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ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS
SECTOR POLICY
2020 - 2023

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Preface

The Communications Act, 2009 (Comms Act) sets out the framework for the regulation of electronic communications in The Bahamas and recognises that electronic communications play an integral role in sustainable development and the economic and social welfare of The Bahamas.

The Government of The Bahamas (the Government), mindful that electronic communications hold a key position in the socio-economic development of The Bahamas has outlined in this Electronic Communications Sector Policy (ECS Policy) its vision and objectives for the Electronic Communications Sector (ECS) in The Bahamas.

The purpose of this ECS Policy is to:

- set out the Government's policy objectives for the ECS for the period from 2020 to 2023;
- to provide the policy framework which ensures alignment/support to the ICT Policy Objectives of the Government;
- inform all stakeholders, including the public, businesses providing electronic communications services, persons wishing to provide such services, and other interested persons, of the Government's policy objectives in relation to the ECS; and
- to guide the sector regulator, the Utilities Regulation and Competition Authority (URCA), in the performance of its duties and responsibilities under the Comms Act to ensure that its regulation of the ECS is consistent with the Government's policy objectives.

This ECS Policy will remain in force for three (3) years, subject to the right of the Government, in the interim, to amend or revise this ECS Policy as may be necessary or appropriate to respond to changes in the ECS, or to international developments that impact the ECS. This policy document will be reviewed and revised, as necessary, in accordance with the process set out in the Comms Act.

Introduction

1. Broadly, the vision of the Government is to create an environment in which opportunities are provided for development and achievement of higher levels of economic independence of residents, and the full potential of the people of The Bahamas is realised.
2. In pursuit of that vision, in September 2015, along with an overwhelming majority of the United Nations member states, The Bahamas ratified the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledges that information communications technologies (ICTs) play a significant role in attaining the developmental goals of a country by facilitating *“the spread of information and communication technology and enhancing global interconnectedness. The spread of ICTs and enhanced global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress, to bridge the digital divide and to develop knowledge societies”*.² Hence, the Government has committed to advancing the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
3. Notwithstanding its commitment to advance the SDGs, the Government is mindful of the challenges the country faces with achieving sustainable development goals. For example, as a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), The Bahamas is challenged with socio-economic and cultural divides throughout the islands, especially in the more remote settlements.
4. The Government reaffirms its commitment to upholding and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), six of which the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) has focused on as being achievable through the strategic use of ICTs. It is in this context that this ECS Policy document articulates the role that electronic

¹ Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015.

² 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/intlcoop/sdgs/default.aspx>

communications³ must play in the promotion, development and adoption of ICTs in The Bahamas in:

- (a) Ending Poverty in all its forms (Goal 1);
- (b) Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (Goal 4);
- (c) Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (Goal 5);
- (d) Building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and fostering innovation (Goal 9);
- (e) Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (Goal 16); and
- (f) Strengthening the means of implementation and revitalisation of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development (Goal 17).⁴

5. The Government is committed to ensuring that the poor and vulnerable have equal rights and access to basic services including appropriate technology. For this to occur, the continued development of the ECS and ICTs must remain at the forefront of the Government's agenda.

6. The Bahamas has developed as a leader in two key sectors, Tourism and Financial Services, which have to date been the pillars of our economy. It is the intention of the Government to implement targeted initiatives, which establish technology and

³ Electronic communications, as defined in the Comms Act, means the "conveyance, by the use of electrical, magnetic or electromagnetic energy, of signals of any description" and the electronic communications sector (ECS) comprises "the economic sector encompassing the provision of all electronic communications". Electronic communications services include mobile and fixed voice telephony, data communications, two-way radio communications, paging, television and radio broadcasting.

⁴ The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, The United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), a Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), United Nations.

innovation, including ICTs and ICT innovation, as no less than the third pillar of the Bahamian economy. The Government will do this through initiatives, which stimulate technology investment in The Bahamas, train and develop indigenous Bahamian talent to drive Bahamian innovation in new technologies, and create an enabling environment within which these new technologies and innovation can flourish, centered on a national and regional technology hub, which we will establish in Grand Bahama. We will leverage the robust ICT sector, which will be the core of this third pillar of our economy, to create social and economic improvements, which will underpin the Government's development agenda, as set out in Annex I to this Policy.

