

**BAHAMAS YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME,
2025-2026 SESSION**

Opening Ceremony

Keynote Address, Sapodilla Conference Centre on Saturday

14 February beginning at 9:00 a.m.

**Ms. Christina Rolle, Executive Director
Securities Commission of The Bahamas**

**"The Leader You're Becoming: A Journey of
Discovery and Growth"**

Good morning, everyone.

I would like to thank the organizers of the Bahamas Youth Leadership Development Programme, and Mr. Zhivargo Laing in particular, for inviting me to share some of my thoughts, experiences, and what I have come to learn about leadership.

I'm honoured to be here with you today—a room full of young people who are already asking the right questions about who you want to become and how you want to make your mark on the world. Many of you are leaders in your own spheres now, in your schools, or your social groups, but I am sure that seated among you are the leaders of tomorrow –

future CEOs, future pastors or principals, future fathers and mothers. Perhaps a future prime minister is in the seat where you are sitting right now.

When I was around your age, I thought leadership was about being in charge, that it was about having all the right answers, making the most money or having the most impressive title. But after more than thirty years as a working professional, leading teams, and collaborating with others, across the globe as well as engaging in continuous learning and development, I have come to understand something different: leadership is deeply personal, constantly evolving, and built on a foundation of competence, self-reflection and empathy.... a foundation which, through this program, you are building right now.

Your Unique Leadership Fingerprint

Here's the first thing I want you to understand: there is no single mould for what a leader looks like or how one is supposed to lead. Some of the most

effective leaders I've come to admire, like Marcus Aurelius, are quiet strategists who lead through thoughtfulness and self-reflection. Others are charismatic visionaries who inspire through their energy and passion. Still others are servant leaders who empower their teams by removing obstacles and creating opportunities for others to shine.

Think about the leaders you admire—perhaps a teacher, a coach, a family member, or a historical figure. Many of you would have selected very different leaders – with different approaches to moving their missions forward. What makes them effective isn't that they all lead the same way. It's that they've discovered *their* way of leading—one that's authentic to who they are, shaped by their values, and honed through their experiences.

If you read popular management books, they will speak of leadership styles. Don't ever be pigeon-holed by these categories. Your style will be uniquely yours. It will reflect your personality, your

experiences, your cultural background, your values, your ability to connect with and inspire others, but, most importantly, your leadership will evolve and adapt based on what is needed in the moment. The Bahamas has given us a particular lens through which we see the world—our community and family orientation, our resilience in the face of challenges, our ability to navigate complexity. These aren't limitations; they're strengths that you can tap into to shape your authentic connection with others, your outlook on the world, and ultimately, the type of leader you will be.

Competency: The Non-Negotiable Foundation

But here's the reality check: authenticity alone isn't enough. To lead effectively, you must, first and foremost, be competent. You must know your craft. You must develop real expertise.

I've had the privilege of education and training at some of the world's leading institutions, *[including Harvard University, Kellogg School of Management*

and the London School of Economics]. These experiences have been invaluable to my effectiveness as a leader, *not* because credentials make a good leader, but because competency does! When you truly understand your field—whether that's finance, education, technology, healthcare, or any other area—you have built a foundation on which people will come to trust you. They will follow you not just because they like you, but because they believe you *know how the story ends, what the end goal looks like, how the vision will unfold,* and can help them to succeed and guide them somewhere worthwhile in the process.

To develop competency that means you have to put in the time and effort to accomplish hard things: studying when others are scrolling, practicing when it's uncomfortable, seeking feedback even when it stings, and continuously updating your knowledge as the world changes. In my field, I've had to learn about everything from traditional investments and

securities regulation to trading of carbon credits, cryptocurrency and tokenization of real-world assets. The moment you think you know enough is the moment you start becoming irrelevant.

Start building your competency now. Excel in your studies. Develop skills that matter. Become genuinely good at something. Your competencies is the platform from which you will launch your leadership.

Experience and Exposure: Expanding Your World

Effective leadership, however, does not develop in a vacuum. It requires exposure to ideas, people, and situations beyond your immediate environment. In photography, there is an adjustable mechanism over the camera's lens, called the aperture and the function of the aperture is to control the amount of light the lens is exposed to. When the aperture is contracted, less light comes through but when it is expanded, more light comes through. In life, and for leadership, you need to expand your aperture—to

expose the lens of your minds in order that you can see more, understand more, and recognise patterns and trends as they unfold.

So, how does one expand their horizons? This can happen through travel. Some of my most valuable learning experiences came from working with international organizations, seeing how different cultures approach similar problems, and understanding that there are multiple paths to address any challenge and all of these multiple ways can be valid. Even if you don't get an opportunity to work in an international environment, just by observing other cultures and other ways of doing things, we learn so much. We come to appreciate other perspectives, and I can tell you that as a leader, it is critical to appreciate that others may have a different view. This enables you to remain open to the possibility that you could be wrong. When approached with an attitude of learning, it can help to keep you humble.

So, if you have opportunities to travel—whether through student exchanges, competitions, or family trips—embrace them. Pay attention not just to the sights, but to how people think, organize themselves, and solve problems.

I need you to know, though, that expanding your horizons does not require a passport. When travel is not possible, reading acts as the next best method to explore the world. It is one of the most powerful tools for leadership development available to you right now. And I'm not just talking about required reading for your courses, or even fiction, although there is much that can be learned from writers such as William Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and Chinua Achebe. Great writers and the stories they weave can teach us empathy, about human nature and most of all, they can teach us about ourselves. I'm also talking about learning from leaders who came before us through their autobiographies and memoirs.

