

**Accounting to the Ministry of Social Services &
Urban Development – “Accessible America’s #V
Conference Representation Report”**

Theme: Information and Communication for All

Date: 28th – 30th November, 2018

Venue: Hotel Hyatt Ziva, Montego Bay, Jamaica

Attendee: Dr. Anthony Hamilton

* Commissioner & Chairman Accessibility Committee - The National Commission For Persons With Disabilities (NCPWD) / *(Bahamas)*

*Vice President / *(Acting President)*
Civil Society Bahamas (CSB) &

*Chairman Accountability Committee - Organization for Responsible Governance (ORG) / *(Bahamas)*

Conference Overview:

Indeed, I am uniquely privileged to have had the opportunity to represent The Commonwealth of The Bahamas and in particular “The National Commission For Persons With Disabilities” at the above referenced conference.

A significant benefit and achievement from the conference was the opportunity to obtain specialized training lectures and be awarded with a certificate having successfully completed an examination (see attachment – Fundamentals of International Communications Technology (ICT) Accessibility).

I believe that there is a critically urgent need for a national, regional and international Master Plan of Accountability and Accessibility for “Persons with Disabilities”. This urgent need demands a formal inclusion and consultative structure and process for key stakeholder engagement and realization of maximum benefits. The Ministry of Social Services & Urban Development appears uniquely positioned to facilitate this leadership responsibility for The Commonwealth of The Bahamas. This fact is captured through the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) principles of the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) as its principle framework and particularly Article #9.

The Accessible Americas Conference, for the first time since its establishment in 2014 was held in the Caribbean and was attended by two hundred and twenty six (226) representatives from twenty six (26) countries. The conference attracted a wide cross section of participants from the following segments in the Americas Region: Academia, Civil Society, Policy Makers, Regulators, Industry, Content developers, Application developers and Device developers.

The conference’s plenary sessions provoked engagement as critical and practical issues were addressed for a results orientated environment and atmosphere.

Conference Emphasis & Recommendations:

The general focus emphasised at the conference was to encourage Governments, Industry, Academia and other stakeholders to promote (ICT) accessibility in order

to create fair and equal opportunities for all citizens (persons with disabilities, women and girls, the elderly, indigenous people and others that are still unserved) and to support a regional development agenda by treating ICT accessibility as a cross-cutting development issue.

The International Telecommunications Unit (ITU) is the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies. The Accessible Americas Conference has been used by the ITU in the Americas Region to raise awareness amongst governments and industry players on the measures necessary to promote digital inclusion and enable persons with disabilities, as well as the most vulnerable in society to have equal opportunities and better access to information and communications technologies.

Acknowledgement, Observations and National Performance Accountability Recommendations:

- The need for an agreed documented National Plan and the coordination of a national response to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to be reflected as national assets. (**Observation** – Design and implementation of a National Plan and its representation through exceptional customer service quality and demonstrated hospitality at the Accessible America’s #V conference host hotel experienced in Montego Bay, Jamaica.)
- The need for the alignment of strategic mandates and support resources engaged through the Ministry of Social Services & Urban Development, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office of the Attorney General, the Ministry of Tourism & Aviation and the Ministry of Finance. (**Observation** – Aggressive accessibility policies, facilitation and promotion of national and regional partnerships can be critically beneficial to all citizens and in particular “Persons With Disabilities” of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.
- The need for true empowerment of members and organizations of the “Persons With Disabilities” communities through individuals, families, religious entities, national, regional and international agencies executing the coordination of national resources and skill sets for best results. Additionally, the engagement of the **National Reporting Coordinating Mechanism** - (Office of The Attorney General- International Legal Cooperation Unit, having responsibility for the country reporting assistance mandate relative to compliance with international treaties and conventions).

- The need for a focused and intentional effort to build capacity to enable key “Persons With Disabilities” stakeholders to further promote the development of (ICT) accessibility.
- The need to facilitate the reduction of social inequalities is to be encouraged. One example is the Smart Cities development currently advanced by The Office of the Prime Minister Over the Hill Project.
- The need to map civil society organizations into clusters, improving and implementing policies and practices on the use of accessible and affordable ICTs must be highlighted. To increase efforts to ensure that the Americas region becomes inclusive for all civil society organizations must be invited to become stakeholders.

During the conference, it was acknowledged that an improved accessibility capacity through strategic policies provides around 90% of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in developing countries. Therefore, the strategic engagement of a processing system for planning, organizing, implementing and evaluating a holistic standard operating policy for the Ministry of Social Services and Urban Development in conjunction with other relevant government agencies appears to be absolutely necessary.