7. Electronic communications are at the core of the ICT sector. The ECS forms the backbone infrastructure supporting the development of ICTs, and therefore the social and economic progress of The Bahamas. Access of persons to ICTs enabled by affordable and effective electronic communications delivers opportunities for our communities to participate in the economic and social activities in the country. Connectivity is the catalyst for the empowerment of residents. It is through connectivity that a knowledge-based society is built, and learning, communication and trade facilitated. In the current global environment, "connected" is defined as having access to basic telephony services and a high-speed broadband internet connection.⁵ The Government, therefore, formulates its policy for the ECS with this in mind.
8. It is noted that the basic objectives of the Comms Act clearly envisaged the role of the ECS in achieving sustainable development in The Bahamas, and Section 4 of the Comms Act outlines the following objectives for the ECS Policy:

To further the interest of consumers by promoting competition and in particular:

⁵ Recommendation I.113 of the ITU Standardization Sector defines broadband as a "transmission capacity that is faster than primary rate Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN) at 1.5 or 2.0 Megabits per second (Mbps)". Retrieved from <https://www.itu.int/osg/spu/publications/birthofbroadband/faq.html>

- (i) enhancing the efficiency of the Bahamian electronic communication sector and the productivity of the Bahamian economy;
- (ii) promoting investment and innovation in electronic communications networks and services;
- (iii) encouraging, promoting and enforcing sustainable competition in the sector; and,
- (iv) promoting the optimal use of state assets, including radio spectrum.

To further the interests of persons in The Bahamas in relation to the electronic communications sector by:

- (i) promoting affordable access to high-quality networks and carriage services in all regions of The Bahamas;
- (ii) maintaining public safety and security;
- (iii) contributing to the protection of personal privacy;
- (iv) limiting public nuisance through electronic communications;
- (v) limiting any adverse impact of networks and carriage services on the environment; and
- (vi) promoting the availability of a wide range of content services which are of high quality.

9. To achieve these objectives, the Government, through the ECS, will continue to seek a balance between the need to safeguard consumers through relevant policies, effective regulation, and the desire to provide incentives for investment in innovation, new technologies and services. In doing so, the Government seeks to establish and promote a policy framework that both prevent anticompetitive behaviour and encourages the development of the sector to bring variety and choice of high-quality services to residents of The Bahamas at rates that reflect value for money. The established policy

and regulatory framework must strike a balance between regulatory oversight and commercial freedom.

10. The ECS requires modern and progressive regulatory oversight to ensure that the sector and national resources are managed for optimal development and utility. As per the Comms Act, URCA's mandate includes responsibility for the regulation of all forms of electronic communications (including telecommunications, broadcasting and spectrum management). The legislation empowers URCA with a broad range of regulatory faculties, including competition and merger control powers, which are to be applied consistently and transparently.⁶
11. URCA's primary mandate in relation to the ECS is to further the interests of residents and consumers in The Bahamas through the introduction and regulation of sustainable competition in the sector.⁷ URCA is also responsible for the efficient management of state assets such as the electromagnetic spectrum and national numbering resources.
12. It is noted that while the overall independence of the sector regulator is a key feature of the regulatory framework established in the Comms Act, there are some aspects of the regulatory framework such as the formulation of this ECS Policy, the approval of the National Spectrum Plan, and certain aspects of the universal service framework in which, for policy reasons, the Government maintains a level of involvement in regulatory decision making.
13. Now, within the above context, the Government sets out below its policy imperatives for the ECS.

⁶ URCA is accountable for its budget and actions in a transparent framework of legal provisions and published policies and regulations. URCA is tasked with establishing processes and procedures that ensure consistency, transparency and proportionality of its actions.

⁷ URCA must exercise its regulatory powers in accordance with sound administrative principles. A robust system providing opportunity for examination has been put in place allowing for review of decisions by URCA that affect the rights of parties. The Utilities Appeals Tribunal (UAT), established by the Utilities Appeal Tribunal Act, 2009, has been constituted for the purpose of determining such appeals.)

