MR. SPEAKER & HON. MEMBERS OF THE HONOURABLE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY, today, invincible womanhood, mother of men and ruler of the world raises her noble head and approaches the courts of justice with the clarion call of equal rights for all Bahamian Women.

This mobilization of our energies was called forth by the challenging statement issued by the Right Honourable Secretary of State, Mr. Lenny Boyd on 17 April 1949, that there was not sufficient interest on the part of Bahamian Women for him to recommend the enfranchisement of women at that time.

This statement by the Secretary was issued despite the fact that a petition signed by more than 3,000 women had been presented to Mr. Lenny Boyd by a delegation of women from the Suffrage Movement.

To add insult to injury, Mr. Boyd at the same time recommended the extension of the franchise to all males who have reached the age of 21. May we remind you that there has never been any demand from our husbands and sons to secure their rights, but these are freely recommended. The Woman Suffrage Movement wishes to go on record as wholeheartedly supporting Universal Franchise for man and woman alike, and the Secretary of State must be sternly reminded by the Woman of the Bahamas that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, set forth in the Charter of the U.N. guarantees to all men and women regardless of race, colour, or sex the fundamental right to vote.

We women of the Bahamas have lined up on the side of the United Nations and justice and democracy, and do hereby reaffirm our faith in the equal rights of men and women and are prepared to perpetuate these ideals to our children. In the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights it reads 'whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of man and woman, the General Assembly proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights.'

We quote Article 1 and 2 of the Declaration:

Article 1 - All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

Article 2 - Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration without distinction of any kind such as race, colour or sex.
MR. SPEAKER & MEMBERS OF THE HONOURABLE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY, the
Women Suffrage Movement speaks today in the behalf of 54,000
women, more than one-half the population of our Islands. The
Women of the Bahamas have been suckered to their responsibilities
and duties as citizens for many generations, but within the last
30 or 35 years women have vigorously carried out these duties and
responsibilities in a manner comparable to that of any highly
civilized country. True we have not been violent agitators
because we have accepted the traditional theory that civic and
political responsibilities were ably carried out by our men.

Today women have by force of circumstance taken on increasing
responsibilities to ensure the proper development and growth
of our homes, our children and our social institutions. Bahamian
women have risen to give outstanding leadership services in busi-
ness activities, welfare work, home and school organizations, as
well as the extension of brotherly love in 100 fraternal and bene-
ficiary organizations throughout the Islands.

In nearly all of these organizations women already learn to use
democratic techniques of government and the principles of choosing
their representatives. We nominate and elect officers, and keenly
watch their services to the group, returning them again to leader-
ship when they have served us well. We know of the many selfish
intrigues which sometimes motivate men and women to seek re-
election to offices and are aware of our responsibilities to rid
the group of corrupt and improper leadership when once the wel-
fare of the group is threatened. We have therefore learnt to
choose our leaders well and wisely. The same principles will
guide us now as we seek to assume our duties and responsibilities
in guiding the destiny of our beloved Islands.

An early petition for Women Suffrage was presented in 1952 by the
great Benevolent Order of Elks of the World, an organization with
membership of 81,000, and with six temples in the Out Islands.

We regret that the petition submitted to the House on 1st December,
1958, was grossly misrepresented as coming from 13 petitioners and
500 others. The 45 page petition, photo-static copies of which
have been preserved, was signed by 2,829 persons living in such
widely scattered islands as Exuma, Grand Bahama, Abaco, Long Island,
Out Island, Eleuthera, Andros and New Providence.
We wish to go on record in protesting to the House that a great injustice has been done to the people's cause and that this real, irresponsible deed, can only be vindicated by a noble act on the part of the Assembly. To be deceived is regarded by women as one of the greatest crimes against their faithful trust, since faithfulness is the basic principle upon which we build our homes, rear our children and build our nation.

We women have accepted and paid all the taxes which are imposed upon us by a government in which we now have no representation. Since we are powerless to limit these taxes, we are forced to bring charges of tyranny and despotism against the our Government if it further denies us our rights to choose those who must rule over us and share in the making of our laws.

Should the Government agree to abolishing all taxes of every kind including stamp duties, and customs duties on goods and properties, owned by women, we would regard this as detrimental to the progress of our country, but mind you, we would be justified in refusing to pay your taxes, since we women are ineligible to vote.

