



Last updated: August 2011

Bahamas Detention Profile

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The British Commonwealth of the Bahamas is a series of islands located to the east of the straights separating Cuba and the U.S. state of Florida. The islands, which have a population of nearly 350,000, have served as an important transit area for migrants from Cuba and Haiti, as well as increasingly from African countries, like Nigeria. The country reportedly hosts an estimated 30,000 undocumented Haitians (USDS 2011). It has strict immigration laws in place governing entry and residence, and the law provides for criminal sanctions for violations of its *Immigration Act*. Although a signatory to the 1951 [Refugee Convention](#), the country has yet to approve legislation providing for asylum. Watchdog groups have reported appalling conditions at the country's sole dedicated migrant detention facility—the Carmichael Road Detention Centre—and there have been numerous reports of abuse at the facility. Undocumented children are detained pending their removal from the country, as are asylum seekers while their claims are being processed.

Detention Policy

The *Immigration Act* (1967), which has been amended several times, contains provisions for the entry, residence, transit, and exit of migrants in the Bahamas, as well as for the arrest, detention, and deportation of irregular migrants. The act also contains provisions for the imposition of criminal sanctions for status-related violations.

Grounds for detention. Section 9 of the *Immigration Act* grants powers to any immigration or police officer to arrest, without a warrant, a non-citizen who is suspected of committing an offence under the *Immigration Act*. Immigration officers have the authority to detain anyone refused entry, pending removal from the country (Section 25(4)). In addition, any foreign national apprehended in the country after landing in contravention to the act is subject to detention and removal under Section 25 (Section 26).

According to Section 22, a person can be refused entry if he/she, *inter alia*, is not in possession of a valid ticket or permit; has been convicted of a crime punishable with imprisonment of at least three years; is considered to be, in the opinion of the Board of Immigration, “undesirable”; falls within the Minister for Immigration’s “prohibited class of persons”; or is incapable of supporting herself or dependents during stay in country. Anyone listed on the Board of Immigration’s “Stop List”—a list that contains the names of non-citizens not currently in the Bahamas who have conducted or are likely to conduct themselves in an “undesirable” manner—can also be refused entry to the country (Section 24).

Anyone refused entry can be issued a removal order and the “master” of the vessel that brought the foreign national to the Bahamas is responsible for removing the migrant. Immigration officers have the authority to place such foreign nationals on board the vessel on which they will depart (Section 25). Section 27 stipulates that the master of the vessel that brought the foreign national to the Bahamas is responsible for covering costs associated with detention and removal.

Section 40 provides for the deportation of non-citizens who have landed or remained in the country contrary to the provisions of the *Immigration Act*; have been convicted of an immigration offence or any offence punishable with death or imprisonment of at least two years; or have been deemed an “undesirable” person. The Minister for Immigration may issue a deportation order that requires a person to leave the country within a specified time-frame and prohibits him/her from returning.

The Governor-General has the authority to detain persons issued a deportation order until deportation is possible (including on board a ship or aircraft about to leave the country); and anyone whose case has been recommended for deportation (Section 41).

Access to appeals. Migrants who were lawfully in the Bahamas prior to the issuance of a deportation order are entitled to appeal the order. This must be done in writing to the Governor-General within seven days following the date the order was

issued (Section 40 (2)). Migrants cannot be detained during this seven day period (Section 41 (5)).

Length of detention. There is no maximum length of detention specified in the law. According to U.S. State Department, the typical length of detention can vary greatly depending on the nationality of the detainee and is largely dependent on the willingness of governments to re-admit their nationals as well as on the availability of funds to cover repatriation. Haitians are generally repatriated within one week; Cubans can be held for much longer periods (USDS 2011).

Criminal non-citizens. Foreign nationals convicted of crimes other than immigration violations are held at Fox Hill Prison, where they reportedly can remain for weeks or months after serving their sentences as they await deportation (USDS 2011).

Minors. There do not appear to be any specific provisions for minors or other vulnerable persons in the *Immigration Act*. According to the U.S. State Department, children have reportedly been detained for months without access to education (USDS 2011). One staff member working at the country's sole dedicated migrant detention centre—the Carmichael Road Detention Centre—told the **Global Detention Project**, on background, that children are detained with their mothers alongside other women at the facility (Carmichael Road Detention Centre 2011).

Gender segregation. While the *Immigration Act* does not explicitly provide for the segregation of men and women in detention, in practice, men and women are detained in separate sections of the country's the Carmichael Road detention facility (Carmichael Road Detention Centre 2011).

Asylum seekers. The Bahamas became party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees in 1993; however, the country has yet to enact legislation that fulfils its obligations to the Convention (BIS 2011; USDS 2011). According to multiple sources, asylum seekers are detained at the Carmichael Road Detention Centre while they are being processed (Carmichael Road Detention Centre 2011; BIS 2011).

