



Belize Chamber of Commerce  
& Industry  
*Annual Report*  
2022

# 103<sup>rd</sup> Annual General Meeting



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# President's Message



How quickly a year has passed! I am pleased to provide the annual Report for the 103<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry, serving **you**, our members. It is my duty to take you through the last year of activities and focal points delivered on your behalf through this Chamber.

Before I start listing off all of our many accomplishments and an even greater list of works in progress, I must thank you -our members- for your unwavering support over the last twelve months. Being an overly ambitious president, boasting a decade of service to our members, I realized the importance of continued communication with the membership and am now sending quarterly letters from the President.

It was a busy year for the Secretariat as we continue to discharge our debt and pay off our loan for the spaces we own at the Withfield Tower by December of this year; thus, freeing up funds to focus on other demands such as strengthening The Chamber's financial sustainability for another 103-years.

We anticipate 2023 will be a year to better appreciate our team for the hard work and superb execution that you see in our signature events namely:

Our 5<sup>th</sup> annual Made in Belize Trade Show, which was hosted on June 4, 2022, at the Governor General Field in the City of Belmopan under the theme "Buy in Belize, Build Belize, Support your own homegrown." The Made in Belize Trade Show featured 105 micro, small, and medium-sized entrepreneurs, as well as established businesses.



Our EXPO Belize Marketplace 2022, which occurred on September 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> 2022. Having returned from a two-year hiatus, the expo saw robust participation from the business sector. Over the two days, well over 13,000 visitors enjoyed the wide variety of local business offerings that only the EXPO has been known to host on such a grand scale. To date, this has been one of the largest expos since its inception in 1996 with over 200 booths of which 62 were MSMEs. This event also

saw our partnership with Total Business Solutions Ltd. (TBSL) to develop the Expo Belize

Market Place Business Directory, a digital application highlighting the layout and businesses participating in last year's Expo Belize Marketplace.

The Christmas Extravaganza, which is yet another undertaking of the BCCI to allow local artisans to display their goods and services and build lasting relationships with the general public was hosted at the Governor General's Field in the City of Belmopan on December 3, 2022. This event saw 135 exhibitors and was executed in partnership with the Belmopan City Council. The event started at 10:00 am and dovetailed into the City Council's night market.

This small but dedicated team of eighteen at the BCCI also executed many other events and I must highlight some of them:

- The Belize Private Sector Project Capacity Building and Validation Forum of the Green Climate Fund (GCF)-funded project "*Strengthening Belize Private Sector Access to Climate Finance*" ended. This project was in collaboration with the Ministry of Economic Development, and with the support of the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB). The aim was to capacitate the private sector on what constitutes a GCF-ready project.
- The first *BCCI LINK-UP* was held on March 25, 2023. The event aimed to connect job seekers with employers for new career opportunities and/or employers to select from a wide pool of candidates. We thank everyone who participated in the job fair. We hope that you were able to meet qualified prospects for the positions available at your companies. We plan to stage this bi-annually.
- On March 29<sup>th</sup> the First BCCI Women's Forum entitled "*Inspiring Women – Coffee & Conversation*" was hosted at the Caribbean Motors Conference room. The event sought to inspire women, celebrate their successes, and share knowledge and experiences. We plan to make this an annual event.
- Business Perspective Show – presented weekly on Tuesdays at 6:30 am on Love FM (TV and Radio) touches on topics of business interest, including business tips, legislative changes, and global impacts. Thank you to Dyon and Noriko along with the BP Committee for keeping the subject matters interesting and informative.
- Our Governance and Trade Division (GTD) was strengthened by the addition of a Policy Analyst, Joshua Pott, who ably assisted our Chief Policy Analyst, Dyon Elliott. With this team's support, we have been competently equipped to represent you on key topics.
- **Trade Licensing Reform** – One such policy issue is the upcoming reforms to the Trade

License Reform Regime. The regime's expansion signals that businesses in the villages and are outside the traditional nine municipalities will now pay trade license. Clearly the

expansion itself was not our preference, but via your Chamber's intervention,

we managed to secure a maximum cap of \$2,000 in terms of trade license fees payable in the rural areas. Please note that without said cap, fees could have rivaled some of the higher ones we have seen in Belize City, for instance.

Remember: The long-term goal is to align the trade-license regime with international best practice; therefore, it cannot be ideal for government to export or expand this economically inefficient colonial-era relic.

- **Front of Packaging Label Nutritional (FoPLN) warning** – Based on overwhelmingly strong empirical evidence, we support the regional policy to adopt Front of Package Nutritional Labels (FoPNL). This is a key component in the wider arsenal of measures to combat Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). However, as we alongside the regional private sector have maintained since 2017, the regional standard should adopt multiple FoPNL schemes, especially those used by our major trading partners. Research shows that existing FoPNL schemes in use in Europe and North America, for instance, can be as effective as (if not even better) warning label that has been proposed. That fact alone demands that the region take a balanced approach that considers both the health and trade dimensions.
- **Belize-Mexico Trade Agreement** – with the BCCI’s intervention we were able to get the National Trade Negotiating Commission (NTNC) to engage the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) for a Computable General Equilibrium Study. While we remain pro-trade, we also promote deeper analysis to make such a big decision when considering a Trade Agreement with one of the top-20 economies in the world. That demands closer analysis to inform better strategy! Moreover, the Chamber’s in-house analyses, which included a partial equilibrium analysis and other WTO-approved methods, all said the same thing: “Handle this one with care!” This is the motivation for our request for the Computable General Equilibrium Study. We’re business people. We prefer to make informed decisions.
- We remain active and at the table as the Belize-Guatemala Trade Negotiations for the expansion of the Partial Scope Agreement (PSA) continue.
- **The Occupational Safety and Health Draft Bill (OSH)** was submitted to the Minister of Labour at the end of 2022. This is something we’ll continue to advance via our seat on the Labour Advisory Board (LAB). We also submitted the draft Belize Disabilities Bill which is under review by the Disabilities Desk within the Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs.
- **Minimum Wage.** While the call for the phased-in changes to the legislated minimum took a lot of airtime last year, it must be stated here that the Chamber’s principal advocacy position on this issue has always been the call for more predictability regarding changes to the minimum wage. For this reason, since 2017 we have set forward a minimum-wage adjustment formula that would guide future increases. We

are happy to report that the final formula adopted by the Minimum Wage Task Force was heavily influenced by our proposal. With only a few minor amendments, we are proud that the adoption of the final formula enjoyed unanimous support on the task force.

- We revived existing Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) such as with the Development Finance Corporation and signed new ones, namely, the Agreement of Mutual Cooperation with the Importers & Exporters Association of Taipei - which spotlights the need to facilitate the collaboration of small and medium-sized enterprise in the two regions to access new markets, and to reinforce bilateral cooperation and further develop third-party markets.
- **MOU with Israel Latin America** - through this agreement, both parties anticipate increased bilateral business and opportunities for economic growth through importing and exporting, trade investments, and information sharing. In addition, the BCCI looks forward to refining our internal industries by sharing and adapting Israel's advanced knowledge in technology and agriculture.
- **Rev-Up Caribbean Ltd. (RevUp)** –RevUp is a business incubator that includes a process of intense, rapid, and immersive education, training, networking opportunities with peer ventures, guidance from local and international mentors, all aimed at accelerating the life cycle of these early-stage companies, compressing years' worth of learning-by-doing into just a few months. The training will also ultimately culminate with participating business founders being able to make their pitch to a network of angel investors. This is one part of our ongoing efforts at expanding opportunities for our members to access much needed finance.
- **New IDB Lab Project:** Promoting Sustainability and Driving Growth Through an MSME Digital Revolution in Belize valued at BZ\$1.336m. The project will be implemented over a 30-month period and is financed by both the IDB Lab and BCCI. Firstly, this project will seek to improve the quality of ecosystem support to businesses to accomplish digital transformation. Secondly, the project will support businesses in digital readiness by raising awareness among stakeholders. Thirdly, the project will provide a program to aid MSMEs in enhancing their ability to meet the necessary requirements to attain financial investment.

Turning to our report card for the past year, I reflect on my inaugural address one year ago and my commitment to you. The three areas highlighted were: Corruption within regulatory and government agencies, access to and the cost of financing, and access to training and education that encourages Entrepreneurship.

In the area of corruption, we have started the process to move on the Draft Campaign Finance Bill to introduce it via the Senate by way of a Regular Bill. We thank the social partners for meeting with us on this matter. The letter of the Standing Orders reads clearly that any member could submit a regular bill, the social partner senators—which includes our Business Senator—

are no exceptions. We may have some bureaucratic hurdles to climb but climb them we will. OF COURSE! We would hope it would not require us to pull on that lever of tabling it ourselves as civil society. The draft legislation has been shared with the government in 2021 and even more recently with the Good Governance Unit. To the Good Governance Unit's credit, I must say that they have shown interest in the proposed law. Consequently, while we would prefer that the government brings it to Parliament in fulfillment of their own good-governance commitments if the sands in the hourglass run out, your Chamber is ready to indeed pull on that lever.

