



**Independence Day Address
Prime Minister Hon. John Briceño
September 21, 2023**

My fellow Belizeans,

This day, 21st September, lifts an enlivened nation to the pinnacle of our annual Celebrations Calendar, as together we salute the various milestones of our glorious march to statehood.

On behalf of all Belizeans, I welcome the many distinguished visitors who have traveled great distances to show solidarity and to show respect.

All Belizeans are grateful for your presence here today and I thank our citizens in every village, town and city, who have joined, in person and in spirit, the many events of our Celebration Calendar.

True to tradition, my remarks today have been preceded by the always imaginative critique of the Leader of the Opposition. How fitting it is for him to fulfill this obligation and to do so even on this paramount day of national unity. In doing so, he demonstrates to our guests and to the world that our democracy is high-spirited and our Constitution vibrant.

Taking stock of our nation's standing at 42 compels a recognition of the existent regional and global conditions.

Lamentably, the times are turbulent:

A vicious war rages for a second year in Europe, the first conflict of this kind since the end of WWII.

Climate change ravages the planet, from super storms menacing our region to the forest fires in the northern hemisphere to the catastrophic floods in Africa and Asia.

A surge of inflation wreaks havoc on the pocketbooks of those who can least afford to pay more for the staples of living. And a deluge of debt of every stripe – sovereign, personal and commercial – risks reversing the post-pandemic recovery, threatening to erode decades of advances for humanity.

At 42, the downside risks appear formidable and intimidating for a small, open democracy such as ours.

Despite these obvious and very real challenges, the results of our constant labors since the election of November 2020 show that #PlanBelize, our national plan, our north star, is not just working but working far better than the optimists imagined.

I want to share with you today just a few snapshots of this success.

Last week, as an example, the IMF concluded its mid-year review, where Staff and the Authorities agreed that 2023 will see economic growth and an expansion of 2022.

And just as Belize vastly outperformed IMF projections in both 2021 and 2022, we are confident that 2023 will extend this trend of actual performance, surpassing forecasted performance.

Presently, unemployment is at a historic low, 2.8 percent. That's as close as Belize has ever been to full employment. Especially pleasing is the forecast for domestic inflation, expected to fall from 6.1 percent last year to 3.7 percent this year.

The explosive economic growth we have managed, along with the unprecedented bounty of new jobs, has not come at the expense of overspending and new debt.

In fact, a primary fiscal surplus of 1.2 percent is projected for this year, while the public debt is anticipated to fall below 60 percent of GDP. And we are working to reduce the public debt by significant margins.

Belize's financial system has regained its pre-pandemic strength – Central Bank reserves exceed half a billion US dollars or four and a half months of imports, well beyond the recommended 3-month standard.

The banking system is liquid, non-performing loans stand at the prudential 5 percent level and the Central Bank Act has only recently been revamped to further fortify the toolkit of the Regulator to fulfill its vital mandate.

In sum, then, the economy is booming, Belizeans are working, our dollar peg is safe, and the medium-term prospects are exceptionally promising. No wonder, therefore, that a few weeks ago, when the Second Annual Investment Summit convened on idyllic Ambergris Caye, there were waves of confidence and cheer about investment opportunities in Belize.

Focusing on Belize's potential for Orange Economy growth, this latest edition of our investment summit attracted serious commercial interest from every continent, underscoring our limitless promise in art, culture, research, science and technology.

Six hundred registrants and 300 million dollars estimated in pledged new investments are unmistakable signals that our investment pitch is bearing bountiful fruit.

But the vision of our Party has always stretched beyond just stony statistics to that promised land of social progress brought about by what the Father of Independence called "the mixed economy."

The surging economic growth, if it is to be sustained, requires more energy – clean energy.

In pursuit of this objective, government signed a \$144 million loan agreement with the Saudi Fund for Development for the construction of a 60-megawatt solar plant, an ambitious endeavor we expect will also receive support from the World Bank.

Clean and independent energy will complement the multiple investments underway in power distribution, water and sewerage systems, and a national road network that will facilitate optimal product and service delivery and distribution, particularly for the foundational sectors of tourism and agriculture.

