



Opening of Fidelity Bank (Bahamas) Limited Service Branch
Georgetown, Exuma
17 November 2023

Remarks by Governor John Rolle

Good Morning;

It is a pleasure to be here in Exuma for the opening of this service branch for Fidelity Bank. The Central Bank takes note that this is a partnership that leverages the support that will be provided by CashNGo, and that the reach of these services is fully optimised with customers also able to maintain contact with the bank through digital channels.

This is still a good thing for the Exuma Community, because as much as possible, the personal interaction with customers is still important. It also demonstrates the innovative approaches which are necessary to extend banking, and especially modern payment services to the Family Islands.

Given this occasion, I would therefore like to stress several points as regard the approach that the Central Bank is taking to promote access to banking and financial inclusion for all of our communities—many of which still have less than what is available in Exuma.

The first is that financial institutions are encouraged to accelerate their thinking around agency banking—meaning, relying on outsourced arrangements to connect with and provide services to persons in the Family Islands. The Central Bank is developing a regulatory framework to facilitate and encourage such arrangements, which we would like to have concluded in 2024.

A second point is that Exuma still typifies financial inclusion challenges, which will have a digital component to resolution. Fidelity, and all of our licensed financial institutions, will have a role to play in this process. It means also having the capacity to provide the onboarding leg for services through digital channels; taking P2B payments capability beyond credit and debit cards, to safe and interoperable mobile phone applications; and equipping all businesses and individuals with the options to send and receive payments digitally. This financial inclusion vision, in which we foresee the Government also playing a role, also requires an entrenched push to improve the quality, access and reach of the wireless telecommunications infrastructure. It has to consider treating data as an essential consumer item from which no one is denied access when it comes to the ability to complete financial transactions and it should, from the contribution that the Central Bank expects to make, guarantee access to basic banking or payments accounts for all persons in our community. Where the Central Bank's impact can be felt, we will be rolling out further regulations and policies as early as 2024, in consultation with our financial institutions.

My third point of emphasis is about cash. Cash is not going to disappear from use. We accept that. However, it is costly to store and transport, is administratively less efficient for businesses to keep track of, aggravates security and money laundering concerns, and, in all of these respects, is costliest to maintain on the Family Islands. Therefore, it is in our national development interest to reduce our reliance on physical cash. Again, for financial inclusion to be positively impacted, all persons in The Bahamas must



Page 2 of 2

have the right of access to digital money and other alternatives to cash. This is also the direction we are continuing to push at the Central Bank. Also, we are commissioning work in the area of the SandDollar on how peer to peer and P2B payments can still be safely and securely completed when persons lose data connections.

Finally, a point about what it means to be inclusive and resilient in a tourist dependent, international business environment. How do we ensure after a hurricane, that commerce is swiftly restarted, financial services are quickly resumed, and the ability to provide critical social assistance promptly enabled? The experiences of Abaco and Grand Bahama after Hurricane Dorian gave us a good baseline for where the improvements can be centered. Again this underscores, the work that we must continue to advance to ensure digital payment services and digital financial inclusion.

In all of these respects I am happy to be here with Fidelity Bank and CashNGo, and to encourage them to see the importance of their role in ensuring genuine financial inclusion outcomes for all of Exuma, including the Cays.

Congratulations.

17 November 2023 ■