



**Prime Minister Hon. John Briceño
High-Level Ocean Meeting
September 18, 2023**

A People-Centric Conservation Agenda for Financing Ocean Conservation

I thank the organizers for inviting me to this this morning's event.

It is great to be here and to feature what Belize is doing for what *Time Magazine* recently called "the most important place on earth": the Oceans.

I am a citizen of beautiful Belize – a nation that depends deeply on the health of our oceans.

Our coastal and marine environment includes a national and global treasure: the largest barrier reef in the western hemisphere and three of the four atolls in the Western Hemisphere. It supports more than 1400 species, provides food and livelihoods for almost half of our population, and generates over half a billion dollars in annual ecosystem services.

Belizeans recognise the importance of protecting our mangrove forests that cover most of our coastlines, protecting our people and visitors while safeguarding hundreds of millions of dollars in economic infrastructure from natural disasters.

In short, healthy oceans and coastlines are an existential condition for my people and country to flourish.

The core of our conservation commitment is to deliver outcomes that benefit the Belizean people and planet through building a nature-positive economy.

In recent years, my government has engaged the international community to realize this vision.

In 2021, our country finalized a Blue Bond that reduced Belize's external debt by 12 percent, created long-term sustainable financing for marine conservation, and secured our commitment to protect 30 percent of Belize's ocean.

Now, our country is involved in another innovative and audacious conservation finance model called Project Finance for Permanence, or PFP for short.

We have partnered with the World Wildlife Fund and The Nature Conservancy in this endeavor, and I am particularly thankful to Carter Roberts, WWF's CEO, who is with us here today, for his support as we move this initiative forward.

Belize's PFP, which we have named **Resilient Bold Belize**, brings together partners from government, local communities, finance institutions, NGOs, and philanthropy to develop marine conservation outcomes that are sustainably financed for the long run.

I am proud to share our vision and ambition for this PFP and its goals which rests on three key Pillars:

First, we will triple the full protection of our coral reef and go from 7 to 20 percent protection.

We will achieve this milestone through a scientific and stakeholder-driven process.

Increased coral reef protection will further livelihood and food security for the Belizean people, as well as grow our blue economy.

Second, Belize has committed to protect 30 percent of our marine environment by 2030 and we have endeavored to fast track this achievement by 2026.

As part of the PFP, we will work with our partners and local stakeholders to designate the remaining 10 percent of our 30-by-30 commitment in areas that will support the highest biodiversity and people outcomes.

Third, with our partners we are developing domestic and international funding mechanisms to make Belize's diverse marine protected areas and watersheds among the best managed in the world.

To end where I began: The ocean is central to Belize's future.

It feeds our people, it creates jobs, it protects our infrastructure, and it brings visitors to our beautiful country.

A nature-positive economy is therefore part of our future.

But we can't do it alone, which is why Belize is partnering with global institutions such as WWF and The Nature Conservancy to deliver conversation that matters for people and the planet.



Thank you for your attention.