

**Independence Day Address by the  
Hon. Patrick Faber, Acting Prime Minister  
September 21, 2018  
Belmopan**

Your Excellency, the Governor-General, Sir Colville Young,  
My Lord Chief Justice, Kenneth Benjamin and Mrs Benjamin, and other Justices of the  
Supreme Court  
Hon Leader of the Opposition, John Briceño, and Mrs Briceño  
Hon Members of the Cabinet and Members of the National Assembly  
Your Worship the Mayor of Belmopan, Mr Khalid Belisle & Mrs. Belisle  
My Lords the Bishops of the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches of Belize  
Bishop of the Methodist Belize/Honduras District  
President of the Evangelical Association of Churches  
Other members of the Clergy  
Excellencies of the Diplomatic Corps  
Members of the Consular Corps  
Special guests, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Fellow Belizeans

Before I get into this address, kindly allow me to say what a privilege it is for me to be standing at this podium to be offering such a notable speech that lands me in the company of only a few others, probably not more than five in number who have had such a distinguished honor to address the nation in such a capacity on the anniversary of our nation's Independence. Allow me as well to encourage all Belizeans to continue to pray for the full recovery of our prime minister, the Rt. Hon. Dean Barrow and to thank the many who have extended, by way of the government, their best wishes for his recovery.

I'd also wish to ask you to remember in your prayers, the family of another great Belizean leader and patriot, the Hon Dean Russel Lindo who passed on and will be buried by an official funeral on Monday afternoon at St John's Anglican Cathedral.

Since Independence we have enjoyed periods of prosperity and endured significant challenges to our nationhood, but regardless of the condition of the day, our democracy has remained intact, and the principles of law and order have always prevailed. It is on those principles of democracy and social justice that we have been able to build this young nation, and on the principle that we are one nation under God, and one people with one determination; to ensure our survival, sustainability and prosperity in a changing world.

In this our third term in office, our government remains strong. Our economy remains sustainable, and our growth remains steady. Our social programs continue to yield internationally recognized results and our education system continues to deepen and expand each and every year. The infrastructure of this nation has never been stronger; new and improved road and bridges interconnect our nation from North to South, East to

West, connecting into improved municipal streets and vast networks of rural and farm roads, connecting people with jobs, products with markets, students with schools, citizens with services, and people with each other.

It was not always this way. The inherited conditions from our predecessors left us with a myriad of government sponsored deals that shackled our development by choking our access to technology, threatening our energy supplies, and robbing us of our national revenues; deals that drove us to excessive litigation and that diverted social resources toward private greed. Through the assertive and brave actions of our government led by the Rt. Hon Dean Barrow, we were able to regain much of our national assets, liberate, modernize and expand telecommunications, secure and stabilize electricity supply, and restore our financial footing with strong foreign reserves. In addition, we stabilized our banking system, even in the midst of an uncertain global financial landscape.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is on this solid foundation that I come to offer you a glimpse into the future of where we intend to take this nation, and just some of the programs that are being undertaken to get us there.

Describing all the programs that this government is engaged in might take us a while but I will limit myself to five broad themes, all of which we see as important at this time. These themes center on service delivery, national security, the economy, infrastructure, and our vision for the future. They all encompass the essence of our challenges and our opportunities, and offer to us the greatest hope for our nation.

First and foremost, we realize that the quality, accuracy, and integrity of the services that we provide to the public is fundamental to good governance. Since independence, government has not kept up to pace with technology and up to today we remain mired in antiquated ways of delivering services to our people. It is our determination to ensure that every Belizean client is treated with respect. Honesty, efficiency and service at the best possible cost to taxpayers are also of paramount importance.

With this in mind, we are embarking on a system wide program to re-engineer the processes and systems that power our government. At the very top, we in cabinet will be moving toward a digitized e-Cabinet system, and will be setting the example for the rest of government for a system-wide Digital Transformation that will see marked improvement in the level of service to the public over the next two years.

This transformation has already started, but will accelerate with the embarking on a program in October to revamp our tax institutions with a new institutional structure, powered by modern digital technology. Beyond this, investments in the coming year in people, processes and technology will continue to strengthen the delivery systems that we use to identify citizens, to manage our land and other resources, to provide health services, and to provide security to our citizens.

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, Government 2.0 is just on the horizon, and with the rollout of BTL's broadband fiber network to almost every household in Belize, the future beyond that horizon is bright.

In the area of national security, this vexing problem of crime has to be tackled with all our might. Our recent move to declare urban violence in Belize City as a national emergency was one that was necessary, and in my mind an appropriate response to what has become no less than a national crisis. Since the detention exercise in early September, we have seen an exponential fall in the number of street killings, and this is not by accident. This is proof that it is without a doubt that this small group of young men; members of gangs involved in turf warfare, armed with dangerous weapons, have been the main contributors to the spate of violence that dominated the headlines. While caution is being taken to ensure that the rights of all Belizeans are respected, we must ensure that the safety and security of law-abiding citizens are placed at the forefront, and if drastic measures have to be taken to ensure this, so be it.

