



**INDEPENDENCE DAY ADDRESS  
PRIME MINISTER HONORABLE JOHN BRICEÑO  
September 21, 2021**

**With Hopeful Hearts and Steady Hands, Together We Rise**

Your Excellency Ms. Froyla Tzlam, Governor General of Belize and Retired BDF Captain Daniel Mendez

Our Acting Chief Justice the Hon. Michell Arana

Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Patrick Faber and Ms. Shanikka Arnold

Her Worship the Mayor of Belmopan Ms. Sheran Palacio

Hon. Francis Fonseca Chairman of the National Celebrations Committee

Pastor Lance Lewis, Representative of the Clergy

Members of the Cabinet

Madam President of the Senate the Hon. Carolyn Trench Sandiford

Members of the House of Representatives

Her Excellency Martha Irene Boza, Ambassador of Panama, and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps

Your excellencies of the diplomatic and consular corps

Chief Executive Officers

Heads of our Uniformed forces

Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Today, at 40 we celebrate as a nation.

We celebrate even amid this pandemic that has tested us and taken so much and so many from us.

Yet our love for this land and everyone who lives here has never been stronger and never more determined.

COVID -19 has tested us, changed how we live, how we work and how we pray. It has tested our mettle by forcing drastic changes to our daily lives none more so than having to keep apart from each other.

It has kept our children away from school and their friends.

It has kept loved ones from celebrating weddings, young parents from bringing their family together for christenings and even burying our dead, things we hold near and dear.

Ten months ago, our party got elected to government with a resounding mandate.

We immediately got to work delivering on our ambitious agenda, Plan Belize. Plan Belize remains our north star.

For this reason, from day one we have been working to make our communities and neighborhoods as safe and as healthy as we can.

Our first task has been and must be defeating COVID.

We do this by making vaccines available for everyone, and we are doing that.

Today every Belizean from 12 and up can and should get vaccinated to protect ourselves but more so to protect each other.

Once again, I urge everyone to please get vaccinated.

We are doing this to save lives and because we must get on with the work to build our economic resilience, get people working and put our children back in the classrooms.

Last November we inherited an economy that was in decline well before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

One that was near depression levels, levels not seen in almost 40 years, where the unemployment rate soared to almost 30 percent, with over 60,000 people out of a job, with the poverty rate surpassing 50 percent.

These were clear evidence that our nation was being mismanaged or perhaps more appropriately, abandoned, but we did not allow ourselves to despair.

With the stellar efforts of the Minister of Agriculture and his team the export of cattle started almost from day one of the PUP administration.

Currently agriculture is leading the economic resurgence growing almost 25 percent in the second quarter of this year.

Our small and large farmers are growing and producing more, and our people are responding by eating what we grow and produce.

Through the tireless efforts of the Minister of Tourism and his team, tourism is not far behind growing by almost 20 percent in the second quarter as well.

Our Minister for Infrastructure Development & Housing has assiduously pursued the repair, restoration, and improvement of our dilapidated road infrastructure.

Already over 976 miles of road and 18 bridges across this country have been repaired including those ravaged by the Eta and Iota floods of 2020.

Over 311 miles of village streets, roads and farm roads have been resurfaced to support the rural areas and productive sector while another 15 miles of roads have been newly paved.

The Ministry has further renegotiated the terms of the Caracol road construction contract and the Haulover Bridge construction contract saving the Government upwards of 57 million dollars on those two contracts alone.

Unemployment has fallen dramatically by 25,000 from over 64,000.

Using old definitions of employment, this means that unemployment is down to roughly 11.2 percent of the labour force.

Overall, our economy is now headed in the right direction experiencing an overall growth of over 22 percent in the second quarter and over 6 percent for the first six months of this year, more than triple what our IFI partners like the IMF expected.

On the public finances, this government is no longer borrowing a million dollars a day.

This reckless borrowing has been discontinued for almost six months now. In addition, we have successfully reduced the Central Bank overdraft balance from \$100 million to zero.

In other words, we are no longer paying any interest as we no longer owe any monies on overdraft with the Central Bank.

Thanks to the sacrifice of many, including our teachers and public officers, we have kept Government expenditures under check.

The result of all this is that for the first four months of this fiscal year, we are now operating in the black not in the red.

