

Press Release

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Photo credits: Azaleta Ishmael-Newry

Bahamas Special Olympics Bring Home 14 Medals From World Summer Games 2019 Where Unity and Inclusivity Were Paramount

Nassau Bahamas - The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has become a popular center for world events with Bahamian participation at its finest. Recently, 24 special Bahamian athletes competed among an estimated 7,500 athletes from 195 countries in the 15th Special Olympics World Games 2019 that was held in Abu Dhabi, the capital of UAE.

The Bahamian athletes left their mark in one of the largest sporting events in the Middle East, where the Bahamas brand became significantly more recognized thanks to this small team with big determination. Half a million spectators, 2,500 coaches and 20,000 volunteers were part of the Games where “inclusion and unity” were incorporated into these Special Olympics.



Photo 1

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture representatives met the Bahamas Special Olympics (BSO) delegation on their arrival home from Abu Dhabi, UAE. More than 30 Bahamian athletes were among 7,500 from 195 countries in the 15th Special Olympics World Games 2019. Present at the Lynden Pindling International Airport in Nassau, Bahamas were Tim Munnings (center left, in turquoise jacket), director, Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture (MYSC), Rhoda Jackson (black and white jacket), acting permanent secretary, MYSC, Ambassador Tony Joudi, (beige suit) non-resident Ambassador to UAE, and Gilbert Williams (turquoise toque) BSO committee. Photo by Azaleta Ishmael-Newry.

This Bahamas Special Olympics (BSO) team admirably made their mark at home and internationally by winning 14 medals - six gold, three silver and five bronze at the World Games that took place March 14th to 21st. The Bahamas team competed in 5 sporting disciplines in athletics, swimming, bowling, bocce and soccer. The Special Olympics World Games 2019 included 24 summer sports at 11 venues throughout Abu Dhabi.

The following day on March 22nd, The Bahamas delegation returned to an energetic welcome home greeting at the Lynden Pindling International Airport. Members of the BSO committee, family, friends, and representatives of government ministries filled the arrival area as an enthusiastic Junkanoo performance by Barabbas and the Tribe took place.

Representing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was non-resident Ambassador to the UAE for The Bahamas, Tony Joudi and for the Ministry Of Youth, Sports and Culture, Acting Permanent Secretary Rhoda Jackson and Director Tim Munnings.

Affirming the appreciation of the Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture, Hon. Laneisha Rolle, Rhoda Jackson said, "We know how long it takes – the many hours of practice and training, and we know that it was not a small feat. We are very proud of you. Each of you played a special part in representing The Bahamas and on behalf of my Minister, I just want to congratulate you and we're proud of the 14 medals you earned."

Ambassador Joudi expressed similar sentiments letting the group know that Hon. Darren Henfield sent his gratitude as he was off of the Island on government business. "On behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Bahamian people, we thank God for the blessings you received, as you have elevated your country when you competed with the world's athletes."

Amanda Moncur, Chairperson of the Bahamas Special Olympics stated that the team performed especially well and reminded us that the focus is not just on the medals, but the overall performance of the athlete. "The beauty about Special Olympics is that the athletes are competing according to ability and age – competing against persons who have the same ability as they do. So, it's fair competition," said Moncur.

"For the first time, we had a unified soccer team. There is a big movement world-wide in Special Olympics for inclusion...They had a hard time there (at the World Games 2019) but they were able to defeat China... and bring home a bronze medal."

When asked about the important timing of having the Bahamian team attend the Special Olympics World Games 2019 in Abu Dhabi – which is the second most populous city after Dubai, in the UAE - Ambassador Joudi explained: "The Bahamas Special Olympic team is a fresh reminder of The Bahamas in the Middle East. They have added more support to our Expo project by their participation in the Games. A lot of people on that side of the world do not know where The Bahamas is located. The medals and the athletes added to the momentum of the upcoming Expo 2020 Dubai event and to the prestige that The Bahamas is not just a country of sun, sand and sea."

The Bahamas is one of the more than 150 countries participating with a Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai that is less than 18 months away.

Expo 2020's Rita Penteado, said: "We are creating one of the most inclusive World Expos in history, welcoming people from all walks of life and nationalities with various abilities, talents and perspectives. The World Games shares this philosophy and, as another international event with the support of the nation's leadership, it is an ideal setting in which the Expo 2020 team can learn. We are inviting the entire world, including people of determination, to join us at Expo for six months, from 20 October, 2020, with an open and creative mind and to witness the UAE host the biggest event ever held in the Arab world." The Expo team had volunteers in the World Games who will head various areas when Expo arrives. (Source: www.abudhabi2019.org).

In a newsletter recently written by US journalist Maria Shriver whose mother Eunice Kennedy Shriver founded Special Olympics, for rights and acceptance for people with intellectual disabilities, Shriver wrote, "In my time in Abu Dhabi for the Special Olympics World Games (2019), I was struck by a few things: 1) How vast the world is and how small we all are in it; 2) How diverse the world is and how little we know about each other's cultures, religions and customs; 3) How similar we actually are, regardless of the color of our skin or the God to whom we pray; and, 4) How much we all need inspiration and examples of courage and dignity in our lives. These things have the power to lift us all up. They should give us hope that we can find common ground and that we are each capable of being the inspiration that we seek."

The country is proud of the accomplishments of the Bahamas Special Olympics team and the Bahamas Pavilion Organizers invite Bahamians to start planning and gearing up for another significant event in the UAE – Expo 2020 Dubai where 180 countries are participating. The Bahamas Pavilion will showcase Bahamian culture, traditions, food as well as industries such as: financial/banking services, real estate, tourism, agriculture and local manufacturing industries. Bahamians do not require a Visa to travel to Dubai. More information on Expo is available at www.Expo2020Dubai.

Photos



Photo 2

H.E. Tony Joudi, non-resident Ambassador to the UAE, center, pose with committee members, family and friends of the Bahamas Special Olympic athletes who were arriving from Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates after successfully winning 14 medals in the 2019 World Summer Games. Photo by Azaleta Ishmael-New



Photo 3

Gilbert Williams, second from left, who heads the Special Olympic program in The Bahamas stands with (L-R) Tim Munnings, director, Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture (MYSC), Rhoda Jackson, acting permanent secretary, MYSC and non-resident ambassador to UAE, Tony Joudi at the welcome home greeting at LPIA of the Bahamas Special Olympics delegation that attended the World Summer Games 2019 in Abu Dhabi. Photo by Azaleta Ishmael-Newry

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