We do not wish to be regarded as rebellious but we would point out to you that to cling unreasonably or timely to ancient outmoded ways of government is not in the best interest of our country.

We therefore earnestly desire that this Regime go on record as an enlightened, democratic body, by ordering the immediate enumeration and registration of all women 21 years and over so that they may carry out their duties as full citizens in the next by-election or general election.

We women press this demand and ask such enactment on the basis of not who is right, but what is right for our country. We judge expediency only on this basis. We seek no compromise. There is no alternative. We abhor any delaying action. We women ask only that you gentlemen move now to secure the rights of 54,000 women including your wives and daughters.

Approximately half of the female population are working women, many of whom are the entire support of their families. Many have built their own homes, have bank accounts, established themselves in business and pay government taxes. An earlier petition points out to the HONOURABLE HOUSE that it is a violation of the principles of democracy to grind out taxes to people who are without the power to limit or extend such taxes. Taxation without representation as you will recall was the basic principle upon which
which the American Revolution was based, and which due to the
shortsightedness of the British King, George III and his Minis-
ters lost for Britain our great and beneficent neighbour The
United States of America. It is this principle which still
stirs a revolt in the hearts of Bahamian Women and energizes us
to make our plea before honourable men.

We women grieve and are deeply concerned when our sons and
daughters tried in the courts of law, find always that they are
seated by a male group of jurors. We do firmly believe that it
is democratic and right that women should serve on these juries,
but without the vote, the whole country is denied the benefit of
full and impartial judgment.

We women are extremely concerned that the plight of delinquent
girls is taken so lightly by our Government. The hearts of
mothers grieve at the revolting practice of sending poor girls
8, 9, 10 and 11 years to live in jail with seasoned criminals.
Active participation in Government by Bahamian Women will see
an end to such practice, and proper care and guidance given to
those whose real crime is only poverty and insecurity.

There are other grievances which we women have. Local Government
in our Islands is administered through Boards and Committees.
There are eleven boards consisting of fifty-six members. How
women on these boards.

There are twenty-one Committees assisted by Advisory Committees
and on these there are ten women who are privileged to serve
in an inferior capacity.

There are nearly 200 Justices of the Peace from whose ranks women
are totally excluded.

There are Out Island Commissionerships to which no woman is in-
vited to serve.

The Houghton Report on Education suggests to Government the advi-
sability of including women on the proposed Advisory Committee to
the Board of Education. While wholeheartedly endorsing this sugges-
tion, we further wish to show the advisability of including women
on the Board of Education and any other Board which deals with the
welfare of our homes, schools and communities.
Gentlemen, hear me. It requires the insight and interest of women to investigate, report on, and seek improvement of many projects in which men are not naturally interested and which would free you to turn your energies to more manly pursuits. We women wish to serve our country and assist your efforts in attending to such projects as Housing schemes, Slum Clearance, establishment of Libraries and Museums, Local Welfare Services, Supervision of Food and Drug Supplies, and the establishment of reasonable and respectable lodgings for temporary visitors from our Out Islands.

Education in the processing and operation of School medical services and milk distribution, care of our many weed-covered cemeteries, Registration of births, deaths and marriages, Proper filing system of Registration of voters, Suppression of nuisances, Maternity and Child Welfare, birth control information centers, Jury Service, Notification and disinfection of infectious diseases, Care of the aged, etc. are only a few of the areas to which women can make their contributions. This is a task so large that it takes the energies of everybody, men and women, to better conditions in our Islands.

MR. SPEAKER AND MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY, putting aside our grievances, we women raise our hearts and heads to loftier things, our willingness and readiness to participate as full citizens in the affairs of our country. We women are ready, willing and able. You must no longer deny us our rights.

The spirit of the great, the Honourable A. F. Adderley, reassures us this day in the walls of this assembly that right will prevail. You must feel as I do, his spirit supporting those very things for which he in his lifetime fought so hard to bring about - Justice for All. Gentlemen if you deny the people their right you will be found fighting against God.

Your humble petitioner thanks God for this opportunity to speak to your hearts and consciences and pray that speedy action will be taken by you to bring about the enumeration and registration of all Bahamian Women 21 years and over.

DORIS L. JOHNSON
Pro: Woman Suffrage Movement
January 19, 1939