This is no doubt a tenuous position as we are early in the fiscal year, but it certainly is a positive sign of fiscal recovery and if this holds, we will fulfil our promise to public officers and teachers.

Our efforts in renegotiating the superbond are now public.

As of September 14, we have formally launched our offer at a deep discount of 55 cents on each dollar of outstanding bonds issued to bondholders.

We still have some ways to go to get that across the finish line, but we look forward to that day when we will finally be released from this noose hanging around our necks and to the substantial savings of almost half a billion dollars to the government and people of Belize.

We also look forward to the issuance of the new Blue Bonds, which will enable us to set up a Marine Conservation Endowment Fund.

This fund in 20 years will grow to over 200 million Belize dollars and has been designed to ensure marine conservation project funding in perpetuity.

If we are successful on this front, our debt to GDP ratio will reduce by a full 12 percent, moving us toward a sustainable debt path.

We would also enjoy cumulative cash flow relief over the period of this PUP administration of almost \$130 million.

Our debt management efforts do not end there however as we explore other areas to restructure other government debt.

In this regard, we are pleased to report that our close friend and partner in development, the Republic of China – Taiwan, has agreed to reschedule all

ten of our loans with them amounting to more than \$286 million by providing a principal moratorium on these loans for up to 3 years.

This will yield much needed cash flow relief.

Today we are also pleased to report that with the steady prudential collaboration of the Central Bank and as the economy turns around and we get our fiscal house in order, the foreign exchange reserves are now at their highest point since the famous August of 2015 when the UDP administration agreed to pay over half a billion dollars for the botched nationalization of BTL.

This sweetheart settlement deal was agreed to be paid using our precious foreign exchange reserves.

On 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021, under this PUP administration, the net foreign assets of the banking system reached \$1.33 billion.

For the first time ever, domestic banks' net foreign assets have surpassed the half billion-dollar mark.

Fellow citizens, our currency peg is no longer at risk.

There will be no devaluation under this PUP administration.

As we progress to enhance private sector access to credit at cheaper rates, we are also moving to significantly improve the ease of doing business in Belize through reducing the cost of starting a business by over 40 percent.

Momentously at the celebration of our first anniversary of being elected to office we will hold the Belize Investment Summit 2021.

It is a first-of-its-kind event focusing on attracting and promoting investment for economic development in Belize.

Under the theme: "Belize is Open for Business", this summit is a call to both local and international investors for identifying opportunities and showcasing Belize's readiness to support global investment through vastly improved service delivery.

The Belize Investment Summit will bring together business investors from the four corners of our globe and will highlight industry development, technology and innovation and an improved business climate for safe, secure, and sustainable investments.

Our government has prioritized the economic development of our country by adopting and changing policies to create an environment that is conducive to doing business in Belize.

Just a couple weeks after our official launch our Investment Summit secretariat has received significant interest from local and international investors whose summary profiles suggest an interest in investment projects amounting to a total of 539 million Belize dollars.

These projects span a range of sectors from tourism to agri-business and agro-processing to manufacturing and aqua-culture.

While Belizeans are resilient, we were not put on this earth merely to suffer, struggle, and survive.

Belizeans deserve more.

This is what Plan Belize is all about, a better life.

This is why for my government, “Ending Corruption” is not a slogan.

It is a demand we have heard loud and clear from the Belizean people across the length and breadth of our nation.

It is too a requirement for the successful growth and development of Belize.

It is the foundation of our Social Justice Agenda aimed at addressing poverty. We will make Government more accountable and transparent by reforming the oversight structures and reviewing the Belize Constitution to ensure that it meets the needs and aspirations of the Belizean people.

Today, I am announcing our government’s decision to appoint a Constitutional Reform Commission to undertake a comprehensive review of the Constitution, engage in national consultations, and make specific recommendations to the Ministry of Constitutional Reform for any changes deemed necessary.

The Commission shall be appointed on or before 31<sup>st</sup> October and have a one-year term of office.

As efforts at reform continue, the Ministry of E-Governance recently passed major legislations that give life to Government’s plan to achieve and roll out its digital agenda and action plan that will see government services such as vital statistics, criminal records, land applications, e-passport services, and the creation of a national ID.

This is in context to our commitment to an open government through digital transformation for the benefit of all.