The aim of this bill is to reduce the opportunity for corruption to seep into Belizean electoral politics. Unchecked money in electoral politics can have an unhealthy influence on public policy that could hurt private-sector development and fair competition. This would be achieved through augmenting transparency by requiring political parties to register, which no law currently mandates them to do. Second, this law--once passed--would make them accountable to the public for all funds acquired for use in political campaigns whether at the municipal or national level. This would also set in place limits on how much funds political parties and candidates can receive and on how much they can spend during any campaign period. It would usher in a new era of transparency in Belizean politics.



For access to financing, we are now one step closer as the Credit Reporting Act, 2023 will allow for a fair and accurate credit reporting system within the financial system in order to facilitate objective credit decisions. The next step on our agenda is to continue to advocate for the Collateral Registry. We commend the Government on the Fiscal Incentives Act, which now provides increased and targeted incentives to MSMEs, with special attention being given to Micro enterprises.

Possibly one of the most intriguing features of the new law, however, is the amnesty extended to businesses operating in, at present, the informal economy, which estimates have suggested is as large as 40% of Belize's GDP. Now, those informal MSMEs are able to formalize without (i) worrying about being assessed for back taxes that they otherwise should have paid had they been operating formally. Instead, (ii) these companies can take advantage of a one-year exemption from paying business tax and GST for local purchases and imported key inputs. Of course, this window closes this December, so we do encourage local informal sector MSMEs to capitalize on this opportunity.

Third, is the Entrepreneurship Ecosystem. While we have not gotten our own incubator started as yet, we continue to participate in activities such as Aspiring Women Entrepreneurs (AWE Project) and IDB LAB Pitch Tank 2022 as judges, mentors, and advisors to the budding entrepreneurs. My participation in these activities was rewarding, to say the least, as we help to nurture new talent specifically micro and small businesses get the assistance needed to move their business to the next level.

In closing, we thank you, our members, for your continued support and involvement. Your Chamber continues to represent you by participating in over 70+ external committees. In excess of 300 members strong representing over 5000 individual companies, we accelerate full speed ahead with our strategic planning to guarantee that this Chamber's era continues to span strongly and advance for years to come. We encourage members to collaborate with each other, co-brand where feasible, and support each other.



Together we grow stronger.

Thank you!



# Overview



This is not just another Annual General Meeting in the BCCI's 103-year-long history. These are extraordinary times. Life as we know it has changed, and we are witnessing the dawning of a new era. So much has happened in the last six years that have changed our lives irreversibly. The pandemic not only shocked us, but it made us feel vulnerable. It took away our freedom to move, travel, meet, work in our offices, go to the cinema or theatre, or go shopping. It made us feel vulnerable and realize that we are not invincible. As individuals, families, and companies, large or small, we had to lose the fear of digitalization as we emerged from the pandemic in a different world. The way we work, interact with each other, entertain ourselves, shop, and inform ourselves is already different and will never be the same again.

At the BCCI, we have had to adapt to the changes to be able to fulfill our mandate to our members. Through the International Labour Organization, we were the recipients of a training platform that will enable us to provide online, hybrid, and training that participants can do at their own pace.

Members and visitors alike were happy that we were able to return to having physical shows with the return of the Made in Belize in the City of Belmopan on 4<sup>th</sup> June. This show is dedicated to showcasing all goods and services that are made in Belize. The Expo Belize returned with a bang on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of September with members after the two-year hiatus due to the pandemic, wholeheartedly supporting the event and breaking the participation record with over 200 booths being sold. Visitors were excited at the return and over 30,000 visited the showgrounds over the two days. In December, we

**The Reporter**  
October 1, 2022 · 🌐

Poverty in Belize, which was already reported at 52 percent based on 2018 data, has increased by ten percent within the last three years, Prime Minister John Briceño told the United Nations recently.

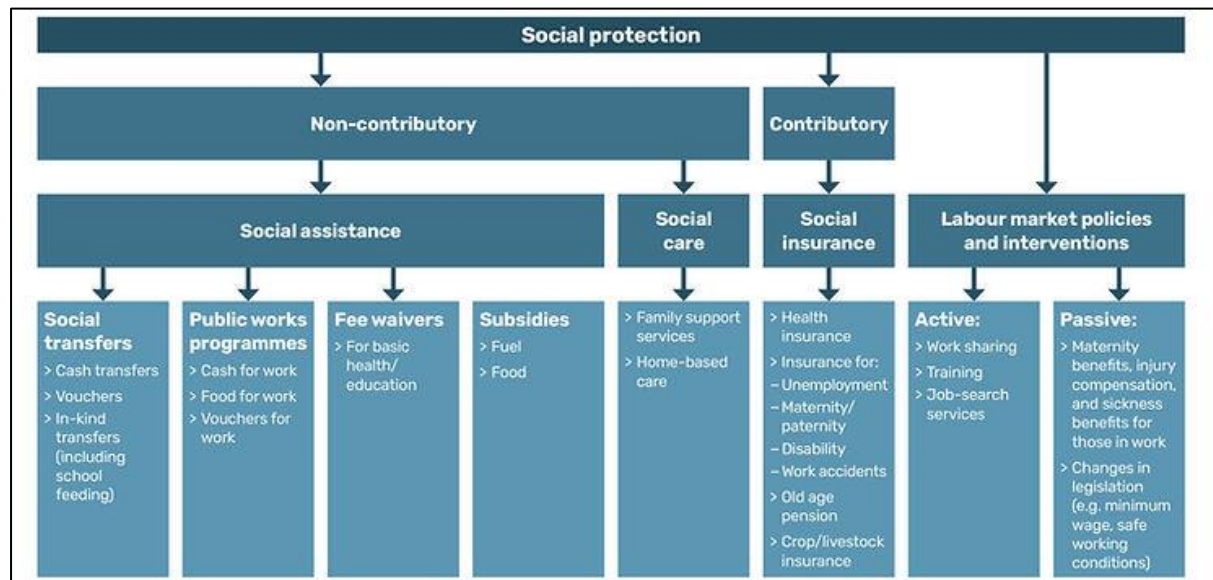
Speaking at the 77th United Nations General Assembly last Friday, Briceño said to the world community, "Poverty is on the increase. ...The lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and persistent supply-chain disruptions have contributed to skyrocketing inflation. These economic realities exacerbate an already acute social situation in Belize. Poverty is estimated to have risen by 10% between 2018 and 2021. [And] 45.5% of Belizeans are estimated to be moderately to severely food insecure."



also collaborated with the Belmopan City Council to host our Christmas Extravaganza at the Governor Generals field. Amidst the inclement weather, the event was well supported.

Once again, the staff at the secretariat had to move the operations to the ground floor at the Coney Drive building since the decision was made to rent out the second floor to ease the cash flow. In December we signed a two-year lease with Peak Outsourcing. We finalized the sale of our Ferrels Lane property in February of 2022. We are on track to complete our mortgage for the Coney Drive property by December 2024.

The Governance and Trade department was strengthened with the addition of a policy analyst. We championed for a less onerous trade license regime as well as for evidence-based decisions as it pertained to Belize signing on to a free trade agreement with Mexico. We participated in the minimum wage task force where the recommendations of the consultant and the task force were for a phased approach to increasing the minimum wage.



Infographic 1: Depicting Belize’s Existing Social Protection Programs

Needless to say, the Government of Belize chose not to take the recommendation of the task force and increased the minimum wage in one fell swoop. The impact of this increase is being felt by all. The BCCI was also instrumental in drafting the disabilities bill in an effort to provide protection for persons with diverse abilities. In addition, the BCCI provided a MSME inclusivity grant for Persons with Disabilities.

The BCCI along with the NTUCB worked together on a draft Occupational Safety and Health bill which had been languishing for some time. A draft that was agreed upon by both entities was submitted to the Minister of Labour. The BCCI has representation on the Labour Advisory Board, one of the key areas of focus of this board is to look at conducting a comprehensive review of the Labour Act, as opposed to the piecemeal amendments. With the assistance of the ILO, the BCCI was able to engage the services of an attorney to look at the existing Act from the employers' perspective. This exercise was completed, and its aim was to better guide our interventions in this exercise.

The BCCI boasts the largest Western Union network in the country. This year marks our 29<sup>th</sup> year of offering this service, our compliance officer was recently certified by the Association of Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialists (ACAMS).



A lot has happened over the past year, we saw the slow recovery of the global supply chain coming out of the pandemic, and we have seen the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Through our Business Perspective Show, the BCCI sought to educate our radio and TV audience on all the global factors that impact Belize. World and local events have taken their toll on employers and on workers. Through our membership in CARICHAM, the BCCI was able to access psychosocial training.