Belize has been blessed with bountiful and valuable natural resources, and their ecosystem services are central to our economic sectors and

development. Our natural assets are complemented by our cultural assets in developing these three important pillars in our economy and development.

The Industrial Strategy with Blue, Green and Orange policies is a work in progress that aligns with my government's vision, which is to develop a thriving nature-positive economy that is people-centric.

Last year, I told you about plans to convert sargassum collected from the sea into fuel for energy. Last week, the investors and designers were here and are predicting that by this time next year, the construction of their facility will be well underway.

Development that does not lift the people to a better quality of life lacks legitimacy. Inequitable growth cannot sustain an open society. Vitalized by this conviction, government's investments in education, health and citizen security have reached unprecedented heights.

\$90 million has been secured, again from the Saudi Fund for Development, to construct a new tertiary-level hospital on the University of Belize's campus here in Belmopan. This is the first new tertiary hospital to be constructed in 30 years.

At the same time, funding has been increased for our anchor hospital facility – KMHM - as well as for regional hospitals and for clinics throughout the country. This year, the NHI was expanded to include the Orange Walk District, bringing virtually free primary healthcare access to 220,000 Belizeans.

No less than 20 cents of every recurrent dollar in this year's national budget will go to the education system. No Belizean should be out of school because he or she cannot afford the costs of schooling.

Quite the opposite, Belize cannot afford for even a single student to forego learning because of their economic standing. Over 20,000 students from Primary School to University have benefited from scholarships or financial assistance from the Ministry of Education at a value of close to 10 million dollars.

Nine Schools are now a part of the Education Upliftment Project Together We Rise, which provides free tuition, uniforms, books, digital devices and

healthy meals. This will expand to an additional 10 Schools in the next fiscal year.

As with so many countries in the hemisphere, citizen security remains a foremost challenge, primarily because of the so-called curse of geography.

Drugs flow north. Guns flow south; their proceeds soil governance systems and pervert law and order.

If multilateralism is a prerequisite to save the planet from the ravages of climate change, an equal dose of this medicine is urgently needed to suppress transnational crime.

We are more convinced than ever that the core of these multilateral cooperation programs must focus on citizen well-being and citizen opportunity rather than solely security and law enforcement.

At the root of migration is an absence of opportunity.

Heramos Beliceños

El tema este año de nuestro aniversario de la independencia captura, con tanta claridad, este momento de la historia: nuestra visión se renueva, nuestra esperanza arde y nuestras manos se unen en una marcha imparable hacia adelante. A los cuarenta y dos años, como nación, seguimos enfrentando desafíos obvios y muy reales.

Sin embargo, los resultados de nuestro trabajo constante desde las elecciones de noviembre 2020 muestran que #PlanBelice, nuestro Plan Nacional no solo esta funcionando, sino que funciona mucho mejor de lo que los optimistas imaginaron.

Estoy convencido que, así como Belice superó ampliamente las proyecciones del FMI, tanto en 2021 como en 2022, confiamos en que 2023 ampliará esta tendencia de desempeño real que va a superar el desempeño previsto.

Hoy como portadores de la antorcha de la causa perdurable, renuevo el compromiso inquebrantable de nuestro gobierno con una nación más

equitativa, más prospera y más inclusiva, en paz consigo misma y con la comunidad de naciones.

Forty-three years ago, at the brink of Independence, George Price spoke of “a peaceful constructive, progressive revolution.” It was then and it is now, a revolution against a system that was “inhumane, unjust, wrong and unjustifiable.”

Mr. Price called for a “wave of nationalism and national unity; an awareness of the beauty and wealth of Belize, a consciousness of the oneness of all Belizeans and an appreciation of a common heritage and common destiny for all the Belizean people.”

Today, as the torch bearers of that enduring cause, I renew our unshakeable commitment to a more equitable, a more prosperous and a more inclusive nation, at peace with itself and with the community of nations.

This year’s theme captures with such clarity this moment in history: our vision is renewed, our hope burns, and our hands join in an unstoppable forward march. And with the guidance of our Creator and the support of our people, we keep ever moving forward.

To all Belizeans at home and abroad, we proclaim:
Long live Belize!
Que Viva Belice!
Happy Independence Day!

Thank you!