Now, this singular action is not the end-all for our plans to secure our streets. We understand that social intervention must expand in risk areas, and that the focus must be on building strong family structures, expanded educational support, and increased economic opportunities for our youth. With this in mind, investment in programs such as BOOST, the Pantry Program, our education subsidies and housing grants will continue to be rolled out and expanded, with more specific targeting to those families at risk. To our detractors, we will continue to say that these programs are not handouts, and they are not band-aids; proof of which can be seen in the results of the increasing numbers of high school graduates that have come from beneficiary families.

Intervention on crime continues with investment in our security forces. Over the last few years, we have increased the recruiting, training and deployment of police officers. This increase in our forces, coupled with an increase in training programs, a strengthening of our prosecution branch and the strengthening of the forensic laboratory have made our fight against crime a stronger one.

On the international front, our efforts to peacefully address and resolve the territorial claim by Guatemala will arrive at a very important milestone in April of 2019 as Belizeans participate in a referendum to decide whether this generational question should be taken to the International Court of Justice. This action, one more step in the efforts by countless patriots over many years, will reflect the true sentiment of our Belizean populace, and will undoubtedly set the stage for a possible final resolution of the dispute. While the Guatemalan public has spoken loud and clear on the issue, it is our government's view that each and every Belizean should participate, and it is our determination that through our education process, everyone will have all the facts needed in order to make the right decision.

As has been typical for the past few years, our country's economic growth has been steady. Recent data indicate an acceleration in economic activity and growth in the 2nd quarter of 2018 and is estimated at 5.8%. Tourism arrivals were up by 17.1% in the first half of the year when compared to the same period last year. During the first half of 2018 the net foreign assets of the banking system expanded by \$55.2mn, while net domestic credit fell by \$37.7mn due to an increase in foreign investments in the banana industry and a steady growth in tourism receipts.

The Central Bank of Belize expects inflation to remain unchanged at under 1%, foreign exchange to remain strong, and an overall growth by the end of 2018 of about 2.4%, a full percentage point above 2017 numbers. Despite meeting all our debt obligations, settling a number of claims and without a pause to our infrastructure expansion program, our economy remains strong, and there is no sign of any crisis in the foreseeable future.

Foreign Investment continues unabated with several large projects in the pipeline. On the agriculture front, ASR/BSI's BZ \$22million investment will result in production of packaged refined sugar, while an additional investment of \$50 million to improve efficiency and repair and make improvements to the mill and power plant should reduce cost, all leading to a better yield for our farmers in the North.

While the shrimp industry has been facing the severe challenge of managing Early Mortality Syndrome Disease (EMS), technology known to manage and eradicate the disease was implemented and while such measures were not enough to stave off some loss of jobs, new emerging trend that is seeing small scale farmers restocking their farms and larger scale farmers investing in new field production technology is expected to contribute to a rebounding of the crop. Re-opening of markets in Mexico added to our CARICOM exports to Trinidad and Jamaica as well as the seeking of access to the EU Market will enhance the chances for full recovery of the industry.

Leading the charge in new investment is the tourism industry, where we continue to lead the region as one of the few countries able to boast double digit increases for the past 3 years. This growth has been fueled by a vast increase in international flights, which has effectively doubled from four to eight international carriers since our administration came to office, and with new direct flights from Mexico City and Minneapolis-St Paul expected to commence before year-end. In order to accommodate this growth, the PGIA will soon have new extended hours to accommodate night flights.

In terms of hotels, 2018 marked the announcement of 4 new flagship hotels in Belize, with high-end internationally renowned brands leading the way. The Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts at Caye Chapel has commenced the hiring and training of new staff, while the Marriott, the Wyndham Hotel Group, and a new Belize City Hilton are expected to break ground in 2019, accompanying the current Hilton Curio which has already made Belize its home.

Of course, all this new activity means that we must improve our national infrastructure in order to effectively move people, goods and services throughout Belize, and development activity is clearly evident everywhere you look. The Phillip Goldson 4 lane Highway between Haulover and Buttonwood Bay Blvd is nearing completion which will now lead to a replacement of the Haulover bridge. The Climate Resilience Infrastructure Project will continue the works from the PGIA junction to mile 24.5 and another project is in the pipeline for the PGH from mile 24.5 all the way to the Corozal border. We expect actual works on the rehabilitation of the Coastal Road to commence by mid 2019, and work has already commenced on the new Airport Bypass road that will connect the airport directly to the Western Highway.