The staff at the secretariat must be commended for their stellar work. They have enthusiastically taken on numerous projects and have given tirelessly of themselves to be able to provide top level services to you our esteemed members. As we move into our 104<sup>th</sup> year of existence we look forward to continuing our service to you.



I leave you with Charles Darwin's famous quote:

*"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change."*

# Connect



## **Belize Investment and Finance Forum**

In June of 2022, the Belize American Chamber of Commerce (BACC) hosted its 6<sup>th</sup> annual Belize Investment and Finance Forum. The Treasurer of the BCCI Board, Mr. Giacomo Sanchez attended on the Chamber's behalf.

## **Tri-County Chamber of Commerce Meet and Greet**

Last year, the Tri County Regional Black Chamber of Commerce brought various trade missions to Belize on March 6<sup>th</sup>, July 18<sup>th</sup>, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, and December 5<sup>th</sup>. Members of the BCCI were invited to all missions and given the opportunity to meet the representatives visiting the country.

## **Taiwan Expo 2022 in Belize**

The Embassy of the Republic of China (Taiwan) in Belize collaborated with the Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA) to host a Taiwan Expo from October 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup>. Thirty Taiwanese exhibits were displayed at the Caribbean Motors showroom in Belize City, and our members had the opportunity to showcase their brands and network at the event.

## **Florida International Trade & Cultural Expo (FITCE)**

The 7<sup>th</sup> annual Florida International Trade & Cultural Expo (FITCE) was hosted from October 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>. Our Manager for membership Relations, Ms. Yorshabell Cattouse represented the BCCI at the event and met up with other representatives from institutions such as the Ministry of Health, the Belize City Council, and the Belize American Chamber of Commerce.



## Caribbean Association of Custom Brokers Meeting

The Caribbean Association of Custom Brokers (CACUB) hosted a meeting on October 1<sup>st</sup> to discuss Jamaica’s Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and highlight how Belizean traders can capitalize on the existing logistics network to boost intra-regional trade.

## Blue Economy Climate Resilience Forum and Expo

The Ministry of Blue Economy and Civil Aviation (MBECA) in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Representative for Jamaica, the Bahamas and Belize and Belize’s National Designated Authority to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) hosted it’s first Expo at the Belize City Civic Center from December 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup>. The BCCI and BCCI/WU sent our representatives to participate in this initiative which was designed to share information on professional and entrepreneurial opportunities within the blue economy (coastal zone and fisheries sector) of Belize.



## National MSME Roadshow

The BCCI was pleased to endorse and participate in the National MSME Roadshow which was organized by The Belize Trade and Investment Development Service (BELTRAIDE) under the Office of the Prime Minister.

ROADSHOW BOOT CAMP DATES & LOCATIONS:

MUNICIPALITY	BOOT CAMP & FORMALIZATION CLINIC 9AM - 4PM	POP-UP SHOP 9AM - 2PM
COROZAL AUG 24 - 25	ST FRANCIS XAVIER SCHOOL AUDITORIUM	HOUSE OF CULTURE + BASKETBALL COURT
ORANGE WALK AUG 27 - SEPT 01	BANKERS' BLDG HOUSE OF CULTURE	CENTRAL PARK
BELIZE CITY SEP 07 - 12	ITVET DINING FOOD	ITVET
PLANTA GORDA SEPT 14 - 19	SOCIAL SECURITY CONFERENCE ROOM	CENTRAL PARK/ WELCOME CENTER
CAYE CAULKER SEPT 22 - 28	CAYE CAULKER VILLAGE COMMUNITY CENTER	MARKET PLACE AREA
BELMOPAN SEPT 28 - 30	BELMOPAN CIVIC CENTER	CIVIC CENTER PARKING LOT
SAN IGNACIO/SANTA ELENA OCT 04 - 10	SUNSET TOWN HALL	WELCOME CENTER
DANORIGA OCT 12 - 14	SPORTS COMPLEX	ALEJO BENI PARK
PRINCENIA OCT 18 - 21	VILLAGE COUNCIL CENTER	FOOTBALL FIELD
SAN PEDRO OCT 26 - 28	LEONS DEN	CENTRAL PARK AREA

DAY 1: BOOT CAMP & TOWNHALL SESSIONS (9PM-12PM) | DAY 2: FORMALIZATION CLINIC | DAY 3: POP-UP SHOP

The roadshow was designed to:

- Support an enabling environment for MSME development;
- Improve market access and establishment of business linkages for MSMEs;
- Promoting buying locally to improve economic recovery;
- Increasing procurement of MSME goods and services by the public and private sectors;

- Facilitating Access to affordable finance for the MSME Sector AND
- Building the business acumen of MSMEs.

We showcased the services of the Chamber in Belize City, Caye Caulker, San Pedro, San Ignacio and Belmopan.



### Expo Belize Marketplace 2022

The Expo Belize Market Place has become one of the most anticipated events in Belize’s September calendar of events. Due to the pandemic, the BCCI was forced to improvise and design a virtual trade show to accommodate our exhibitors in 2020 and 2021. In 2022 the BCCI team was



both proud and excited to re-introduce our in-person exhibition from September 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> which saw the participation of over 150 exhibitors, occupying over 200 stalls at the Marion Jones Sports Complex in Belize City. Following this two-year hiatus, the return of the Expo Belize Market Place was well-attended and accumulated over 13,000 visitors throughout the weekend.

In keeping with tradition, the Chamber also held its Expo Opening Ceremony on September 17<sup>th</sup>, featuring presentations from Guest Speaker, Nardia Garcia, CEO of the Office of the Prime Minister as well as BCCI President, Mr. Marcello Blake and other honored guests. We also awarded our



outstanding vendors for their exemplary displays at the Expo. Categories for awardees included: best overall Booth, Most Creative Booth, Most Professional Booth, Most Innovative Booth, Best Female Entrepreneur, and Best Male Entrepreneur.

### **Made in Belize**

The Made in Belize Trade Show has easily become a staple for our members and the general public who continue to share an interest in showcasing their products and services on a larger scale. In June of 2022, we returned to our in-person exhibition at the Governor General Field in the City of Belmopan. This tradeshow consisted of over ninety exhibitors from all across the country who marketed a wide array of locally crafted products and tailored services. It was a joy that was embraced by the residents of Belmopan and visitors from neighboring districts, who numbered in the hundreds to support this event.



### **Christmas Extravaganza**

The BCCI Christmas Extravaganza has likewise become a fan-favored event hosted by the Chamber which not only gives businesses an opportunity to showcase themselves but also allows residents to get an early start on their Christmas shopping at an affordable cost.

Our most recent Christmas Extravaganza was done in partnership with the Belmopan City Council as a dual-feature event tied to their monthly night market. The festivities kicked off at the Governor General Field on December 3<sup>rd</sup> and featured over 100 exhibitors who braved the inclement weather to participate in this event.



## MOU/Agreement Signings

(i) On Monday, September 5, 2022, the BCCI and the Israel Latin-American Chamber of Commerce convened virtually to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in an effort to fortify our existing diplomatic relations. Through this agreement, both parties anticipate increased bilateral business and opportunities for economic growth through importing and exporting, trade investments, and information sharing. The Chamber also looks forward to refining our internal industries through sharing and adapting Israel's advanced knowledge in technology and agriculture. We consider this undertaking a starting point in future initiatives that will strengthen Belize's and Israel's business sectors.



(ii) In June, the BCCI also renewed our MOU with the Development Finance Corporation of Belize (DFC). One of the highlights of the MOU was the introduction of the BCCI Verify service which seeks to provide support and assistance to MSMEs that are trying to acquire financing to further develop their businesses. We hope to alleviate some of the uncertainty experienced by MSMEs when undertaking the processes involved in seeking loans. The DFC has committed to recognizing and promoting the BCCI Verify, and enterprises referred through the BCCI will be provided with streamlined and convenient access to finance once they meet the DFC's prerequisites. We aspire for the BCCI Verify to prove to be another avenue to stimulate the growth of Micro and Small businesses resulting in increased economic activity in Belize.



(iii) On June 15<sup>th</sup> the BCCI also entered into an Agreement of Mutual Cooperation with the Importers and Exporters Association of Tapei, to enhance cooperation between our respective



organizations in the areas of importing and exporting, investment, information sharing and other commercially-oriented activities to the benefit of their members and those they represent.

(iv) Last year we also signed an agreement with First Angels Jamaica and Rev Up with the intent to increase the opportunities offered to our members via local and international channels for development.

### **International Labour Conference**

The Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry has served as the official Employers' Organization over the last 26 years representing the International Labour Organization's (ILO) tripartite social partnership system. In 2022 the ILO and the Ministry of Rural Transformation, Community Development, Labour and Local Government invited the country's tripartite partners to attend the virtual *110<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference* May 27<sup>th</sup> – June 11<sup>th</sup>. The BCCI attended the conference and enjoyed discussions on safe and healthy working conditions, and rights at work through an amendment to the 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and a standard-setting item on quality apprenticeships.

