



# BELIZE PRESS OFFICE

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## **Prime Minister Rt. Hon. Dean Barrow's Reassurance to the Nation Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic**

My Fellow Belizeans,

The sounds of the Corona alarm are everywhere – on television, from social media, and in our conversations with friends and family.

I know this is an excruciatingly stressful time for all of us. It is even more so for our senior citizens, those who have lost their jobs and our frontline health care workers.

We rightly worry about our individual and collective situations. After all, as a nation we are facing the greatest crisis of modern times.

In these extreme circumstances, at this extraordinary moment, I have felt it my duty to come to you directly. I am most conscious of the wonderful help the Nation has received from so many people. First among them is the medical team led by the Ministry of Health and the Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital. The Doctors Manzanero, CEO Gough, others in the leadership brain trust, the Hon Minister of Health and most particularly the frontline workers at the KMHM and the other public hospitals: they all deserve our highest praise and our greatest thanks.

As well we are indebted to the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues, all the social partners represented on the National Oversight Committee and the National COVID-19 Task Force. These are bodies on which all GOB CEOs, the Leader of Opposition's representatives and very many expert Belizeans are serving.

On your behalf, I offer them our profound gratitude. And I wish to declare how much I personally have benefited from this national partnership and its collective decision-making process.

In the end, though, as Prime Minister I am the one who has to accept the ultimate responsibility for custody of the nation's wellbeing. Especially in this time of an existential crisis of seemingly Old Testament proportions, I must personally come before you. Hence the reason for this address.

My primary message is to assure that you are not alone, neither in your anxiety about the present challenges nor your preoccupation about the future.

I thus reiterate to every Belizean that my administration, together with the national committees, will spare no effort, will action every partnership, will lose no opportunity to cushion the economic impacts and minimize the medical repercussions of this pandemic.

You know that neither the depth nor the duration of this battle is yet clear. In this connection, Belize and all countries — from the richest to the poorest — are in the same boat. We face a lethal, deadly enemy that refuses to stay still long enough for us to get a bead on it.

What is nevertheless also clear is that our country is properly positioning itself for this battle. We do so both on the economic and the medical fronts.

First and most important, we can feed ourselves. And there are two things that are important in this connection. The global supply chain that facilitates imports of essential inputs for our country is not being broken. Even more important, though, is the fact of Belize's self-sufficiency in all basic commodities. With our local production of grains, meats, vegetables and poultry products we are able to dig in for the long haul. That is what sets us apart.

Second, Government is determined to deploy a diverse range of fiscal and monetary measures to fortify our economic structures and bring us through. Our measures include aid to the newly unemployed and the longer unemployed; commercial banking and credit union support to business and the self-employed; and one form or another of customer relief from our utility providers. Broadly speaking, all options are on the table and every backing we can at all come up with will be used to stabilize the economy and underpin the welfare of the people.

Third, our team of public healthcare professionals — reinforced by a first-rate medical brigade from our Cuban allies and buttressed by a massive investment in emergency equipment and supplies — will relentlessly identify, isolate and treat cases of COVID-19.

I repeat that, as hard as the circumstances are, there is no need to panic. And even if we have to take the ultimate step of a national shutdown, there will be no

interruption of essential services. Access to food, pharmaceutical and other necessary supplies will be guaranteed.

In short, Government and its partners will move heaven and earth to protect our Belizean people.

Of course, we need your help; we need the cooperation and understanding of each and every Belizean. This crisis, like no other, demands a unity of effort, a spirit of collaboration, an overflow of fellow feeling and a pouring forth of all the reserves of national humanitarianism and patriotic solidarity.

Therefore:

Practice good personal hygiene;

Distance yourself socially for this crisis period;

Isolate yourself and report Corona symptoms to the health authorities;

Adhere, without exception, to emergency and health guidelines; and, above all, be prepared to lend a helping hand to your neighbor, your friend, your fellow Belizean.

I repeat, there is no need for panic. We don't have to crowd the supermarkets and grocery stores because there is more than a sufficiency of necessary supplies. This will continue for as long as the pandemic lasts. Most important, there is great harm in spreading false rumors and certainly no benefit in stigmatizing persons that may become unwell.

I ask you always to remember our advantages. Our small, dispersed population is spread over two cities, seven towns and over 200 villages. We are, therefore, blessed by a good degree of natural physical distancing. And our interconnectivity will allow for effective tracking and treatment in the eventuality of COVID clusters emerging.

My message to you is, therefore, one of hope. But that is not to sell short the seriousness of the crisis. It will challenge our resilience. It will test our endurance.

I have every confidence and not a single doubt, though, that this too shall pass; that we will once more emerge into our famed, golden, life-affirming Belizean sunlight; that we shall overcome; and that at the end of our trials we shall be once more grasping with both hands the overflowing cup that a beneficent Providence has always reserved for us. We are fortune's child; and we will rebound to seize that special destiny marked by fate for this special land.

Belize now and forever, God bless Belize.

Thank you.