person in the world to pollute the air with 2 tons of carbon. He formed a network of climate ambassadors who had to make one presentation per month and plant trees in their schools. So far, Felix has helped to plant 290,000, and 550,000 trees have been pledged by nearby communities which he and his ambassadors will plant for the rest of the year. Felix's activities are leadership in action.

So, students, are you leaders? What can you do to help your environment right here in The Bahamas? I strongly recommend that you -

1. Write to the Ministry of the Environment and Housing and
 - a. state your solutions to climate change; and
 - b. your reasons why the Government should support the Paris Climate Treaty.

2. Organize a network to plant a native species garden at your school and in your community. Studies have shown that schools that have more tree cover have less students with asthma and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

3. Lead a recycling drive at your school for glass, plastic and aluminium cans and collect some money for your school for Cans for Kids;
4. Conduct an energy audit and make recommendations to the principal on how the school can save money by saving energy.
5. Ask your principal to organize an eco-fair with businesses and environmental organizations in The Bahamas to help students learn more about the environment.
6. Lead a beach or park clean-up campaign.
7. Have an Environmental Officer come in to talk about climate change, the importance to your school and how students can reduce their carbon footprint.

AS I conclude, let me share a story with you. One morning a man was walking down a beach covered with dying starfish. The tide the night before was very strong and thousands of starfish were washed up on the shore, too far up for

them to make it back into the water by themselves. The man shook his head as he thought it was a shame that all of those starfish would die on the beach.

He came upon a boy who was throwing starfish back into the ocean as fast as he could. He was out of breath and it was obvious that he had been doing this for a while. "Son," the man said, "you might as well quit. There are thousands of them. They are washed up all over the beach as far as you can see. There is no way you can make any sort of a difference."

The boy did not even pause in what he was doing. He kept bending and throwing, but as he did, he spoke to the man, "I can make a difference to this one, and this one, and this one." The man thought, and he knew the boy was right. He began to help return the animals to their home, smiling at how life's biggest lessons sometimes came from the smallest people."

I ask you: Who was the leader? The man or the boy?

As you view the environmental exhibits, remember this story because students, it is your turn to lead!

The question is, Will you?

Happy Earth Day!