### **Community Projects**

The Chamber directs a great deal of energy towards service to our clients and our community. 2022 provided us with different opportunities to give back to our local supporters who provide the motivation for us to keep aspiring for the greatest level of excellence possible.

### BCCI Disability Grant

On November 30<sup>th</sup>, at Belize's National Disability Conference, the BCCI obtained funding from the Embassy of the Republic of China (Taiwan) in order to provide a grant in support of entrepreneurs living with Disabilities in Belize. Applicants were required to submit a short video presentation of their business idea and their entrepreneurial aspirations. Seven applications were received and reviewed by a committee resulting in Mr. Vejerano of Corozal Town emerging victorious. Mr. Vejerano who has lost his sight and is self-employed as an electronics technician also offers non-visual technological training workshops to help others who are visually impaired. He plans to use his grant to advance his business and one-on-one technical training for persons living with disabilities.



## Nurses' Appreciation Program

In collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Wellness the Chamber was able to give back to public sector nurses working across various districts and municipalities throughout the country for their selfless contribution during the pandemic. Thanks to the support and contributions of forty-three BCCI members, we were able to present 500 nurses with care packages valued at a total of \$40,000.



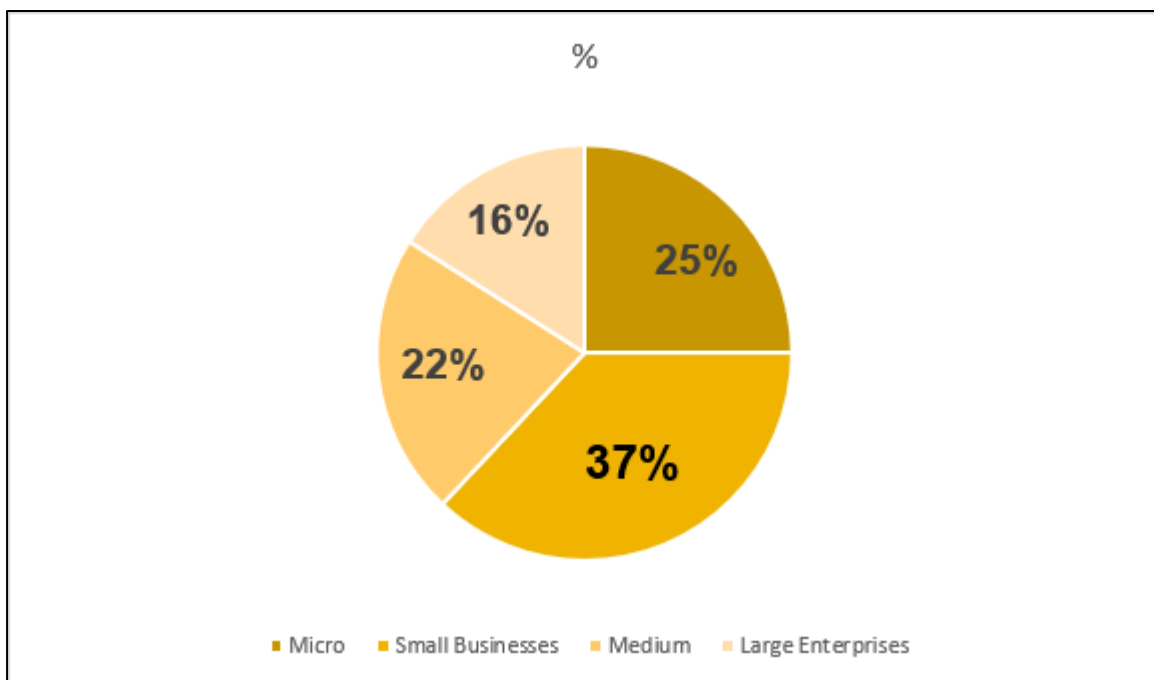
The Chamber commends their generosity and expresses its sincerest gratitude to those who supported to make this event a resounding success, namely:

1. Atlantic Insurance Company
2. Belize Electric Company Ltd. (BECOL)
3. Belize Brewing Company Ltd.
4. Belize Signs Limited
5. Belize Water Services Limited
6. Carlita Espejo (Independent)
7. Caribbean Paper Company Ltd.
8. Caribbean Tire Wholesale Ltd.
9. Caye Talkers Limited
10. Circle R Products Ltd.
11. Courtenay Coye LLP
12. Development Finance Corporation
13. DIGI
14. Elevate Consulting Ltd.
15. Farmers Trading Centre
16. GraceKennedy Belize Ltd.
17. Habet & Habet Ltd.
18. Harpy Security Services
19. James Brodie & Company Ltd.
20. Joe's Meats Ltd.
21. MADISCO
22. Marie Sharp's Fine Foods Ltd.
23. Marissa F. Longworth, Attorney-at-Law and Notary Public
24. Monarch Counseling & Consulting
25. NSAA Bath & Body
26. Oilalah Belize
27. Price & Company Ltd.
28. Protel BPO
29. RF&G Insurance Ltd.
30. Santiago Castillo Group of Companies
31. Sky Tropical Ltd.
32. Southside Meats
33. SMART
34. The Office Gurus
35. Toledo Association of Businesses
36. Tropic Air
37. Travellers Liquors Limited
38. Universal Hardware Company Limited
39. Victoria House
40. Vista Real Estate Services Ltd.
41. Western Union
42. Yello

# Capacitate

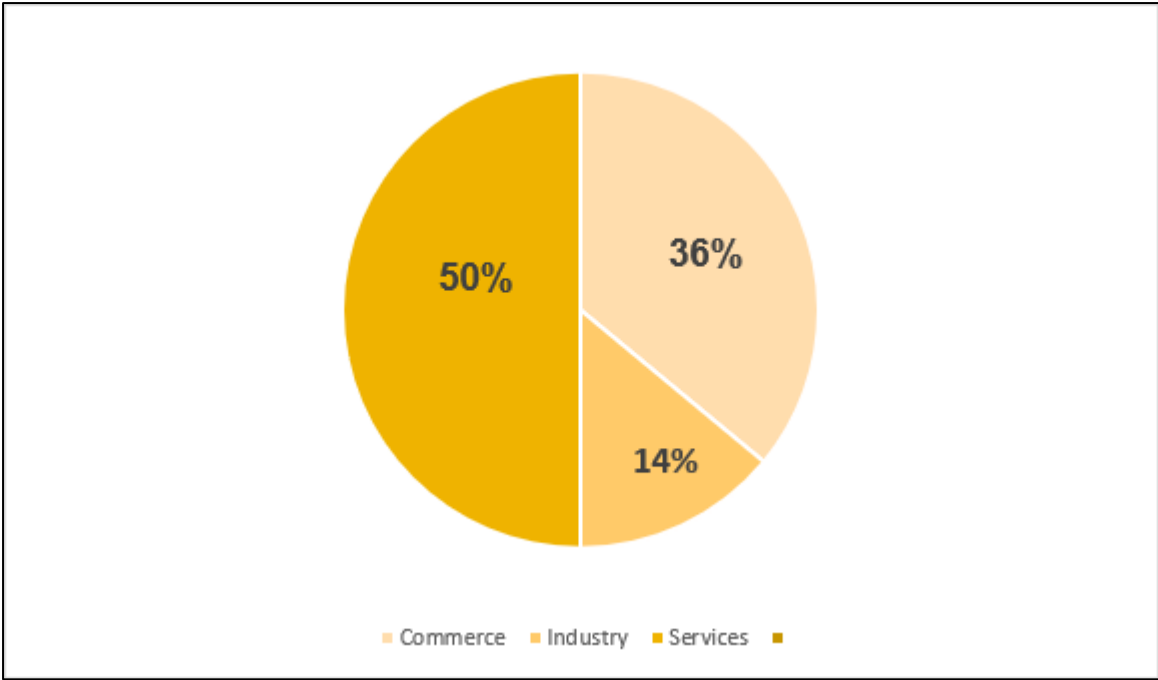


At the end of 2022, the BCCI recorded 388 direct members, representing 6000 employers countrywide. Our membership also represents 15 association members and 5 conglomerate companies. The continuous regeneration of Belize's economy after the stagnation caused by Covid-19, has led to a 16% expansion of our membership in 2022, with 25% being large enterprises and 85% being MSMEs (see pie chart below). The most exciting tell-tale sign of the business community's rebound is the 21% increase in registrations of start-up companies we have experienced this past year.



## Sector Representation

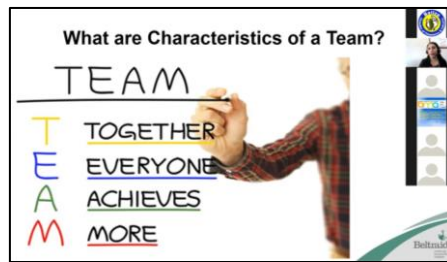
Our Services Sector representation has rapidly expanded with half of our membership being from this sector.