The Electronic Communications Sector Policy Imperatives

Having regard for the Government's development strategies as outlined above and in Annex 1, and in support of the Government's vision for The Bahamas' social and economic development, the Government hereby establishes the following policy imperatives for the ECS in The Bahamas:

Overarching Imperatives

14. The Government's overarching policy is for ECS is to underpin the development of The Bahamas by:
 - (i) Ensuring that people and businesses in all parts of The Bahamas can access a broad range of high-quality electronic communications services. These services should, as far as possible, be on par with the services available in developed countries. Further, the services should be available at prices and with terms and conditions that are typical of an efficient and competitive ECS.
 - (ii) Supporting the Government's development on the island of Grand Bahama of a Centre for Technology, Innovation and Entrepreneurship that will create new sustainable technology-based industries to inspire economic growth and development on that island and throughout The Bahamas.
 - (iii) Delivering a level of connectivity to Government institutions and the public which supports electronic government (e-government), that is, the fully digitized, integrated delivery of Government services to the public across The Bahamas.
 - (iv) Delivering access to content and electronic communications services at prices which are affordable to all persons in The Bahamas, and in particular:
 - specific basic essential electronic communications services should be available free of charge to institutions of social and educational importance; and

- key services, including broadband access, must be available at rates, which are affordable to all persons, which necessarily means free of charge to particularly economically and socially vulnerable groups in the society (though possibly on shared platforms).
- (iii) Providing key institutions in the public and private sector with access to robust high quality domestic and international electronic communications capable of withstanding natural disasters and supporting the governance, social and economic structures of The Bahamas. Key institutions include, inter alia, government and law enforcement institutions, healthcare institutions and educational institutions.
15. The Government notes the critical role Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) can play in Government's development strategies for The Bahamas. It is therefore a priority that URCA establishes a regulatory framework/regime that supports market entry of IXPs in The Bahamas. The goal of the regime is to reduce or minimize any regulatory impediments to the market entry of local IXPs, which the Government believes will enhance the attainment of its policy imperatives.
16. Since the inception of URCA, Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) has been a statutory obligation and a policy objective. While the Government acknowledges the considerable effort URCA has made in the past, the need to establish the regulatory framework to facilitate this necessary transformation of the broadcasting industry is extremely important. The Government views the introduction of PSB as a vital next step in the diversification of traditional radio and television services in the country and encourages URCA to continue its regulatory work toward achieving that objective.
17. The Government notes the relatively small number of players in the ECS and is mindful of the scope for anti-competitive behaviour by providers with market power that is significant. URCA is therefore charged to be vigilant in guarding against behaviours, which are anti-competitive and inconsistent with the interests of consumers and the

country. To this end, the Government considers it appropriate that URCA continues, where consistent with the core objectives, to apply a regulatory approach which does not unduly restrict market entry or the commercial freedom of providers to:

- (i) Deliver media content to the viewing and listening public, which is consistent with the public interest and reflects and has regard to our cultural, social and moral values, while respecting the rights of individual persons to receive and impart opinions and to partake fully in the expression of socio-political, cultural and artistic expression.
- (ii) Provide all centres of tourism within The Bahamas a suite of electronic communications services, which is at least equivalent in range and quality to the services provided in the home countries of those visitors.
- (iii) Provide a reliant and robust electronic communications infrastructure, inclusive of radio, television, satellite and telephone systems, which ensures the continuous availability for critical communications systems during times of disaster.

18. The Government acknowledges that telecommunications services are critical to assisting with disaster mitigation and relief. The Government is aware that the Tampere Convention, an international treaty, establishes an international framework of cooperation that encourages states to *“reduce or remove regulatory barriers to the use of telecommunication resources for disaster mitigation and relief”*. The Government intends to, officially accede to the Tampere Convention and urges URCA to consider the treaty in its regulatory interventions in the ECS.

Revision of the Universal Service Obligations

19. In order to achieve the aims set out above, the Government considers that the universal services and obligations set out in the Comms Act must be updated to more closely align with the broad objectives outlined in this policy and current norms in international delivery of electronic communications services. Therefore, pursuant to

section 41(1) of the Comms Act, the universal services in The Bahamas are hereby revised to the following:

- A set of essential electronic communications services, delivered at affordable prices, which comprises:
 - Voice telephony access and services to all populated areas;
 - Broadband internet services offering transmission capacity that is faster than primary rate ISDN, at 1.5 or 2.0 Mbit/s⁸;
 - Public access pay apparatus enabled for the provision and maintenance of telephones and enabled for the provision of essential telephony services, where it is economically and technically feasible for such services to be made available;
 - Public access pay terminals at easily accessible locations throughout The Bahamas, offering both voice and data electronic communications; and
 - A multi-channel television service delivered to all populated areas in The Bahamas and comprising six-channels including any television service provided by the designated public service broadcaster, the Parliamentary Channel, and four other channels of local and regional relevance.
- The provision of relevant tools and mechanisms to ensure the ability of persons with disabilities to access all essential electronic communications services.
- The broadband service to all locations of specified institutions that serve members of the public shall meet the following requirements:
 - The bandwidth and capacity shall be based on the specific needs of the institution, proportionate to the institution's purpose and likely use of

⁸ http://www.itu.int/osg/spu/ip/chapter_seven.html

broadband, and the number of people served by the relevant location, in accordance with guidelines developed by URCA; and

- The broadband access to the specified institutions shall be free or available at subsidised rates in accordance with guidelines developed by URCA.
20. The establishment of revised universal services obligations in this ECS Policy shall not impose any new obligations on the current, or any universal service provider or other stakeholders in the ECS, unless and until the requisite designations of universal service provider are made by URCA, and a timeframe established for such designation to have effect in accordance with the Comms Act.⁹ Until such time, the designations and obligations contained in the Comms Act shall remain in force.
21. The Government considers that the foregoing obligations are well aligned with the policies set out herein, and are economically feasible, subject to URCA's responsibility to determine the details of implementation, including access to the Universal Service Fund where appropriate.

Consideration of Additional Mobile Competition

22. Having regard to the above imperatives, the Government will during the life of this policy consider whether and when further liberalisation of the cellular mobile market should be undertaken, and the manner and form any such liberalisation should take. The Government has asked URCA to provide advice and recommendations to the Government, including a feasibility and market analysis, to support any recommendations made. The Government has requested that advice to be produced by no later than 31 December 2021, following which the Government will make its

⁹ See Section 41 of the Comms Act.

decision. In the interim, the Government proposes to refrain from introducing further competition in the cellular mobile market.

International Participation

23. The Government aims to promote The Bahamas as a centre of excellence in the international ICT arena. Recognising that the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is the UN's specialisation body for ICT and noting that The Bahamas is a member state of ITU the Government believes that increasing the country's representation and participation at ITU meetings will promote the goal of being a centre of excellence in the international ICT arena. The Government, therefore, reaffirms its delegation to URCA of responsibility for representing the Government at the ITU in accordance with section 7(c) of the Comms Act.
24. The Bahamas is a member of the Organisation of American States (OAS), and participates in the OAS' arm relating to telecommunications, the Inter American Telecommunications Commission (CITEL). Pursuant to section 7(c) of the Comms Act, The Bahamas' participation in the activities of CITEL has recently been enhanced through the election of The Bahamas to CITEL's Permanent Executive Committee (COM/CITEL) at the CITEL Assembly in March 2018. URCA is requested to continue its work to represent The Bahamas at CITEL, subject to overall Government oversight.
25. The Bahamas is also a member of the British Commonwealth and CARICOM, both of which have telecommunications related bodies or groups, in the deliberations and activities of which The Bahamas either directly or through URCA participates and will continue to participate.
26. URCA is encouraged to continue to develop and engender relations with international organisations and regulatory bodies in other countries, with the goal of enhancing its regulatory activities and ensuring that The Bahamas benefits from international experiences and best practices in the regulation of the ECS.

27. URCA is exhorted by section 8 of the URCA Act to carry out its functions and exercise its powers in a manner that makes the best use of the economic and other resources available to it, and that is best calculated to promote the policy objectives. URCA, recognising that its resources represent a cost to the regulated entities, will continue to seek to ensure that the regulation of the ECS represents value for money to its stakeholders.

Duration

28. This Sector Policy shall remain in effect until replaced in the manner provided for under the Comms Act.
29. Amendments to this Sector Policy can be made during its term: (a) in accordance with the terms of the Comms Act; or (b) on a proposal by URCA and subject to the Minister's approval in accordance with the terms of the Comms Act in the case of unexpected changes of circumstance and/or to take account of technological advances and the evolution of the sector.