As our nation's economy grows, it is equally important that we focus on the social fabric of our society in order that our citizens are equipped with the skills and abilities to participate fully in the work and benefits that growth will bring. It is in this light that the government is placing investments in health and education as two of the pillars of social upliftment. Initiatives in these two areas are numerous but I will focus on two. The Ministry of education announced at the start of the fiscal year its high school subsidy expansion program that now brings a total of three of our six districts to receive the \$300 subsidy automatically without the need to qualify. In addition, all rural primary school children now also qualify automatically. In health, Cabinet recently decided that the 100 hemodialysis patients receiving treatment at four service providers across the country will all receive two free treatments per week.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have provided a snapshot of the actual work that is being done by this government toward building a resilient nation, a nation that is quickly finding its place as an example of stability and strength in a region threatened by weather events linked to climate change, violence linked the illicit drug trade, and by global economic conditions out of our control. Our nation, at the crossroads between North and South America, and between Latin America and the Caribbean, represents the hope of this region, and it is our destiny to take a leading role in showing small developing nations that is it possible to not just survive but to thrive. This demonstration is no more evident than in the leading role we have taken to solidify our country's commitment to sustainable development and to the preservation of our natural patrimony.

As humanity's innovation continues to lay its heavy hand on the world's ecology, Belize must continue to do its part to preserve our jewel for generations to come. This determination has shown fruit with the recent announcement by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee that the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System has been removed from the list of sites in danger. It is without a doubt that the natural bounty with which we have been blessed is the value that we must carry forward as our version of a Sovereign Fund that will bring great dividends for generations to come.

In 2019, we will take this one step further by implementing our already-approved policy to ban Styrofoam, single use plastics and plastic straws, and by the end of this year, our new policies that will govern the cutting and clearing of mangroves will come into effect, along with a new land-use policy that will chart the way forward in how we utilize our natural resources for future sustainable growth.

The future for this young nation lies in our hands, and we as the leaders of this nation must step up to the plate and do what is right. Many times, the actions we must take as leaders to address our greatest challenges may seem ambitious, and often times, they may not be the most popular, but we must always strive to make decisions that are in the best interest of the nation, its people and its future. The policies of tomorrow, therefore, will have to include decisions on major issues like the ones taken on the environment.

Beyond this we have to tackle reforms in our immigration system, and in cementing Good Governance in legislation, policy, and at the service-delivery level, so as to insulate against official corruption. We must look at our judicial system and find ways to enact legislation and to strengthen law enforcement to ensure that criminals are punished for wrong doing. We must look at our financial system to ensure equity and fairness in taxation, to ensure that government collects what is due and that those resources are equitably shared to assure the greater good of society. We have to expand and broaden our education and health systems to ensure that our citizens are productive and that the skills and abilities needed to build this nation are imparted upon them. And finally, we must strengthen our social safety net for those that are marginalized, or that have fallen out of the system, to ensure that they are given a hand up, not a hand out, and that all Belizeans can have a fair share of the bounty of this nation.

Today for me is a call to service to our young people. It is their destiny to shine, just as it is our job to create an environment of peace, prosperity and opportunity so everyone can be free to create and innovate, so that family structures can be rebuilt and so that diversity can be celebrated. Most importantly, ladies and gentlemen, we must ensure that hope endures above all, and we must inspire our youth to take their rightful place as productive citizens and good neighbours in this great country of ours.

I take this opportunity to salute our young people as they excel in various areas of self-development and nation building. Their excellence we have seen being demonstrated in sporting, academics, use of technology, governance and entrepreneurship.

As I speak of the accomplishments of our young people, I am reminded to salute our young folks who have been selected by the US government to participate in the 2018 Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative. The nation joins to congratulate Mervin Budram, Fatima Chi, Lorcia Moore, and Kyle Zuniga.

The YLAI initiative is just but one in many support programs offered by nations that are friendly to our Belize. Quite often their support as well as the support of numerous other

development partners go unnoticed or unrecognized. These include non-governmental organizations, UN agencies, foreign universities, IFI's, and more. Ladies and gentlemen of the Diplomatic and Counselor Corps, please assist us in carrying these warm words of gratitude from the grateful hearts of Belizeans. Your contribution to our work of nation building is invaluable.

Less people start believing that the Leader of the Opposition has one upped me, let me make clear that in my view our nation's Independence Day is not an occasion for mudslinging. I say to my friend the Leader of the Opposition that I understand his position completely. You see I understand very well the preternatural world of opposition where all can easily be made perfect by waving a magic wand or in this case calling the election and electing them to power.

But in the world the rest of us live in, and certainly the one where the Barrow administration has thrived against all odds to make a better life for the Belizean people, there is no easy fix and what is required is genuineness. Genuineness of intention and genuineness of action. The kind of genuineness that will not see you take convenient positions when popularity is not on the same side as the right thing to do. Your whole scale condemnation of the government's state of emergency declaration in parts of the southside of Belize City is but just one such example. Let us, my Honorable friend, join in unity for the sake of the Belizean people who elected us to serve.

The job of nation building as taught to us by our National Heroes, George Cadle Price and Philip Goldson, requires all hands on deck. So, it is with all our hearts and all our hands and with God's unmerited favor that this our beautiful and bountiful Belizean land, all 8867 square miles of it will continue to flourish now and forever and its inhabitants the sons and daughters of the Baymen will continue on many more anniversaries of that faithful day in September 1981, to proudly exhort, Que viva Belize... long live Belize. Happy Independence Day to everyone!