In 2022 we also used our virtual platforms to engage our membership countrywide. The Chamber was able to facilitate numerous online training and other informational sessions. These sessions had the participation of about 400 professionals in areas such as:

- Advanced Customer Service
- Roles & Responsibilities of a New Supervisor
- Team Building and Work Culture Development
- Marketing & Sales Promotion
- Digital Records Management Training
- Professional Etiquette in the Workplace Advanced Customer Service
- Service Recovery – Handling Difficult Customers
- Disciplinary Action – The Importance of Documentation
- How to Build New Habits and Break Old Ones
- Digital Strategy
- Manage to –do Lists, Deadlines and Expectation
- Strategic and Planning Management Training
- Customer Service and Sexual Harassment Training
- Brain Management for Stress Management

## ❑ Planning and Decision Making



Since December 2019, the BCCI and **Birches Group** have worked together to offer HR Solutions to our members who prioritize the strengthening and development of their workforce. Two training sessions took place in 2022, namely the “Why Job Design is Key to Everything in HR” and “The Importance of Job Evaluation in Managing Employee Compensation” sessions.

### **Virtual E-Commerce Accelerator Programme (VEAtCaP)**

The BCCI was selected by Caribbean Export Development Agency (Caribbean Export) as one of the Business Support Organizations (BSO) in Belize to take the **Virtual E-Commerce Accelerator Programme (VEAtCaP)** from November to December 2022. The purpose of the training was to build the capacity of CARIFORUM firms and Business Support Organizations (BSOs) to adopt E-Commerce technologies and processes leading to broader and more effective market reach, customer engagement, and export sales. A 5-6 month follow-up training session is scheduled for 2023 with the BSOs expected to provide support in the training process.

### **Cyber Security Training**

A **Cyber Security Training** was facilitated on August 2nd by one of GetSafeOnline's Belize Ambassadors, Mr. Bruce Flowers. This training helped members become aware of what cyber are, and how to protect their businesses from being cyber attacked.



## **Belize Companies and Corporate Affairs Registry (BCCAR) Training**

The Belize Companies and Corporate Affairs Registry (BCCAR) session was held virtually on September 1<sup>st</sup> and was designed to sensitize the private sector on how the new online system would function after being launched in November 2022.

## **Women Financial Inclusion Workshop**

PPF Capital was contracted by the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, and Immigration to host a Women's Financial Inclusion Workshop as part of the "Enhancing the Economic Empowerment of Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in the COVID-19 Post Pandemic Era" project. The BCCI and our members participated in this workshop from April 18<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022.

## **Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ and CCJ Academy for Law)**

The CCJ Academy for Law hosted an informational session on the topic, "Understanding the Original Jurisdiction of the CCJ". Our members in manufacturing, export, and professional services were given the opportunity to attend.

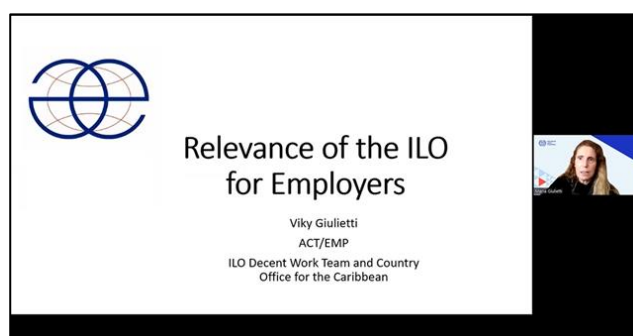
## **Labour**

The International Labour Organization, Decent Work Team and Office for the Caribbean (ILO DWT-POS), and the ILO/ Inter-American Centre for Knowledge Development in Vocational Training (ILO/Cinterfor) offered the BCCI's secretariat a scholarship to participate in an online course entitled "Quality Apprenticeship in the Caribbean" from 11<sup>th</sup> April to 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

The objective of the course was to introduce key elements of an apprenticeship system and guide participants in the design and introduction of concrete activities to promote quality apprenticeship in their own countries. Other tripartite representatives from Belize, Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana participated in this training and at the end each country was responsible to present an apprenticeship roadmap. We look forward to supporting the implementation of Belize's first apprenticeship programme to empower youths, boost entrepreneurship, and increase employment and productivity.

## **ILO and Labor Standards Training**

On 13<sup>th</sup> June, the ILO also facilitated a training session for our members on the topic of "An Introduction to the ILO and Labour Standards." Our members were presented with an overview of who the ILO is, what labour standards are, what it means for Belize to be a member state of the ILO, etc. Employers also learned that they are held liable to be engaged in the yearly country's tripartite reporting system to the ILO.



### **Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour**

The Labour Department, the BCCI, and the National Trade Union Congress of Belize had tripartite representation at the International Child Labour Conference held from 15<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

### **Gender Based Violence at the Workplace Policy**

The Caribbean Employers Confederation (CEC), the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) shared a “Joint Policy Positions to Address Gender Based Violence at the Workplace” working document with our members which included ILO standards and global best practices that can be incorporated in members’ workplace policies.

### **Labour Department Info Sessions**

The Labour department facilitated several informational sessions for our members on labour topics such as “Rights and Responsibilities of Workers and Employers with focus on Protection of Wages, Hours of Work, Overtime & Holiday” and “Maternity and Severance Pay Time”.

# Champion



## ADVOCACY

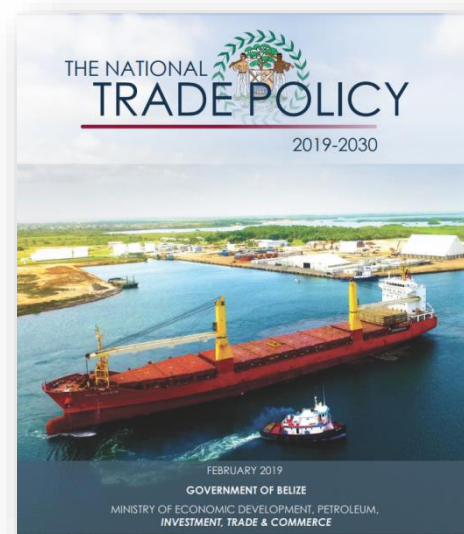
### What the Policy Advocacy Advanced and Defended against in 2022

The overarching mandate of the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI)'s advocacy efforts could be summarized into one single phrase: To champion the improvement of the entrepreneurial ecosystem and foster a healthy business environment. Of course, it is possible for us to drill down into the specifics and details as to what all that entails, but let's just agree on two things: (i) they are intricate, and (ii) important to a healthy economy.

At any given time there are forces that either work towards improving or regressing the "health" of the business environment and entrepreneurial ecosystem. In 2023 alone, we had a healthy mix of domestic and regional policies that were either favorable or potentially harmful to business activity. Others were not so much the policy itself but rather the way in which they were implemented. Some big-ticket items included the minimum-wage upward adjustment, the proposed Belize-Mexico Free Trade Agreement (FTA), the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Bill, the need for Import License Regime reform, addressing ad hoc public and bank holidays, the Belize Port Authority Act, and trade license reform.

#### 1—Belize-Mexico Free Trade Agreement

Let us start here: The Belize-Mexico Free Trade Agreement (FTA). In its natural form, an FTA would see the liberalization of trade across the Belize-Mexico border. The expectations for these types of agreements are that most imported goods would see the removal of tariffs and other barriers reduced or eliminated. In these modern times, the barriers' removal would not likely be exclusive to physical goods, but would also have impacts on the services sector and have implications for investments. In short, it is a big deal. This is where the words "it's complicated" becomes a useful descriptor. The BCCI supports trade liberalization. However, we also acknowledge that if we are not careful, local industries could be gobbled up by much larger players from the likes of a Mexico, which ranks (according to GDP) among the 20 largest economies in the world. Belize is closer to 160<sup>th</sup>.





As is our norm, we sought out input from members. Overwhelmingly, there were preferences for there to be a Partial Scope Agreement (PSA) with Mexico akin to the one we have with Guatemala. Members—especially those in the services sector—also expressed strong support for an agreement designed similar to the Economic Cooperation Agreement (ECA) we have with Taiwan. Compared to an FTA, the ECA, and the PSA are not as comprehensive, and—consistent with our country’s [National Trade Policy](#)—operate under the principle of asymmetric treatment, meaning that we do not negotiate with these larger economies from the vantage point of mutual reciprocity. The smaller party, clearly, should benefit from more lenient conditions.