ANNEX 1 - Electronic Communications for National Development

National Development Plans

1. Creating a modern, digital society that facilitates the growth and expansion of the Bahamian economy is an obligation of the Government. While initiatives have been made to provide standalone digitized government services in the past, it has not served as the catalyst to transform the delivery of government services to the public. It is the Government's intention to establish a fully digitized, integrated process of delivering services to the public through the establishment of electronic government (e-government).
2. This e-government initiative is intended to revolutionize the work processes and is expected to begin with the Cabinet of The Bahamas. E-cabinet will serve as a demonstration of the Government's commitment to embrace Information Communications Technology (ICT) as a valuable resource to establish a digitally prepared society that's productive, efficient and responsive to the rapidly evolving technological advancements of the 21st. century and beyond.
3. Innovation through research and development is embracing emerging technologies in redefining the development of global societies. Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things and 5G technology are dominating the global technology conversation. Recognizing the value the technological advancements have had and will continue to have on societies, the Government is committed to establishing ICT as the country's third economic pillar.
4. Improving the footprint, quality and resilience of the ICT infrastructure in The Bahamas is central to the achievement of the Government's vision to enhance the quality of life for the Bahamian people. As it seeks sustainable development through the ECS, the Government will leverage the concept of the Smart Sustainable City into a strategy to

enhance the entire Bahamas through the use of technology, as a part of the broader national vision for the country's development. At the forefront of this vision are economic diversification, the improvement of public services, enhanced security, the enhancement of tourism, and better quality of life for the citizenry. The incorporation of emerging technologies, such as IMT-2020, 5G technologies and Internet of Things (IoT), will facilitate the development of a smart, sustainable society and thus will be integral to the development of The Bahamas. The Government will also encourage initiatives such as the establishment of data centres and formation of Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) which can facilitate and enhance the development of a smart, connected and sustainable Bahamas.

5. To this end, the island of Grand Bahama will be developed as a technology hub and the centre for development of the ICT industry in the country. The Government envisages Grand Bahama becoming the place where residents can confidently pursue careers in the fields of science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM) and information technology with confidence that their skills will be utilised. As part of the plans for the island and the country, students will be encouraged to explore careers in STEM. The creation of the technology hub will be the second limb in the technology and industrial development for Grand Bahama. Concomitant with the creation of the technology hub is the development of Grand Bahama as a cybersecurity centre. International technology companies will be incentivised to hold ICT conventions, annual meetings and corporate retreats on that island. Through the implementation of the provisions of the Commercial Enterprise Act, 2017 the business application processes will be streamlined, and immigration policy adapted to facilitate new technology enterprises.¹⁰
6. The Government's decision to establish a technology hub on the island of Grand Bahama provides for the creation of a Centre for Technology, Innovation and Entrepreneurship that will create new sustainable technology based industries to inspire economic growth and development on that island. This initiative will be anchored by an intentional effort

¹⁰ Remarks by Dr. The Honourable Hubert A. Minnis, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, Grand Bahama Technology Summit: Making Grand Bahama the Gateway to Technology, 9 November, 2017, Freeport, Grand Bahama.

- to attract technology specific conferences and events to Grand Bahama together with a consistent international campaign, introducing its new Immigration Policy that establishes a BH1B visa intended to attract ICT investors to help build the new economy. The initiative also seeks to target young Bahamians to work collaboratively with international experts as part of a mentoring and capacity building effort.
7. The Government will further consider the feasibility of additional and expanded entry in cellular mobile services. In the previous ESC policy, the Government promoted the introduction of competition in the mobile sector, a goal realised with the launch of services in 2016 by The Bahamas' second mobile operator. In the liberalisation process the Government delayed the consideration of third mobile operator for a period of no less than three years after the commercial launch of the second mobile operator, i.e., to October 2019.¹¹ The Government will review this issue, in conjunction with URCA during the life of this ECS Policy, to determine an appropriate policy position moving forward.
 8. The ECS is a crucial player in the Government's efforts to modernise public administration and, ultimately, the delivery experience within government services, as well as between the Government and users of its services. Through digitisation of the Bahamian economy, there should also continue to be an improvement in the services provided in the public sector as a whole.
 9. Recognising that the ECS is a sector in its own right, the Government will introduce incentives and new opportunities for development of the sector to increase investments in new technologies, infrastructure and services.
 10. A key challenge to ensuring that the ECS is achieving the necessary levels of service to support the social and economic development of the country is the lack of adequate, verifiable, information about services provided. During the life of this policy, the

¹¹ See Paragraph

Government will seek the establishment of targets to measure the extent to which services in the ECS are meeting the aims of this policy.

