

**CEREMONIAL OPENING OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**  
**FRIDAY, 13<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER, 2015**

**THRONE SPEECH DELIVERED BY HIS EXCELLENCY, THE GOVERNOR**  
**GENERAL, SIR COLVILLE YOUNG**

Mr. Speaker of the House of Representatives and Mr. President of the Senate, Honourable Members of the House of Representatives and the Senate, My Lord the President of the Court of Appeal and other Justices of the Court of Appeal, My Lord the Chief Justice and other Justices of the Supreme Court, Excellencies of the Diplomatic Corps, other distinguished invitees, ladies and gentlemen.

It is my distinct honour and privilege to open this new session of the National Assembly following the general election on Wednesday, 4<sup>th</sup> November, 2015. While it marks the fifth administration of the United Democratic Party, it is also the first time in post-independence Belize that a political party has been elected to three consecutive terms in office. Belizeans have demonstrated once again that we are capable of working the democratic process through free, fair and peaceful elections.

It is customary in a speech of this kind to outline the Government's projects, plans, and priorities over the next five years. Much has been achieved during the last two terms of office. My Government will continue to focus on policies designed to advance economic growth, social development, infrastructural expansion, strengthen national security, expand educational opportunities and improve health care, support citizen security, and foster agricultural development.

Let me now briefly highlight some of the key areas that my Government will be pursuing during the present term.

## Economic Development

In the past eight years, Belize has seen an unprecedented level of economic stimulation through targeted capital investment by government in infrastructure, health, education, safety and security and in programs to stimulate job creation. In the new 2015 – 2020 term in office, the economic stimulation will continue unabated. In the pipeline already, there is over \$600 Million in capital spending in all the priority areas, but most importantly in areas that will result in additional economic growth, and improvement in the quality of life for Belizeans.

The new term in office will see increased investments in roads, bridges, and drainage systems throughout the country. The funding of a transportation master plan to include ports and airports will set the stage for a major improvement in connectivity for the efficient and comfortable movement of people and goods. We will see investments in health systems, rural water and electrification, and a massive investment in education and housing, while the productive sector can expect strategic investments to support growth in agriculture, tourism, and services. Likewise, investments in citizens' security will go hand in hand with social programs aimed at alleviating poverty.

In driving the economy forward, my government's economic strategy will be built on the following pillars:

- Job creation through targeted investment
- Creating and maintaining a high level business climate through institutional reform
- Improved market access for exporters
- Building domestic capacity for industry growth
- Promoting consumer protection in commerce

## Security

The three security forces --- the Belize Police Department, the Belize Defence Force, and the Belize National Coast Guard --- witnessed significant strengthening in the 2012 – 2015 term of government.

Since 2008, the Belize Police Department has grown not only in numbers, but also in expertise, receiving training in the areas of Intelligence, Investigation, Prosecution, Community Policing and Human Rights, among others.

The National Forensic Science Service saw significant capacity building, contributing significantly to crime solving efforts.

Under United Democratic Party Government, the BDF constructed three new conservation posts along the Western Border, at Valentin Camp, Ceibo Chico, and Caracol. Because preservation of our territorial integrity remains our foremost preoccupation, my Government will also build the forward operating base on the North Bank of the Sarstoon River.

In the 2015 – 2020 term of office, my government will continue to expand our diplomatic ties with non-traditional partners in Asia and Africa, and expand our regional and international cooperation programs to identify and implement programs and mechanisms to complement Belize's national development priorities. Further, my government will continue its active participation in the work of international organizations to ensure that Belize's positions are included in the negotiations at the forefront of the international community, such as climate change, international trade, post 2015 development agenda, and official development assistance. Through our embassies and consulates, Belize will increase contact with our Diaspora.

Above all, my Government will ensure continued international support for Belize's complete sovereignty over all its territory; and for our efforts to live in peace with

our neighbours as we work to dispense with any unfounded claim to any part of our country.

### Tourism and Culture

My government will continue to emphasize the sustainable development of the tourism industry, to create even more jobs and more foreign exchange earnings while respecting our natural and cultural resources.

During the last term of government, government invested over \$20 million in aggressive marketing, capacity building, and product development to ensure that Belize maintains a strong competitive advantage. Government invested a further \$100 million in tourism destination infrastructure projects.

My government will continue to improve infrastructure at all Archaeological Reserves, develop a new underwater archaeology program, establish new archaeological reserves, establish Houses of Culture in every district, renovate the Bliss Centre for the Performing Arts building, establish a \$15 million Belize City House of Culture and Downtown Rejuvenation Project, and develop a National Anthropological and Archaeological Museum in Belmopan.

### Agriculture and Fisheries

Agriculture sustains vibrant rural communities and remains the main source of livelihood for a significant portion of Belize's population.

In the 2015 – 2020 term of office, my government will continue to invest in science, infrastructure, and human capital, along with better policies and stronger institutions, to facilitate new market access and take agriculture to the next level. My government will continue to integrate technology in agro-production and fisheries to diversify and maximize outputs and returns in sustainable ways while

protecting the environment. The foundation is laid, the table is set and the best is yet to come.

To ensure more sustainable yields for local fishers, my government is finalizing the updated Fisheries Act that will effectively modernize fisheries management.

### Natural Resources and Environment

Belize has always been a good steward of its natural resources. The challenge to any administration is to find the right balance between the economic development of the country, while conserving the very same natural resources upon which economic growth and development are dependent.