Consequently, even the [Trade Policy](#) had these words: “*There is a growing interest in improving Belize’s trade relations with Mexico and other Latin American countries including Brazil. Presently, preparations for establishing a bilateral PSA [Partial Scope Agreement] with Mexico are in the pre-negotiation phase.*”

That position—which emanated from extensive consultations with the private sector—is also supported by every metric that we used to analyze and advise on bilateral trade policy. For this reason, while we were not opposed to an FTA, we felt obligated to call on the government—via the National Trade Negotiation Commission—to conduct a thorough scoping study to ensure that should we move forward with any Belize-Mexico FTA we are operating with as much information as possible to help identify where challenges may exist. To the government’s credit, they agreed, and, with the help of ECLAC, contracted a consultant to conduct a *computable general equilibrium* analysis that is used to identify any potential downsides as well as upsides. Such knowledge is useful for policy and planning purposes.

## 2—Trade License Reform and Expansion

Moving from international trade to “Trade License”, members would recall that the reform process for this particular regime is at least a decade old. For most of that time, the task was to come up with a model that satisfied five key principles when looking at the nine municipalities that had charged trade licenses. From the start, we agreed on *Revenue Neutrality (for the municipalities)*, *administrative ease*, *predictability*, *transparency*, and *accountability*.

After almost reaching an agreement in 2017, those who have been around for some time would recall that that process was halted by the authorities after having reached its *First Reading* in the National Assembly. Fast forward a few years later, the matter was revived under the new administration. But this time with a new wrinkle: A call for the trade licensing regime to be expanded to the rural areas.

Best Practices for Trade Licensing Regimes	Existing Trade License					Proposed Trade License Regime					
	Compliance Score (1-5)										
	0	1	2	3	4	5	Description				
1							1	Clarity of rationale for licensing in terms of legitimate public interest objectives while acknowledging clearly that no license is required just to establish and operate a business. Default position should be that, except for specified activities, a business does not require a license.			
2							1	The activities required to have trade licenses should be based on established public interest criteria.			
3							3	Exempt small and micro businesses from licensing requirements.			
4							1	Simple registration system - requiring only location, type of activity, number of employees.			
5							1	Subjectivity of process should be reduced to a minimum.			
6							1	Abolition of trade license boards. If the process is objective with clearly defined criteria there is no role for a board.			
7							1	Prohibit local authorities from using trade license processes to enforce other laws.			
8							1	Set license fees at a level to cover the administration costs only. Remove the requirement for annual renewal.			
9							1	Maximum time limit for decisions on trade license applications. Decisions not reached in the prescribed time should be automatically granted.			

Members should know that the original intent was to export a system analogous to that which operates in the nine municipalities. More precisely, villages would have employed the system operative in the nearest city or town. As a result, Ladyville—which currently does not pay trade license—would have been made to apply the Belize City structure and associated charges. Consequently, a hotel in Ladyville, for example, that has a “productive footprint” (measured in square feet) of, let’s say, 10,000 sqft would have likely paid approximately \$10,000 or more, depending on the rate charged on the assessed annual rental value (ARV).

Thanks to the BCCI’s interventions, however, we have secured agreements with stakeholders that a semi-fixed-fee structure would operate in the villages, with a set maximum of \$2,000. That is to say, no business—regardless of size of their premises—will pay beyond that amount! Therefore, that earlier mentioned hypothetical hotel in Ladyville was saved \$8,000 per year. Considering the alternative, that is a “relative win” for the private sector. Also, small businesses below 600 sqft are exempt.

On the downside, yes, we were unable to discourage the expansion to businesses in the rural areas. But that’s policy work: Compromises are often the only way forward. The hope is to eventually move this regime closer to international best practices, which would mean an across-the-board flat fee, as opposed to the property-tax-like structure that currently exists in the cities and towns.

Other areas of movement include the fact that certain groups of business—mostly in the services sector—will no longer have to wait on the Trade Licensing Board, as they would be able to obtain “automatic approvals.” This removes one key bureaucratic layer, thereby, inching the system closer to international benchmarks. Additionally, to prevent the new system from charging businesses significantly more, a ceiling was called for, and ultimately was settled at 10% maximum above any existing trade license charge. Of course, there are those who would say any increase is unwelcome. That is understandable. However, that must be weighed next to the alternative: potential increases significantly above the 10% threshold.

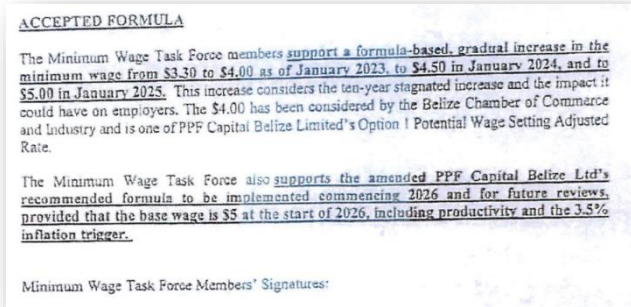
Overall, the trade license regime that is soon to come on stream has some marginal improvements when compared to the existing regime. However, when compared to what was originally proposed, it would then be appreciated why we could use the term “progress.”

### **3—The Minimum Wage**

Certainly, many members would have seen the media coverage of the BCCI’s intervention on the minimum wage. As we have said in numerous forums, our position has always been pro-increase. Low-wage workers have been long overdue for an increase since 2012! Our caution, however, was on the magnitude and speed of the increase. We had advised that the “Balanced-and-Evidenced Based” approach, as recommended by the likes of the International Labour Organization (ILO)—for which we are the Employers’ Representative—be utilized. Why? Because the empirical works in this area consistently show that a gradual and phased-in approach helps to mitigate the potential adverse effects of the changes in the minimum wage.

Via the government-convened Minimum Wage Task Force we tabled our case on the facts, ultimately obtaining a majority vote in favor of the phased-in approach.

The majority vote on the task force is significant, given that the BCCI was the only private-sector representative on the six-member body. Understand that even the workers' representative and other members saw the prudence in a more gradual increase.



Apart from the change in the rate, the task force also voted on a *minimum-wage adjustment formula*. Interestingly, this is what has been the BCCI's longstanding position: That a formula (and not political expediency) should guide the minimum-wage changes. While it has not yet made its way into law, we have good reasons to believe that we shall see such a formula etched into law in the near future. The formula will bring predictability into the matters relating to minimum wage.

#### **4—Other Matters**

Among the myriad of policy matters, we also continued our efforts in areas such as advancing the regional private sector's position on the *Front of Packaging Nutritional Labeling* (FoPNL) standard. Also through the NTNC, we called for increased predictability and transparency as it pertains to the import licensing regime. We worked with the government to also address the *ad hoc* additions of holidays, which all carry payroll-cost implications, and advanced proposals on tax reform to help ease doing business in Belize. Furthermore, among the scores of legislations reviewed, the BCCI and the National Trade Union Congress of Belize (NTUCB) also completed our review of the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Bill.

Beyond the advocacy component, we have likewise sought ways to expand MSME's access to credit. This led us to sign an MoU with *RevUp Jamaica*, an incubator service that, in the end, prepares innovative startups to make investment pitches to angel investors who are part of FirstAngelJA. No one said that the ecosystem needs to all be local. This strategic partnership will be key in helping to move innovation forward.

#### **5—Conclusion**

In summary, the above is only a handful of areas in which the BCCI has made interventions on the private sector's behalf, and we will continue to work for the strengthening of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. In some areas, we witnessed visible improvements. In other areas, we have found the BCCI playing a role in softening the language of regulations that would have otherwise weighed down on the private sector more heavily. Fundamentally, advocacy does take time, and for this reason and more, we thank you, our members, for your continued support.

# Projects



## **Green Climate Fund Readiness Support for Strengthening Belize's Private Sector Access to Climate Finance**

This project was inspired when it became apparent that Belize's private sector had minimal knowledge about the Green Climate Fund's (GCF) initiatives to finance climate action in the private sector. Following these findings, the BCCI, the Ministry of Economic Development in the capacity of the National Designated Authority (NDA) for the GCF in Belize, and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) combined their efforts to write and submit a Readiness Proposal to the GCF to address these gaps.

This readiness intervention was designed to build awareness and strengthen the private sector's capacity to engage with the GCF. The project consisted of several components, including an MSME Webinar, which focused on describing climate change, the impacts of climate change on business, the opportunities to invest in adaptation and mitigation, and available international and national financial support. A total of seventy-eight participants joined the webinar. A Capacity Building and Discussion Forum occurred in five different sessions over two weeks. Forty-three persons from various institutions participated, and twenty-four certificates of completion were issued. The objectives of this training were to provide participants with an enhanced understanding of the GCF process by (1) Identifying/proposing relevant ideas for the Fund and (2) turning them in concept notes.

The Project Concept Note Development phase yielded the submission of ten project ideas, which were narrowed down to two after being reviewed and evaluated by a Focus Group. The two selected project ideas are entitled 'Incorporation of Green and/or Energy-Efficient Technologies in Agriculture, Livestock Farming, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises to Assist in the Mitigation or Adaptation to Climate Change in Belize' and the second project idea is entitled 'Promoting Affordable Climate Resilient Buildings for SMEs and Green Financing,' submitted by the La Inmaculada Credit Union and the Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry, respectively.

