



**CARIBBEAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE PROTECTION OF  
VULNERABLE PERSONS IN MIXED MIGRATION FLOWS-  
PROMOTING COOPERATION AND IDENTIFICATION OF GOOD  
PRACTICES**

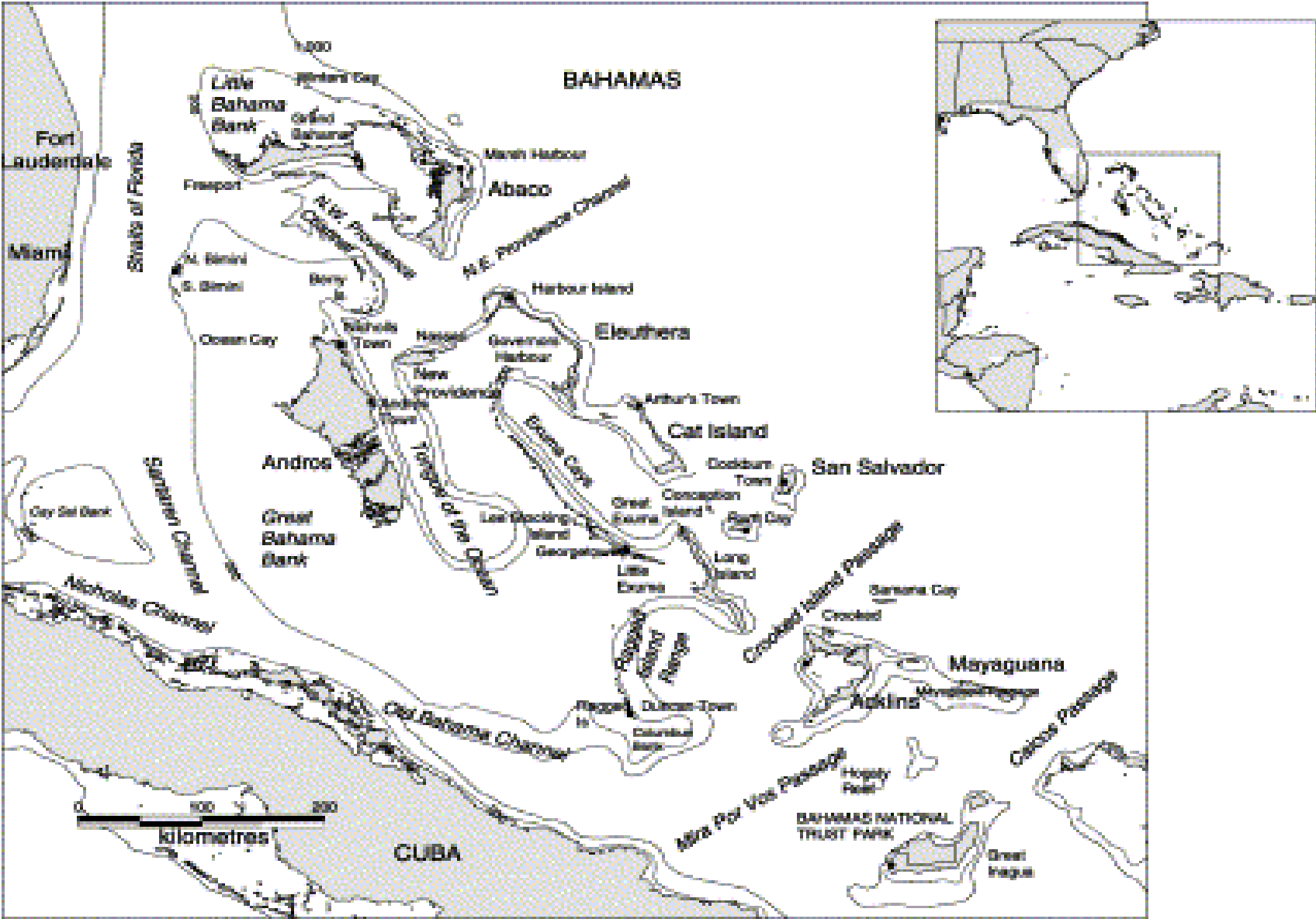
Panelist Discussion: “Rescue at Sea Operations, Interception and  
Disembarkation: Screening Identification and Referral Mechanisms for  
Mixed Arrivals in The Bahamas”