11. Strengthening the country's statistical capacity for the production of high quality, timely, reliable and disaggregated data, is particularly critical to supporting effective policy and decision-making and for ensuring the continuous review of the country's progress in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals¹². The Government will, through the respective agencies, collect and measure key statistics regarding the availability and usage of ECS services so that future policy documents will be able to set clear milestones and targets for the achievement of Government's policy objectives. This is consistent with the Government's approach for delivery of services across the economy moving forward.
12. The ECS is also a key enabler in other sectors, and as such, the Government envisions that the use of ICTs in various sectors of Bahamian life needs to be enhanced as part of its national development strategy, some tenets of which are outlined below.

Community Development

13. A primary objective of the Government is to assist in creating an environment in which education, training initiatives, creating sustainable jobs, and emphasising the continued development of Bahamian culture are priority. The vision for the Government's community development initiatives is to provide relevant information and knowledge to residents of The Bahamas. Therefore, the Government will use ICT's to facilitate community development and expand educational and training opportunities for residents. With that objective in mind, the Government has already launched a programme in urban centres to provide persons living in these communities with access to broadband. These community WiFi projects will allow members of the community to

¹² Sustainable development Goals: Voluntary National review 2018. Retrieved from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/bahamas>

¹⁷ *Ibid*, at page 16. For discussion on cellular mobile liberalization see Annex, Paragraph 3 and onward.

have access to the internet, and the wealth of information available for education and skills development and to support business development ideas.

14. The Government's Sustainable Nassau Action Plan seeks to provide opportunities for increased productivity and economic growth for businesses, residents and the country. One component of the program is to improve sustainability in communities by ensuring renewable energy resources and broadband Internet solutions are integrated into government housing and community building projects. The programme will involve the introduction of tax incentives for the "Over-the-Hill" area.¹³ The programme will also include legislative changes, which will address stamp tax, business license fees and customs duties. The Sustainable Nassau Action Plan aims to empower residents and businesses and to ensure growth opportunities for businesses allowing for expansion and increased hires. It is anticipated that as a result, residents will have the social support necessary to achieve better lives. The ECS is a key enabler of this initiative and must have the capacity to support and enable the development of such an environment through the provision of high-quality electronic communications services in key areas.

ICT Access by Persons with Disabilities

15. In the development of ICTs and keeping with the focus on the vulnerable members of the society, the Government recognises the importance of creating a barrier-free society for persons with disabilities (including age-related disabilities). Technologies for ensuring that persons with disabilities can access and use ICTs are becoming more readily available and affordable, and the Government intends to ensure that these technologies are widely available within The Bahamas to ensure ubiquitous access to ICTs.

¹³ "Over The Hill" in the context of the Government's Initiative:

The residential area with Collins Avenue as its boundary to the East, Nassau Street as its boundary to the West, Meeting Street as the north boundary with an imaginary boundary continuing east of Baillou Hill Road to Collins Avenue, and the south boundary beginning at the Wulff Road intersection at Collins Avenue, continuing west to Poinciana Drive and ending at the round-about at the University of The Bahamas.

16. Further, as members of the disabled community often find themselves in positions of a significant economic and financial disadvantage as their income-earning capacity is often adversely affected, they can gain particular advantage from programmes, which ensure that access to ICTs is equitable for all.
17. The implementation of policies on communications accessibility must have regard to the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act, 2014¹⁴ and The Bahamas' commitment to Article 9 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to promote:
- appropriate forms of assistance and support to persons with disabilities to ensure their access to information;
 - access for persons with disabilities to new information and communication technologies and systems, including the internet; and
 - the design, development, production and distribution of accessible information and communications technologies and systems at an early stage, so that these technologies and systems become accessible at minimum cost.
18. The Government looks forward to, and will promote a Bahamas in which, electronic communications users who are disabled can benefit from offers tailored to their needs and at a level equivalent to that enjoyed by other users.