In May 2011, UNHCR officials met with Bahaman authorities to discuss obstacles to the protection of refugees and asylum seekers in the Bahamas and to explore ways in which UNHCR could support the Bahamas with training, and legal and technical advice (BIS 2011).

In May 2011, UNHCR issued an advisory statement on the return of Haitians following the devastating earthquake in January 2010. It stated, "Despite the recent elections and the positive outlook that they bring to the recovery of the country, the Haitian State, weakened by the earthquake, cannot yet ensure that vulnerable or disabled people, people with health problems or victims of sexual abuse in Haiti would receive sufficient or adequate care by the State in case of return. In this context, governments should refrain from conducting returns to Haiti. Given the current situation prevailing in Haiti, OHCHR and UNHCR would like to appeal to Governments to renew, on humanitarian grounds, residence permits and other mechanisms that have allowed Haitians to remain outside the country" (Bahamas Press 2011).

Despite this appeal, press reports indicate that in August 2011 the Bahamian Immigration Department repatriated 115 Haitian migrants to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on a charter flight, including 76 men, 32 women, and eight children; 86 of those repatriated had arrived in the Bahamas irregularly on 1 August 2011; 29 others had been taken to the Carmichael Road Detention Centre after being found without proof of status (The Tribune 2011). Previously, in January 2011, a group of 54 Haitians entered the Bahamas and were subsequently detained at the Carmichael Road Detention Centre pending their repatriation to Haiti (The Nassau Guardian 2011).

Criminalization. Section 19 stipulates that "Any person landing or embarking in the Bahamas in contravention of this section shall be guilty of an offence," and is liable to pay a fine of up to 300 dollars and/or imprisonment for up to 12 months" (Section 19(2)). The Director of Immigration has the authority to issue a removal order to any person who is convicted of an offence and who has been sentenced to imprisonment. The convicted person can be placed on board any ship or aircraft about to leave the Bahamas prior to the completion of their sentence and are deemed in legal custody until the departure of such ship or aircraft (Section 19 (3)). In addition, anyone who fails to present valid travel documents or who presents forged or false documents is in violation of the Immigration Act (Section 37).

Persons who bring irregular migrants into the Bahamas in violation of the Immigration Act are also in violation of the law and can be fined or imprisoned (Section 19(4)).

In July 2011, acting Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Brent Symonette, said the Department of Immigration faced ongoing challenges with many migrants using forged documents and Bahamians helping illegal immigrants evade

the law. He said, “We may have to look at the laws regarding harbouring of illegals and start charging people who harbour illegal immigrants” (Nassau Guardian 2011).

Detention Infrastructure

The Bahamas operates one dedicated immigration detention facility—the **Carmichael Road Detention Centre**, which is located in New Providence (Carmichael Road Detention Centre 2011; USDS 2011; Government of the Bahamas 2009). Additionally, reports suggest that **Fox Hill Prison** (aka Her Majesty’s Prison), located in Nassau, is used to confine people in a form of immigration-related detention. According to the U.S. State Department, foreign nationals imprisoned for crimes not related to immigration status continue to be confined at the prison after serving their sentences as they await deportation (USDS 2011).

Carmichael Road Detention Centre. There is seemingly contradictory information about the Carmichael Road facility. For instance, regarding its size, the U.S. State Department reports that the detention centre has a capacity to hold up to 500 detainees, with tent space for an additional 500 (USDS 2011). However, a December 2010 press report stated that there were some 70 people at the facility at the time, and only 50 beds available to accommodate them. According to this report, one of the dormitory buildings was destroyed in late 2008 during an alleged detainee arson attack, and that since then bed space had been severely curtailed (Lowe 2010).

A staff member at the Carmichael Road facility, who agreed to speak with the Global Detention Project on background only, confirmed some of the information above and challenged other claims. She said the facility had a total capacity of 500, but that two of the centre’s dormitories are currently down, leaving only some 100 beds available to accommodate immigrant detainees. This source said that tents are not used to accommodate detainees at the facility (Carmichael Road Detention Centre 2011).

Women and men are reportedly detained separately and children under the age of 14 are held in the women’s dormitory (Carmichael Road Detention Centre 2011; USDS 2011). Children reportedly have no contact with their fathers except during weekly visitation periods (USDS 2011). The U.S. Department of State report claimed that children were held for months without access to education (USDS 2011).