My government believes that the solution lies in the development and execution of sound policies and legislation that are cross-cutting, to apply not only to natural resource industries such as agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, but also to other human development and economic areas such as health, education, urban planning, trade and investment.

My government is proposing legislation such as Mangrove Regulations, to protect the coastline from erosion, create a buffer to mitigate the impact of natural erosion, and protect critical habitats for fisheries reproduction and development.

This is aligned with the new National Protected Areas System Act that addresses the needs of people, their communities and the natural environment.

### Oil and Energy

My government will achieve energy security by expanding the electrification to rural communities using renewable energy sources. This will also ensure an improved quality of life and economic opportunities for the residents of these communities. In partnership with the private sector, my government will update

legislation to govern renewable energy and energy efficiency with the specific objective of providing incentives for investment in green energy.

My government will seek to reverse the decline in oil revenues by finalizing the Petroleum Exploration Zones and Exploration Guidelines. This will enable the Geology and Petroleum Department to attract bona-fide companies through a competitive bidding round. The objective is to increase petroleum production while adhering to strict environmental standards. We will legislate to provide a ban on any oil exploration activities in offshore protected areas and within a certain proximity to our reef.

In the 2015 – 2020 term of office, my government will expand Science, Technology and Innovation to ensure that it plays a leading role in the economic development of Belize.

## Health

During its past term in office, my government made quality of life for the people of Belize a top priority. In the 2015 – 2020 term of office, my government will launch a nationwide preventative campaign to promote healthier eating, more physical activity, less alcohol consumption. There will be implementation of programs and policies geared towards healthy lifestyle choices, such as the provision of healthy and nutritious snacks in school feeding programs across Belize. The new term of office will see the construction of new hospitals in San Pedro and Punta Gorda, and of a new hospital wing in Belmopan. New polyclinics in San Narciso and Chunux are planned in the new term. A new building in Independence for X-ray, laboratory and pharmacy is also planned for the new term of office.

Also in the new term of my government, more than twenty scholarships will be made available to Belizean doctors for specialization studies in El Salvador or Cuba.

In the 2015 – 2020 term, my government will adopt a more people-centered approach to health care where mothers, fathers, and children will be the epicenter of the health system and its policies. There will be the adoption of new technologies – the Belize Health Information System will continue to evolve.

### Education, Youth

Investment in adolescent and youth development is a primary pillar of my government's new 5-year development plan. My government is committed to the development of a national education program to meet Belize's demands in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

My government will place special emphasis on the needs of our young people, to ensure that they are equipped to become productive citizens. My government will continue to diversify the high school curriculum to include the arts, science, technology, vocational training, business, and sports. The goal is to serve the needs and interests of students, to prepare them for entry-level employment, self-employment and/or further education and training.

At the tertiary level, my government will work with post-secondary institutions and the business and industrial sectors to develop curricula that are relevant to Belize's economic development priorities.

### Housing and Community Development

My government has made great strides in filling the housing needs for lower and middle income families. The Southside Poverty Alleviation Program continues to provide government-subsidized quality housing in impoverished areas. Middle income families are benefitting from affordable housing loans and grants provided by the Development Finance Corporation and the National Bank of Belize.

In the new term of office, my government, guided by a National Housing Policy, will continue to address housing gaps by securing even more homes for low-income families and by fostering a financial environment that enables middle income families to afford their own homes.

In its continued efforts to strengthen Belize's Social Safety Net, my government has expanded the BOOST program – a flagship accomplishment of my government --- to benefit over 8,000 persons countrywide, of which 250 are children affected or infected by HIV/AIDS. Additionally, the Food Pantry program provides a basic food basket twice per month at half price to 17,000 individuals in 3,400 households in the Belize, Toledo and Cayo Districts.

In the 2015 – 2020 term of office, my government will continue the crusade to restore dignity to the lives of every Belizean and to empower citizens to be self-sufficient, responsible, and productive. My government will secure a higher quality of life and greater social justice for poor citizens as we build on the strong foundation my government set in developing our greatest national asset, the Belizean people.

### Infrastructure

To support the economic and social development of the country, my government will continue its program of improving public infrastructure by building and upgrading the nation's network of roads, streets, bridges, canals and drains.

### Transportation

For the road transportation system, my government will construct a new National Bus Terminal in Belize City, and we will enhance the safety and convenience of the traveling public by continued regulation of bus routes.

My government will, in the new term, address the challenges of the national transportation system through the development of a Comprehensive and National Transportation Master Plan.

### Public Utilities

In its last term, my government settled claims for both the BEL and BTL acquisitions. These vital public utilities are now and forevermore part of the national patrimony and benefits redound to Belizeans by way of the lowest light and telecom rates ever.

### Delivery of Government Services

Top on my Government's agenda will be to introduce structural changes in order to ensure effectiveness in service delivery. The interaction of the public with Government agencies and Departments must be improved to provide for a satisfactory, beneficial citizen experience.

Mr. Speaker of the House of Representatives and Mr. President of the Senate, that concludes this session's Throne Speech.

May I now, with your kind permission, extend my best wishes to the new government and indeed to all members of the House of Representatives and the Senate, for a further term of fruitful deliberations and positive achievements for the welfare of the nation.

May God bless you all and our country, Belize.

Long live Belize!

Que viva Belize!

THANK YOU.