Crime Prevention and National Security

19. The Government will increase efforts to use ICT as a tool for effective crime prevention through the use of closed-circuit cameras for public surveillance and other electronic devices, which may assist in the broadcasting, reporting, prevention, detection and investigation of crime and anti-social activities. Recognising the vulnerabilities in a

¹⁴The Act which is intended to achieve equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities, eliminate discrimination on the basis of disabilities and to provide rights, rehabilitation and habilitation for persons with disabilities provides that every person is entitled to Information Communication Technology.

modern society in which, data is stored and shared electronically, cybercrime and security must also be the focus of any crime prevention and management programme. The development of Grand Bahama as a cybersecurity hub will underscore and address potential cybersecurity challenges.

Disaster and Emergency Management

20. Disaster risk reduction in an archipelago is to a great extent dependent on electronic communications services for the timely dissemination of storm warnings, emergency preparedness and mitigation activities to residents on our islands. The need to establish effective emergency communication and build resiliency has become more apparent as The Bahamas is confronted with global warming, climate change, rising sea levels, and increasing frequency and ferocity of seasonal storms and other weather systems, especially during the hurricane season.
21. The Government envisions that ICTs supported by a resilient telecommunications infrastructure, which must by necessity include meteorological weather surveillance radars and early storm warning and alert systems. Therefore, ICTs such as the pilot national alert messaging system launched in 2017 to notify residents of emergency and public interest events, and forecasting systems that serve to reduce risks and loss of life and property in communities will be a central component of the plan.¹⁵
22. Further, as we develop our islands in an environment of changing climate conditions, the Government plans to establish sustainable and resilient communities in the Family Islands. These communities will be powered by renewable energy sources and connected by smart technologies.

Tourism

¹⁵ The National Statement of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas delivered by The Honourable Darren Henfield, MP, Minister of Foreign Affairs of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas During the 72nd Session of The United Nationals General Assembly, New York, 23rd September, 2017.

23. The Government will be the catalyst for and assist in the development of an environment that will attract tourism projects to The Bahamas, which will be enhanced by the integration of competitively priced electronic communication services into their daily operations. A good quality high-speed internet connectivity product is also vital to improving The Bahamas as an attractive location for conferences, conventions and other enterprise-related tourism activities. This has taken on greater importance with the increase in large tourism facilities in The Bahamas.

Governance

24. For the Government to function more efficiently, high-speed, high-quality communication, including broadcasting, connecting all of the populated islands of The Bahamas is essential. The introduction and expansion of e-Government initiatives will promote accessibility by individuals and businesses in The Bahamas to government services thereby improving quality of life and the ease of doing business in The Bahamas and with the Government.
25. The Government will continue its efforts to modernise various sectors of the public service, improving the quality and accessibility of the services provided by the Government to residents of The Bahamas, including:
- improving the ease of doing business and the perception of The Bahamas as a jurisdiction in which there is ease and efficiency in accessing business services¹⁶; and
 - implementing new technologies within government agencies to attain a higher level of efficiency and access to services.

¹⁶ During 2017 the Bahamas was rated 119 of 190 countries in terms of the ease of doing business. The ranking represented an improvement from 121 in 2016. See: <https://tradingeconomics.com/bahamas/ease-of-doing-business>.

26. The Government recognises that electronic communications and ICTs are essential as the country reasserts its position in the global financial arena. Therefore, the Government will ensure that the responsible ministries undertake initiatives to encourage more companies to create and expand their bases of operation in The Bahamas. A robust electronic communications infrastructure is a primary component for the achievement of this goal. With the adoption of the appropriate technology in the Financial Services Sector, connectivity will be enhanced, increasing the opportunities for growth and impact in the sector. The Government will also promote The Bahamas as a centre for the development of ICTs and provide opportunities to expand skills transfer, business creation and meaningful engagement in the economy.
27. It is recognised that blockchain technology and cryptocurrencies have the potential to play a pivotal role in the financial services sector in The Bahamas. Therefore, the government encourages the promotion of blockchain as a sub-industry within ICT, which can attract logistics companies and similar entities to The Bahamas. The Government in partnership with the private sector is considering applications for blockchain technology and the opportunities the technology presents in financial services and other sectors of the economy. Under active consideration are:
- Plans to further evolve the local payments system;
 - The possible application of blockchain and distributed ledger technology;
 - The security of blockchain technology; and
 - Potential paths to blockchain adoption in the domestic economy.