In December 2010, a detainee claimed that the level of hygiene at the Carmichael facility was despicable. Included in his allegations were reports of over-flowing toilets; insufficient food; insufficient bedding; and sexual assault (Lowe 2010). In response to the allegations, Immigration Minister Brent Symonette said that the claims would be investigated, but that “if conditions are uncomfortable then people shouldn’t break the law. ... [T]hose in the Bahamas working illegally should regularise their status or leave immediately.” The previous Minister for Immigration had promised a report would be commissioned into conditions at the facility; as of August 2011 it had not been published (Lowe 2010).

Amnesty International has repeatedly criticised the conditions and treatment of detainees at the Carmichael facility (AI 2009; AI 2004; AI 2003). In a 2009 statement, AI pointed to alleged beatings and mistreatment of detainees; insufficient bed space; and the absence of any independent review of the allegations of mistreatment made by detainees (AI 2009).

According to the U.S. Department of State, organisations providing aid to detainees—including counselling services and religious instruction—had regular access to the detainees at the facility (USDS 2011). When asked whether such organisations were permitted to access and assist detainees at the facility, a Carmichael staff member told the Global Detention Project that they would need to contact the director of the facility to arrange such access. According to this staff member, the consuls were the main source of assistance to their country nationals detained at the centre (Carmichael Road Detention Centre 2011).

According to a September 2010 media report, the Royal Bahamas Defence Force Commando Squadron is charged with upholding the internal and external security at the Carmichael Road Detention Facility (BIS 2010). In September 2011, two members of the Royal Bahamas Defence Force Commando Squadron travelled to Miami, Florida, to tour the Krome Service Processing Centre. The object of the tour was to discuss best practices in immigration facility detention management in the **United States**. The Bahamian officials reportedly met with several officers from the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to discuss issues regarding irregular migration, detention standards, medical care, detainee in-processing, detainee treatment, and facility security. The visit, sponsored by the United States Northern Command and the U.S. Embassy in Nassau, was the second of a series of exchanges on detainee operations (BIS 2010).

Facts & Figures

The government of the Bahamas operates one dedicated migrant detention centre—the **Carmichael Road Detention Centre**—as well as a prison that is reportedly used to hold non-citizens convicted of crimes while they await deportation **Fox Hill Prison** (aka Her Majesty’s Prison) (USDS 2011).

When operating at full capacity, the Carmichael centre has beds to hold up to 500 people, although as of August 2011 bed space was reportedly limited to 100 because two of the centre’s dormitories were temporarily shuttered (Carmichael Road Detention Centre 2011).

As of 18 August 2011 there were 72 migrants (irregular migrants and asylum seekers) being held at the centre, including a large group of Haitians and Cubans, in addition to migrants from Jamaica, Sri Lanka, Ghana, Guiana, Honduras, Iran, Kenya, Nigeria, China, Montenegro, and Sierra Leone (Carmichael Road Facility 2011). According to the U.S. Department of State, the highest occupancy at any one time during 2010 was approximately 252 (USDS 2011).

The country reportedly hosts around 30,000 undocumented Haitians (USDS 2011).

As of January 2011, there were nine asylum seekers in the Bahamas (UNHCR 2011). According to a May 2011 media report, the Bahamas, with the assistance of UNHCR, granted refugee status to more than 100 Cuban nationals, in addition to other foreign nationals. At the time of the media report, there were seven Cubans, four Sri Lankans, and one Iranian detained at the Carmichael detention facility who had requested asylum (BIS 2011).

According to acting Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Brent Symonette, at the end of June 2011 there were “a number of nationals” being held at the Carmichael Road Detention Centre whose repatriation was difficult due to visas being required for each of the countries that the migrants must pass through en route to their countries of origin (McCartney 2011). Repatriations to Cuba was also a difficult process, particularly if the migrants had been outside of Cuba for more than 11 months. According to Symonette, the Department of Immigration has a total budget of around \$1,000,000, which must also cover the repatriation of migrants to countries in the Caribbean, and also African countries, such as Nigeria (McCartney 2011).

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Bahamas Detention Profile

List of Detention Sites

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Name	Location	Status (Year)	Facility Type	Security	Authority	Management	Capacity	Reported Population	Demographics & Segregation
Carmichael Road Detention Centre	New Providence	In use (2011)	Dedicated migrant detention facility	Secure	Department of Immigration; Department of Police	Royal Bahamas Defence Force	Approx. 100 (2011)	72 (as of 18 August 2011)	Adult males & females. Gender segregation; Age segregation
Fox Hill Prison	Nassau	In use (2011)	Prison	Secure					

Sources

(This is only a partial list. More detailed information is available upon request.)

