

PRESS RELEASE – WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY 2005

10:00AM, MONDAY JUNE 6TH, 2005

World Environment Day is internationally recognized as the day in which nations and the world's peoples demonstrate their commitment to the Earth. It is an opportunity to carefully examine both the actions taken and those that should be taken by us, as citizens of Earth, to preserve life.

In light of this day's purpose and the slogan for 2005 "Plan for the Planet", it is most fitting for The Bahamas to announce the release of its first state of the environment report, GEO Bahamas 2005, and the launch of the National Biodiversity Clearing-House Mechanism Website. GEO Bahamas 2005 describes the national state of the environment through an assessment of pressures and impacts on five priority areas of the Bahamian environment: coastal and marine environments, land resources, waste management, freshwater resources and vulnerability to hazards. The priority areas were identified through stakeholder consultation, during which assessment tools that are endorsed by the United Nations Environment Programme were employed in various workshop exercises. Stakeholders representing Government agencies, non-government organisations and academia working in the environmental arena throughout The Bahamas participated in the consultation, which set the framework for developing the report. In addition to describing the pressures and impacts on the five priority areas of the Bahamian environment, GEO Bahamas 2005 also highlights policy responses currently in place to address the pressures and impacts on these areas. Recommendations for consideration by policy makers and the general public to improve the state of the environment are also identified.

In tandem with the state of the environment report, The Bahamas now has access, through the Internet, to information relating to biodiversity within The Bahamas. The National Biodiversity Clearing-House Mechanism is based on the philosophy that broad participation and easy access to information on biodiversity must be a top priority. Its mission is to promote and facilitate technical and scientific cooperation, develop a mechanism for exchanging and integrating information on biodiversity and develop the necessary human and technological

network to sustain the biological complexity of the natural environment. The website features information on the diverse ecosystems of The Bahamas, including protected areas, protected species, endemics, invasive species and a number of policies relating to the conservation and national management of biodiversity within the environment. In addition, the site provides a portal for exchanging scientific and technological information between Government, academia, civil society and researchers involved in the area of biodiversity data management.

It is anticipated that both GEO Bahamas 2005 and the National Biodiversity Clearing-House Mechanism will become valuable resources to all Bahamians, as custodians of the natural resources of The Bahamas, in formulating and implementing environmental initiatives and stimulating action and participation in environmental conservation and sustainable development activities. I encourage all Bahamians to take full advantage of these new resources both of which can be accessed through the Internet at www.best.bs and www.bahamaschm.org.

To that end, I wish to commend The College of The Bahamas for their contributions to both projects, as well as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for their financial and technical support in realizing the National Biodiversity Clearing-House Mechanism and Mr. Deon Stewart of The BEST Commission for the development and design of the Clearing-House Mechanism Website.

In closing, I wish to present a copy of GEO Bahamas 2005 to Dr. Mark Griffith of the United Nations Environment Programme – Regional Office of Latin America and the Caribbean (UNEP/ROLAC) and express our sincere gratitude to UNEP/ROLAC for the unwavering technical and financial support extended towards The Bahamas in realizing its first state of the environment report, GEO Bahamas 2005.