Because we intended to address improvements in the delivery of justice three itinerant Judges have been appointed to the Court of Appeals and with the assistance of the Commonwealth, we will soon get 4 new justices who will assist with the backlog of cases in the criminal division of the Supreme Court.

Today along with the Minister of Education I am also pleased to announce the launch of the EDUCATION UPLIFTMENT PILOT PROJECT: TOGETHER WE RISE, which is aimed at providing specific, targeted interventions in four (4) Government High Schools located in vulnerable, at-risk communities in Southside Belize City.

This Project will see the rolling out of my Government’s Free Education Policy as set out in Plan Belize. We will also upgrade existing physical school infrastructure, expand feeding programs, provide counselling services, and improve training for teachers and staff of these institutions. We will not fail these young Belizeans!

Through the Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples Affairs efforts continue to improve social services and the credible equality and inclusion mandate of our Plan Belize with full respect for indigenous Belizeans, those with disability, the elderly, the vulnerable and those in greatest need.

Our government works for the development of our people, and we are determined to make the lives of all Belizeans better.

From Day One, we have been committed to take the lands department to the people.

We are not just waiting for election time to do it.

Our famed Land Mobile has been making its way across the country to our villages and towns - allowing thousands of our residents to receive their leases and purchase approvals and titles that in some cases they were waiting many years to receive.

It has shown us what is possible when we concentrate our collective efforts on making sure that we are there for the people, ensuring that the ordinary man and woman get a piece of this beautiful Jewel of ours.

Our planned initial roll out of 150 starter homes for first time homeowners, especially single moms has commenced.

Already 22 homes are under construction in Cayo, Dangriga, Cow Pen Village and in Belize City.

Later this month the construction of 30 more homes for single parents will begin. At the same time some of the dilapidated community houses in Belize City are undergoing much needed repairs.

These programs directly touch the lives of our most vulnerable citizens.

Ciudadanos

En el marco de los cuarenta años de la independencia de nuestro pueblo y cuando mi pueblo se siente doblegar ante una pandemia... hoy me dirijo a todo beliceño con un mensaje de mucha esperanza.

Porque, aunque el panorama local e internacional parezca siniestro, en nuestra nación hemos logrado mucho.

Hemos logrado mucho porque el pueblo beliceño ha sabido cooperar y colaborar con los cambios enormes que se han hecho en todo aspecto de la vida diaria.

Por entender que en los tiempos difíciles todo se hace más tolerable cuando persistimos...el beliceño sabe que el dicho “al mal tiempo hay que hacerla buena cara” es muy cierto.

El gobierno, en solo nueve meses, ha logrado adquirir las vacunas necesarias y asignado todos los recursos sanitarios requeridos para proteger a la mayor parte de nuestro pueblo.

Hemos asegurado la cordura fiscal y reactivado la economía y así poder ofrecerle al beliceño...la capacidad de encontrar un empleo para sostener a su familia dignamente.

También hemos logrado devolverle confianza al sector privado y el sector empresarial, también nos ha dado todas las indicaciones que están dispuestos a invertir en un ecosistema económico estable y eficiente.

Hemos revertido el caos que el pasado gobierno nos heredó.

Las bases para el crecimiento y desarrollo sostenible, no solo económico sino también social, se han sentado.

Los primeros pasos para la transformación y el progreso se han dado...como dice el refrán español..." el primer paso no te lleva a donde quieres ir, pero te saca de donde estas".

Así estamos hoy compatriotas...en miras de un mejor futuro y con el sueño que venceremos y que nos aguarda mejores tiempos.

Celebremos hoy nuestra fortaleza, nuestra humanidad, nuestros esfuerzos y los logros que hemos obtenido a pesar de los grandes retos.

Fellow Belizeans, our transformation has begun, we have set before us a path to a more prosperous future.

As a young nation at 40 we will restore confidence in our social and economic development.

We will use all our energies to chart a new, better, and progressive course for our nation.

And yes, we will defeat COVID.

So, on this our Independence Day we stand together with hopeful hearts, steady hands and with the guidance of our Creator, we will build a Belize where everybody wins.

To Belizeans at home and abroad we say

Long Live Belize!

Que Viva Belice!

Happy Independence Day!

Thank you.