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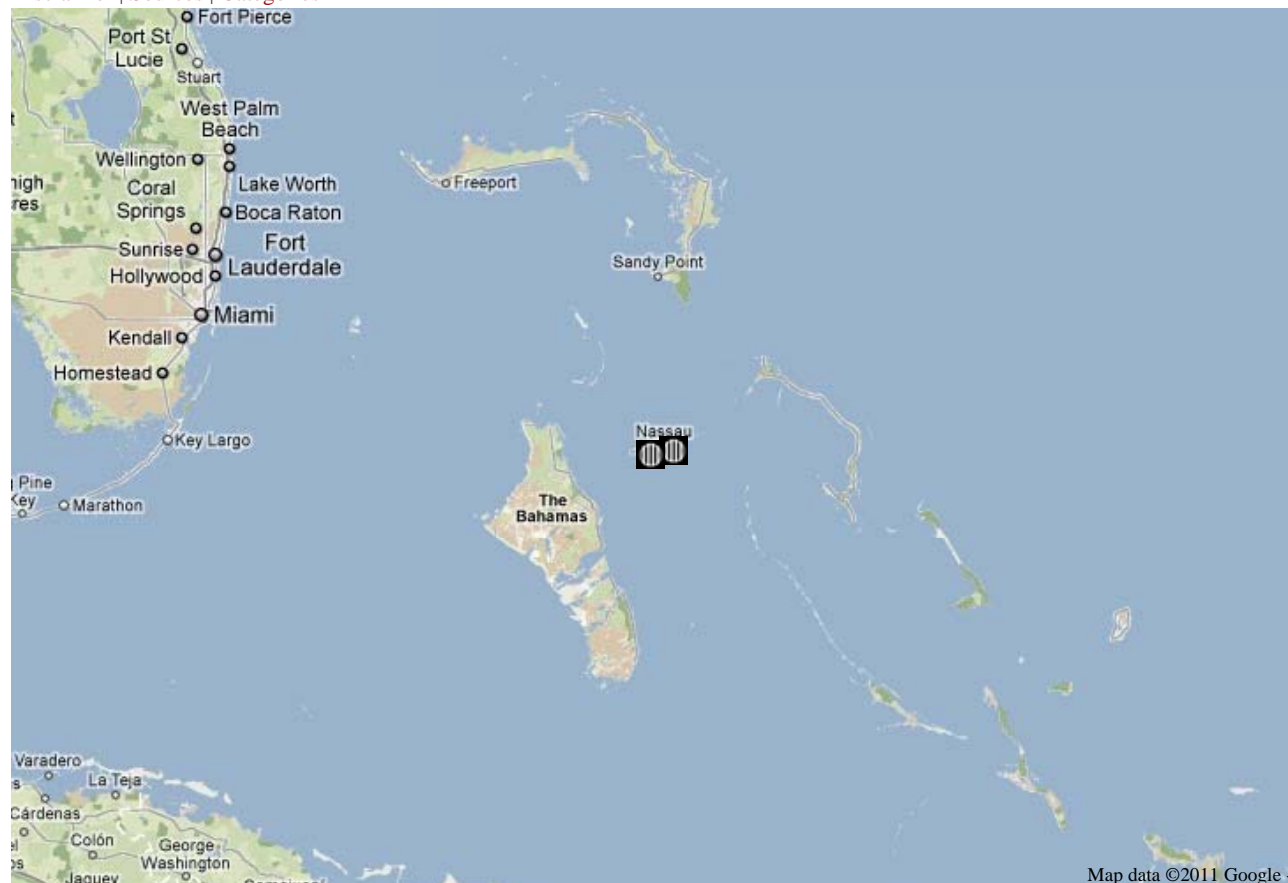
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Map of "In Use" Detention Sites

For more detailed information, see the complete [List of Detention Sites](#).

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Country View

1. [Carmichael Road Detention Centre](#)
2. [Fox Hill Prison](#)

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- » Regional and International Organisations
- » NGOs and Research Institutions
- » Media

Government Agencies

The Commonwealth of the Bahamas Government Portal

<http://www.bahamas.gov.bs/>

Department of Immigration

<http://www.bahamas.gov.bs/bahamasweb2/home.nsf/vContentW/6B5809A102A2AD6B8525745000677F24>

Regional and International Organizations

International Labour Organisation—Bahamas—List of Ratifications of International Labour Conventions

<http://www.right-to-education.org/country-node/299/country-ilo>

International Organization for Migration—Bahamas Country Information

<http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/bahamas>

UNHCR—Bahamas Country Information

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/tehis/vtx/page?page=49e491186>

NGOs and Research Institutions

Bahamas Human Rights Network

<http://www.blue9ine.com/clients/bahamashumanrights/>

College of the Bahamas

<http://www.cob.edu.bs/>

Media

The Bahama Journal

<http://www.jonesbahamas.com/>

The Freeport News

<http://freeport.nassauguardian.net/>

The Nassau Guardian

<http://www.thenassauguardian.com/>

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