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Nassau, The Bahamas

Mrs. Cleola Hamilton  
Parliamentary Secretary  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration  
The Bahamas

# THE BAHAMAS



# THE BAHAMAS EXPERIENCE

- Mixed migration by sea
  - Asylum seekers
  - Economic migrants
  - Trafficking in Persons
  
- Trend in maritime is the smuggling of migrants of different nationalities from the Caribbean Region

# MIGRANTS MODES OF TRANSPORTATION

- Vessels have evolved over the years from wooden sailing sloops, to wooden sloops and steel-hull vessels
- Vessels generally carry between 20 and 250 migrants
- The types and conditions of the vessels introduce other problems
  - Health
  - Safety



# INTERCEPTIONS IN THE BAHAMAS

- Majority of interceptions are in the Southern Islands around Inagua, Mayaguana, and the Exuma chain
- Interceptions are made by the Royal Bahamas Defence Force, and the United States Coast Guard

# INTERCEPTION IN THE BAHAMAS



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# Bahamas-USA Bilateral Comprehensive Maritime Agreement

- Agreement between The Government of The Bahamas and the United States which permits, in part, that U.S Coast Guard vessels to patrol the waters of The Bahamas in an effort to increase maritime security between the two Countries.
- If vessels are captured in Bahamian waters, the U.S. must determine if the vessels bear any connection to The Bahamas, i.e.
  - Bahamians on board
  - Boat registered in The Bahamas

# Operation Bahamas Turks and Caicos (OPBAT)

- Joint Cooperation between The Bahamas, Turks and Caicos, and the United States
- The U.S. regularly assist with:
  - prosecuting human smuggling,
  - irregular immigration detection and interdiction
  - search and rescue cases throughout Bahamian waters and the surrounding high seas.



# DISEMBARKATION

- Migrants are brought in land and turned over to the Immigration Department
- Ensure that migrants are contained in a secure area
- Conduct assessment of the health of migrants
- Begin screening process
  - Interviews
  - Evaluation Forms

# SCREENING AND REFERRAL

- Officers from relevant agencies are trained on UNHCR standards
- In keeping with UNHCR Protocols, migrants are carefully screened by trained Immigration Officers, which includes interviews
- The interviews are then reviewed by a, non constituted panel of officers trained on UNHCR standards, for a decision on whether their cases are seemingly legitimate
- Final recommendations are put to the Executive Branch of Government to ascertain whether The Bahamas will afford the potential asylum seeker protection in The Bahamas



# REFERRAL MECHANISMS

- Individuals deemed to be in need of international protection are referred to the UNHRC
- UNHRC cooperates with non-government organisations in the country to provide temporary assistance to refugees while in The Bahamas



# MAJOR CHALLENGES

- ✓ Insufficient Human Resources in the forms of Immigration, investigation and Enforcement Officers
- ✓ The Border Patrol authorities lack sufficient patrol vessels
- ✓ The Bahamas large territory of water
- ✓ Processing mixed migration arrivals

# BEST PRACTICES

- The Bahamas found several methods successful in detecting irregular migrants at sea
  - ✓ Anticipation- Bahamian authorities anticipate an influx of irregular migration during certain times of the year.
  - ✓ Recent placement of Defense Force plane on the southern island of Inagua;
  - ✓ In the past, a “spotter” airplane was used to determine location of migrate vessels, prior to deploying patrol vessels to intercept them



# Conclusion

The stemming of mix migration flows will require, *inter alia*, enhanced cooperation between affected nations through effective information sharing, effective communication networks, and joint operations.



**THANK YOU!**