

Lesson 3

The Bahamas: an independent Country

The constitution is a document that set out how a country should be governed. When the Bahamas became Independent on **July 10, 1973**, its old system of colonial government was replaced, and its new constitution came into effect. Both British and The Bahamian governments agreed to this new constitution, which is the basis of all law in The Bahamas.

What the Constitution does:

1. Lays out the duties of the prime minister and his/her cabinet.
2. States how parliament, the House of Assembly and the Senate should be set up and how they should function.
3. Protects all citizens' rights and freedom.

CHAPTER III

PROTECTION OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS OF THE INDIVIDUAL

15. Whereas every person in The Bahamas is entitled to the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual, that is to say, has the right, whatever his race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex, but subject to the respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest, to each and all of the following, namely:
- (a) life, liberty, security of the person and the protection of the law;
 - (b) freedom of conscience, of expression and of assembly and association; and
 - (c) protection for the privacy of his home and other property and from deprivation of property without compensation.

From the Constitution of The Bahamas

Our Head of state

The Prime Minister consults his colleagues in Parliament decide who should be the Governor-General and then asks the monarch to make the appointment. The **Governor-General** holds the highest position in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas as the **Queen's** representative. Many of the duties are ceremonial, but he is informed about everything that goes on in The Bahamas. He/she lives in **Government House on Mount Fitzwilliam in Nassau**, New Providence and entertains important foreign visitors and diplomats there.

The Governor General Duties are:

- A. Ceremonial
- B. To entertain important visitors and diplomats at his home.
- C. To ensure that there is a government headed by a Prime Minister to govern the country.
- D. To host important functions and formally open sessions of parliaments each year.
- E. To sign all Bills from the House of Assembly and the Senate to make law.
- F. To approve the appointment of civil servants, on the advice of various cabinet ministers.
- G. To appoint and dismiss ministers, on the advice of the Prime Minister.
- H. To dissolve Parliament on the advice of the Prime Minister
- I. Pardoning criminals on the advice of a special committee. This committee is known as The **Royal Prerogative of Mercy**.
- J. To appoint Senators, on the advice of the leaders of the parliamentary parties.

Since The Bahamas' Independent, there were **nine (9)** Governor Generals.

House of Assembly

The **House of Assembly** is located in **Parliament Square**, Bay Street, Nassau, Bahamas. Here the **Members of Parliament** meet to discuss the nation's business and pass laws. This house is also called the **Lower House** of Parliament. The House of Assembly, the Senate, and the Governor General comprise the **law making body** of The Bahamas. The House of Assembly is the most important part of the law making body because its members are **elected** by the people. This house is chaired by the **speaker**. In addition to chairing the House of Assembly, the Speaker also keeps order in the house.



The Senate

The other group of people are senators who meet at Parliament Square in the **Senate**. This group has the responsibility of ensuring that each law to be pass is flawless. They discuss and make recommendations to laws that are sent to them from the House of Assembly. Their main purpose is to ensure that every law is looked at in detail by two sets of people before it is passed into law. The Senate is chaired by a **president** who is elected by the senators. The president of the Senate has a similar job as the speaker of the House of Assembly.



Date: _____

1. What is a constitution? [1]

2. When did The Bahamas gain its independence? [1]

3. State **THREE** things the constitution does. [3]

4. Who is the Head of State of The Bahamas? [1]

5. What is the name of the **Monarch** whom the Governor-General represents? [1]

6. How many Governor Generals were appointed since The Bahamas became independent? [1]

7. Where does the Governor General live? [2]

8. State **TWO** duties of the Governor General. [2]

9. Who is the current Governor General? [1]

10. List the Governor Generals of The Bahamas in order from the first to the present. [9]

11. Who is the Prime Minister of The Bahamas? [1]

12. Where can you find the House of Assembly? [1]

13. Name the **THREE** groups that make up the law making body of The Bahamas.

[3]