Consider reading *Long Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela. You'll learn about resilience, forgiveness, and the power of a long-term vision even in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. The memoirs of Winston Churchill comprised in *The Second War* provide incomparable insight into the leadership and decisions of one of the most significant leaders of the twentieth century through a time of unparalleled uncertainty and crisis. The Autobiography of Malcolm X will give you a perspective of what it means to move through this world as a person of colour. From Malcolm X, you will also come to understand transformation, conviction and the courage to evolve your thinking as you learn more.

These are just a few examples of leaders who left us roadmaps—not to copy verbatim, but to learn from. They show us their struggles, their doubts, their failures, and how they overcame them. They remind us that every great leader was once where you are

now: uncertain, learning, making mistakes, and growing.

Seek experiences that challenge you. Join organizations. Take on projects that scare you a little. Volunteer for responsibilities that stretch your capabilities. Each experience is data—information about who you are, what you're good at, what you need to develop, and what kind of leader you want to become.

The Inner Work: Know Thyself

Now we come to what I believe is the most important—and most neglected—aspect of leadership development: the inner work.

Leadership begins with self-knowledge. You cannot lead others effectively if you don't understand yourself. This means developing the practice of introspection—regularly examining your thoughts, your reactions, your patterns, and your motivations.

Why did you get angry in that situation? What triggered your defensiveness? When do you feel most energized and capable? What fears are holding you back? What are you really trying to prove, and to whom?

These aren't comfortable questions, but they're essential ones. I've seen talented people derail their leadership potential because they never did this inner work. They reacted rather than responded. They led from ego rather than purpose. They couldn't regulate their own emotions, so they created chaos for everyone around them.

Understanding your emotions is a skill, not a personality trait. It's something you develop through practice. Start noticing your emotional patterns. When you feel strong emotions, pause and ask yourself: "What is this emotion telling me? What do I actually need right now? How do I want to respond rather than simply react?"

This emotional intelligence extends beyond yourself. To lead, you must develop the ability to understand and navigate the emotions of others. You need to read the room, sense what's unspoken, recognize when someone is struggling even if they haven't said so, and understand what motivates different people on your team.

This isn't manipulation—it's empathy. It's the genuine ability to, as much as it is possible, see the world through someone else's eyes, to understand their concerns, their hopes, and their fears.

Empathy: The Bridge to Shared Vision

And this brings me to what I believe is the ultimate leadership skill: leveraging your leadership style, your competency, your experience, and your self-understanding, to develop empathy so others can see, and share in your vision.

Anyone can have a vision. Anyone can have ideas about what should change or where an organization

should go. But leaders—true leaders—can connect their vision to the hearts and minds of others. They don't just command people to follow; they invite people to join them on a journey to achieve something meaningful.

This happens through genuine concern for others. Not fake concern. Not strategic concern. Real, authentic care about the people you're asking to walk with you on a journey.

When I'm carrying out my function as the executive director of a financial services regulator in The Bahamas, I'm not just thinking about regulatory compliance or policy objectives. I'm thinking about real people—Bahamian families trying to build wealth, young people trying to understand financial systems and seeking a variety of good career options in the Bahamas, entrepreneurs aiming to have successful businesses in the financial services industry, vulnerable individuals who could be exploited by fraudsters and scammers. That genuine

concern for the wellbeing of all these varying people, fuels my work and helps me bring others along in that mission.

People can sense when your concern is real. They can feel when you see them as human beings with their own dreams and challenges rather than as resources to be deployed. When they feel genuinely valued and understood, they don't just comply with your leadership—they commit to it. They bring their creativity, their energy, and their best selves to the shared vision.

So, as you develop as leaders, cultivate genuine empathy. Practice active listening—not listening to respond but listening to truly understand. Ask questions about what matters to people. Pay attention to their non-verbal communication. Create space for others to be fully human, with all their complexities and contradictions. Build and foster environments that are inclusive, where talented people feel welcomed and safe.

When you combine this empathy with a clear vision of what you're trying to achieve, you create something powerful: a movement of people who are choosing to follow you because they believe in the destination and they trust that you genuinely care about everyone reaching that destination together.

Your Journey Starts Now

So where does this leave you today? You're in grades 11 and 12. You're not running organizations or leading nations—not yet. But you're in the leadership laboratory right now.

Start developing your unique leadership authenticity by paying attention to what feels true to you. Notice when you're trying to lead like someone else versus when you're leading from your own strengths.

Build your competency relentlessly. Your academic work isn't separate from your leadership development—it's foundational to it.

Seek experiences and exposure. Read those autobiographies. And read other things, both fiction and nonfiction. Then read some more. Travel when you can. Say yes to opportunities that expand your world. Did I mention to read?

Do the inner work. Start the practice of introspection now. Develop your emotional intelligence while you're young, because it only gets harder to develop these muscles later.

And cultivate genuine empathy. Practice seeing the world through others' eyes. Develop real concern for the wellbeing of people around you.

The world needs your leadership—not some generic version of leadership from a textbook, or what plays out like a caricature on tv or TikTok, but your unique contribution shaped by who you are and who you're becoming. Your communities need your leadership. The Bahamas needs your leadership.

You're not just leaders of tomorrow—you are leaders in formation today. Every choice you make, every challenge you face, every experience you embrace is shaping the leader you are becoming.

Embrace this journey with intention, with courage, and with genuine care for the people you'll have the privilege to serve and lead alongside.

Thank you for listening to me so intently. I look forward to seeing the leaders that you will become.