The Scoping Study and Action Plan for MSME's Climate Investment explored the critical gaps and outlined an action plan to address said gaps. The study highlighted the barriers for MSMEs to accessing climate finance, such as limited climate-related data, policy and regulatory landscape, local and international markets access, access to domestic and international finance, technology, gender-related gaps and barriers, and indigenous peoples-related gaps and barriers. The action plan examined each barrier and outlined opportunities to overcome them; it also included measures, responsible entities, and timeframes for action.

The project closed with a final session to present stakeholders with the project's progress, validate the Private Sector Access to Climate Finance Scoping findings, and provide a validation forum for the Concept Notes prepared for Belize.

The Ministry of Economic Development has committed to seeking funding for the project ideas not selected for concept note development by submitting them to the Public Sector Investment Program for other arising funding opportunities. The two concept notes developed through this Private Sector Readiness project were included in the GCF Country Programme for Belize.

# HR & Finance



## **Finance, Administration, and HR in the Year 2022**

At the close of this Fiscal Year; the Finance, Administration & Human Resources Department embraced and overcame various opportunities for growth presented 2022.

Our staff participated in several capacity building training sessions which offered certifications. Whether by participating in one-day or weekly session, our staff proved to be willing and opened to enhancing their professional skills.

- In February 2022 our Customer Service Representative participated in the Advance Customer Service workshop facilitated by BELTRAIDE.
- Our Manager of Member Relations also participated in the Role & Responsibilities of a New Supervisor workshop facilitated by the University of the West Indies.
- In February 2022 our Manager of Finance & Administration also attended the Team Building & Work Culture Development workshop facilitated by BELTRAIDE.
- In March 2023 our Accounts Clerk and Customer Service Representative attended the Digital Records Management workshop facilitated by the University of the West Indies.
- Our CEO also attended a seminar on Best Practices facilitated by CARICHAM.
- Our Compliance Officer/WU Supervisor participated in an online course with the Association of Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialists (ACAMS) for the period November 2021 – March 2022. In April our Compliance Officer passed the final exam and is now a certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialist.
- In May 2022 our Western Union Operations Supervisor participated in the Service Recovery - Handling Difficult Customers workshop facilitated by BTEC.
- Our Manager of Finance & Administration participated in the informational session – Rights, and Responsibilities of Workers and Employers with a focus on Contracts of Service; this session was facilitated by the Labour Department.
- Our Membership Program Administrator and Marketing and Public Relations Manager were nominated to take the ILO's E-design for impactful online courses training for EBMOs which commenced on the 24th of October and concluded on the 9th of December.

Sadly, in 2022 we bid farewell to two members of our staff; namely our Membership Program Administrator and our Marketing and Public Relations Officer. However those positions were filled with the Marketing and Public Relations Officer being upgraded to Marketing and Public Relations Manager and a new Western Union Customer Service Representative being hired.

We are pleased to inform you that we also renewed our service agreement with Belize Healthcare Partners Limited to provide medical services to our staff and their family members.

As mentioned, we were not without some challenges as banking restrictions continue to put a strain on our Western Union Sub-agents in the Southern Districts. This presented some setbacks in settling payments with our sub-agents. However, we worked through these challenges and were able to recover.

The BCCI also renewed our collection agreement with BEL from January – December 2022.

In addition to BTL and SMART services, the BCCI also provides the following bill pay services: BEL, BWS, Courts Belize Limited, Netking Belize, Atlantic Insurance, Belize Tourism Board, Belize Tourism Industries Association, Infinite Wireless Networking, Belize City Council, Central TV and Internet, Central Broadcasting Cable and Internet, Centaur Communication and Alternative Networks. In 2022 we likewise signed service agreements with DigiWallet and E-Kyash.

BDO Belize LLP commenced the audit for 2021 on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January 2022 which concluded on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February. The Executive Council approved the Audited Financial Statements for the year ending 2021 on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April 2022.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2022 the Treasurer, CEO, and Manager of Finance & Administration had a meeting with Atlantic Bank Limited to discuss the renegotiation of the loan instrument. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of March 2022, Atlantic Bank Limited advised that the more favorable arrangements that were requested were approved. We received the documentation from ABL on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May, and the document was signed by the President and Treasurer.

At the Executive Council meeting held on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, it was decided that the updated valuation of the Regent Street property be taken into consideration as it relates to the real estate listing. The Realtor forwarded to BCCI the updated exclusive listing agreement reflecting the new price. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of May, the President and Treasurer signed the agreement.

In August 2021; Buy Belize Representative had a meeting with the Chief Executive Officer and the Manager of Finance and Administration regarding the rental of the entire 2<sup>nd</sup> floor by a Peak Outsourcing. A lease agreement was signed in January 2022 for a period of two years.

In November 2021 we received an interest to purchase the Ferrell's Lane property. The Board accepted the offer and in February 2022 the Memorandum of Sales document was signed and the sale of Ferrell's Lane was finalized. The proceeds from the sale of Ferrell's Lane were applied to the principal amount of the BCCI's Loan Facility on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April.

In closing, despite the hurdles faced in 2022 we would like to thank our employees for all their hard work and dedication in meeting the demands of the day-to-day operations of the Chamber. To show our appreciation to our staff we ended the year with a Christmas social where our team members exchanged gifts, shared laughs and were able to interact on a more personal level.

We now anticipate a successful 2023 with the support of our employees and our Chamber family and you, our dedicated members.



# Western Union



In 2022 the BCCI Western Union celebrated twenty-eight years of devoted service to our customers nationwide. Our focus for the past year was exploring new and creative ways to boost customer engagement and show our appreciation to those who remain loyal to our brand and our network. This year, to show our gratitude, the BCCI/WU gave away over \$5,000.00 in cash and prizes for our year end promotion. This included the raffling of a Christmas hamper valued at \$1,000 and three cash prizes for our “Maaga Season” giveaway.



We also focused on expanding our footprint in order to reach a wider audience and make our WU services more accessible to new and existing customers. We were able to add locations in Corozal Town, Caye Caulker, and Santa Cruz Village in the Stann Creek District. With these additional locations, we look forward to better serving the needs of our customers.



# Executive Council



Marcello Blake  
President



Marissa Longsworth  
Immediate Past President



Katherine Meighan  
V.P. Services



William Usher  
V.P. Industry



William Neal  
Cuncilor



Ashanti Martin  
Secretary



Giacomo Sanchez  
Treasurer



Noriko Gamero  
Cuncilor



Jody Williams  
Councilor



Allan Sharp  
Councilor



Marnix Perez  
Councilor

# BCCI



# Secretariat



**Kim Aikman**  
Chief Executive Officer



**Dyon Elliott**  
Chief Policy Analyst



**Yorshabell Cattouse**  
Manager Member  
Relations



**Venesia Neal**  
Manager, Finance &  
Administration



**Ruth Gillett**  
Senior Administrator/HR  
Officer



**Akmar Codd**  
Western Union  
Supervisor/Compliance Officer



**Anirdi Briceno**  
Accounts Clerk



**Kory Leslie**  
Marketing & Public  
Relations Manager



**Danette Burns**  
Western Union  
Operations Supervisor



**Genesisia Tucker**  
Project Coordinator



**Bibiana Paquil**  
Senior Accounts Clerk



**Silvia Novelo**  
Western Union Customer  
Service Representative



**Joshua Pott**  
Policy Analyst



**Karyn Gill**  
Membership Program  
Administrator



**Sheyvoughn Jones**  
Membership Program  
Officer



**Delwin Soberanis**  
Office Assistant



**Dorothy Goff**  
Office Custodian



# *Reports*



**BELIZE CHAMBER OF  
COMMERCE & INDUSTRY**  
Financial Statements

Year ended 31 December 2022

**Index to the financial statements**

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Statement of cash flows	5
Statement of expenses by functional area	6
Notes to the financial statements	7

## **Independent auditor's report to the members of Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry**

### **Opinion**

We have audited the accompanying financial statements of Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry (Chamber) which comprise of the statement of financial position as at 31 December 2022 and the statement of activities, statement of cash flows and statement of expenses by functional area for the year then ended and a summary of significant accounting policies and other explanatory notes.

In our opinion, the accompanying financial statements give a true and fair view of the financial position of Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry as of 31 December 2022, and of its financial performance for the year then ended in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards for Small and Medium size Entities (IFRS for SMEs).

### **Basis for opinion**

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (ISAs). Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statements section of our report. We are independent of the Chamber in accordance with the International Ethics Standards Board for Accountants' Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants (IESBA Code), and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements and the IESBA Code.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our audit opinion.

### **Responsibility of management and those charged with governance for the financial statements**

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of these financial statements in accordance with IFRS for SMEs, and for such internal control as management determines is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, management is responsible for assessing the Chamber ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless management either intends to liquidate the Chamber or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

Those charged with governance are responsible for overseeing the financial reporting process.