The impact of cryptocurrencies and emergence of a decentralised system and the digital, virtual alternative currencies in that decentralised system of control must be examined in light of the existing centralised electronic money and central banking system.

Health Care

28. The Government will incorporate ICTs into its reform of the health care system by streamlining and computerising records and inventory to ensure an adequate supply of critical drugs and the easy retrieval of patient records. The adoption of ICT and electronic communications in this sector should prove vital in providing technical support for healthcare facilities. This has already been demonstrated with the success of the telemedicine programme through which doctors have delivered services to remote communities throughout The Bahamas. The Government recognises that given the archipelagic nature of this nation, the delivery of critical and immediate health care to remote Family Island communities continues to challenge our society. The Government, therefore, will continue to seek to create opportunities for the development of e-medicine services, which are supported by best-in-class electronic communications, enabling doctors to access patients' medical records and to deliver services whatever the geographical location.

Education

29. The Government will foster an environment, which facilitates the introduction and use of ICTs to ensure an inclusive and equitable education system that provides opportunities for continued education. The Government is dedicated to building a knowledge-based society. It will pursue enhanced investment in the education system and its infrastructure in the continuous training and development of education professionals and enhancement of technical training programmes, among other things.¹⁷ The Government has begun various initiatives in education with the goal of creating an educational system, which uses technology platforms that are sound and robust to enhance competitiveness, develop the strengths of each child, and ensure that the potential of each is nurtured, and opportunities, to contribute to the development of The Bahamas, are thoroughly

¹⁷ Commonwealth of The Bahamas 2017/18 Budget Communication: Entering A New Era of Public Sector Accountability, The Honourable K. Peter Turnquest, MP, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (31 May, 2017).

explored and exploited. The integration of ICTs supported by resilient and ubiquitous electronic communications connecting educational institutions, students and knowledge bases will facilitate universal access to education in The Bahamas. It will also facilitate the delivery of quality instruction and assist in the professional development of teachers and the efficient management and administration of education.

30. Education will also play a part in the creation and facilitation of Government's plans to develop an ICT-enabled technology hub in Grand Bahama and to establish The Bahamas as a Centre of Excellence in ICTs. To this end, there will be an increased focus on STEM education, and other technical fields to provide a modern workforce able to build and support a Smart Bahamas, and the ECS will be steered toward ensuring the provision of enabling infrastructure for the necessary educational programmes to thrive.

Gender Equality

31. The Government recognises the opportunities that ICTs present for the achievement of gender equality by enabling all residents to have access to the same online resources and opportunities. The Bahamas must ensure that a gender divide does not affect the access to ICTs for social and economic empowerment of all citizens. The collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data are needed to identify any gender gaps and create appropriate policies and targets.
32. The Government notes that URCA, in keeping with the international initiatives by the ITU, in 2015 commenced the commemoration of International Girls in ICT day in the Bahamas, introducing female students to the careers in ICTs and providing skills transfer seminars. URCA is encouraged to continue with the Girls in ICT programme and similar programmes to raise awareness that ICTs offer the potential for all persons regardless of gender to end poverty, inspire creativity and create work.

33. The Government is cognisant that the development of ICTs in The Bahamas forms part of a global ecosystem of ICT development in respect of which the Government is determined The Bahamas should play a leading role. Some key international initiatives are fully aligned with the Government's push for ICT development, and the Government will measure and benchmark The Bahamas' progress and seek to advocate for the greater international promotion of those issues important to The Bahamas' ICT development goals. The key initiatives include:
- Broadband Commission for Digital Development¹⁸;
 - World Summit on the Information Society¹⁹; and
 - CARICOM Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D)²⁰
34. All of these initiatives showcase and document the power of ICT and broadband-based technologies for sustainable development of countries regardless of their socio-economic makeup and demonstrate that development of ICTs, in particular, broadband access, is a vital enabler of economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection.
35. As a member of various international telecommunications bodies, The Bahamas is actively engaged in advancing ICT development initiatives on a national, regional and international level.

¹⁸ Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development. <https://www.broadbandcommission.org/Pages/default.aspx>

¹⁹ World Summit on The Information Society. <https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/>

²⁰ CARICOM Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D). <https://caricom.org/media-center/communications/news-from-the-community/information-and-communication-technology-for-development>