## **Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements**

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

As part of an audit in accordance with ISAs, we:

- (i) exercise professional judgement and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit.
- (ii) identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error; design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks; and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- (iii) obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the entity's internal control.
- (iv) evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by management.
- (v) conclude on the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the entity's ability to continue as a going concern. If we should conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify the opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our report. However, future events or conditions may cause an entity to cease to continue as a going concern.
- (vi) evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.
- (vii) obtain sufficient audit evidence regarding the financial information of the Chamber to express an opinion on the financial statements. We remain solely responsible for our audit opinion.

We communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

  
Crowe Belize LLP

20 March 2023

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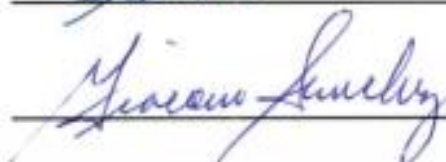
**Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry****Statement of financial position**

At 31 December

*(in Belize Dollars)*

<b>ASSETS</b>	<b>Note</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>
<b>Current assets</b>			
Cash and cash equivalents		1,042,197	1,061,922
Endowment Fund account	4	100,000	100,000
Trade and other receivables	6	1,239,019	984,951
Prepayments		26,544	58,122
		<u>2,407,760</u>	<u>2,204,995</u>
<b>Non-current assets</b>			
Property and equipment	7	2,402,491	2,453,467
		<u>2,402,491</u>	<u>2,453,467</u>
<b>Total assets</b>		<u>4,810,251</u>	<u>4,658,462</u>
<b>LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>			
<b>Current liabilities</b>			
Trade and other payables	9	1,711,481	1,441,973
Borrowings	10	102,547	70,985
		<u>1,814,028</u>	<u>1,512,958</u>
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>			
Borrowings	10	63,013	497,775
Severance provision	11	96,124	89,598
		<u>159,137</u>	<u>587,373</u>
<b>Total liabilities</b>		<u>1,973,165</u>	<u>2,100,331</u>
<b>Net assets</b>			
Unrestricted funds		2,737,086	2,458,131
Endowment reserve fund, restricted	12	100,000	100,000
<b>Total net assets</b>		<u>2,837,086</u>	<u>2,558,131</u>
<b>Total liabilities and net assets</b>		<u>4,810,251</u>	<u>4,658,462</u>

Approved on behalf of the Executive Council:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
President  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Treasurer

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**Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry****Statement of activities**

For the year ended 31 December

*(In Belize Dollars)*

	Note	Western Union	General office	2022 Total unrestricted	2021 Total unrestricted
<b>Supports &amp; revenue</b>					
<b>Support</b>					
Membership dues		-	177,595	177,595	151,715
<b>Revenues</b>					
BCCI's share of Western Union transfer charges		1,101,637	-	1,101,637	1,406,494
Collection fees		50	15,652	15,702	14,864
Gain on disposal		-	165,460	165,460	31,650
Interest income		-	85	85	528
Rental income		-	134,611	134,611	14,170
Net contributions from EXPO and other services		160	96,903	97,063	28,000
Sundry income		161	24,018	24,179	26,229
Total supports and revenue		1,102,008	614,324	1,716,332	1,673,650
<b>Expenses</b>					
Administration		(326,173)	(1,008,161)	(1,334,334)	(1,143,545)
Financial		-	(23,762)	(23,762)	(45,016)
		775,835	(417,599)	358,236	485,089
Business tax	13	(66,098)	(13,183)	(79,281)	(88,810)
Change in unrestricted fund		709,737	(430,782)	278,955	396,279
Unrestricted fund-1 January 2022				2,458,131	2,061,852
Unrestricted fund – 31 December 2022				<u>2,737,086</u>	<u>2,458,131</u>

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**Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry****Statement of cash flows**

For the year ended 31 December

*(in Belize Dollars)*

	Note	2022	2021
<b>Cash flows from operating activities</b>			
Change in unrestricted funds		278,955	396,279
Adjustments for:			
-Depreciation	7	81,549	62,873
-Bad debts	6	450	3,000
-Gain on disposal of fixed assets		(165,460)	(31,650)
-Tax expense		79,281	88,810
-Interest income		(85)	(528)
-Interest expense		23,762	45,016
-Severance pay provision	11	6,526	6,138
		<u>304,978</u>	<u>569,938</u>
Change in working capital:			
-trade and other receivables	6	(254,518)	(273,040)
-prepayments		31,578	(23,915)
-trade and other payables	9	269,508	171,793
Cash generated from operations		<u>351,546</u>	<u>444,776</u>
Tax paid		(79,281)	(88,810)
Interest income received		85	528
Interest paid		(23,762)	(45,016)
Net cash provided by operating activities		<u>248,588</u>	<u>311,478</u>
<b>Cash flows from investing activities</b>			
Purchase of property and equipment	7	(135,588)	(5,787)
Proceeds from sale of assets		270,475	31,650
Net cash provided by investing activities		<u>134,887</u>	<u>25,863</u>
<b>Cash flows from financing activities</b>			
Repayment of borrowings	10	(403,200)	(65,871)
Net cash used in financing activities		<u>(403,200)</u>	<u>(65,871)</u>
<b>Net (decrease)/increase in cash and cash equivalents</b>		(19,725)	271,470
Cash and cash equivalents at 1 January 2022		1,061,922	790,452
<b>Cash and cash equivalents at 31 December 2022</b>		<u>1,042,197</u>	<u>1,061,922</u>
<b>Represented by:</b>			
Cash and bank		<u>1,042,197</u>	<u>1,061,922</u>
		<u>1,042,197</u>	<u>1,061,922</u>

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**Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry****Statement of expenses by functional area**

For the year ended 31 December

*(In Belize Dollars)*

	Note	Western Union	General office	2022 Total expenses	2021 Total expenses
<b>ADMINISTRATION</b>					
Advertising and promotion		91,740	13,558	105,298	79,004
Annual general meeting expenses		-	16,779	16,779	4,061
Audit		(5,833)	18,000	12,167	28,833
Bad debt provision and write-off		-	3,000	3,000	3,070
Bank charges		15,140	3,558	18,698	18,000
Depreciation		-	81,549	81,549	62,873
Donations and subscriptions		-	4,315	4,315	6,718
Electricity and water		17,585	1,610	19,195	32,041
GST input tax disallowed		-	3,123	3,123	1,776
IDB Project-climate change		-	-	-	1,715
Insurance		12,004	43,417	55,421	48,256
Members and board meetings		-	42,870	42,870	14,183
Miscellaneous expenses		2,311	5,302	7,613	10,134
Motor vehicle expenses		-	22,144	22,144	23,791
Office cleaning		-	14,502	14,502	13,750
Office expenses		734	6,053	6,787	4,774
Personnel costs	14	104,158	546,414	650,572	564,136
Professional fees		-	1,500	1,500	-
Property taxes		-	8,470	8,470	8,183
Rent		-	8,775	8,775	7,200
Repairs and maintenance		774	82,330	83,104	65,443
Security		24,386	35,477	59,863	50,987
Stationery, postage and office supplies		25,144	19,447	44,591	45,523
Telephone		30,559	13,429	43,988	44,652
Training		246	3,558	3,804	3,680
Travel, local and international		7,225	8,981	16,206	762
		<u>326,173</u>	<u>1,008,161</u>	<u>1,334,334</u>	<u>1,143,545</u>



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## **Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry**

Notes to the financial statements

*(In Belize Dollars)*

### **1. General Information**

The Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Chamber) is a private sector initiative whose objective is to promote free enterprise development across all sectors of the Belizean economy including commerce, industry, manufacturing, agri-business, the professions and trades.

The Chamber is a private, non-profit, non-partisan, membership organization established by statute - the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry Act (the Act), Chapter 308 of the Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2020. This Act repealed and replaced the Chamber of Commerce Act of 1923. The office of the Chamber is located at #4792 Coney Drive, Belize City, Belize.

The Chamber and Western Union (WU) established domestic and international money transfer services for Belize under a joint agreement in 1993, whereby the Chamber and WU share transfer charges levied on money transfers. This activity continues to be the main source of revenue for the Chamber.

These financial statements were authorized by the Executive Council for issue on 31, March 2023.

### **2. Summary of Significant Accounting Policies**

#### **Basis of preparation**

The financial statements of the Chamber have been prepared in accordance with 'International Financial Reporting Standard for Small and Medium-sized Entities' (IFRS for SMEs) issued by the International Accounting Standards Board. They have been prepared under the historical cost convention. The principal accounting policies applied in the preparation of these financial statements are set out below. These policies have been consistently applied to all years presented, unless otherwise stated.

The preparation of financial statements in conformity with IFRS for SMEs requires the use of certain critical accounting estimates. It also requires management to exercise its judgment in the process of applying the Chamber's accounting policies. Areas involving a higher degree of judgement or complexity, or areas where assumptions and estimations are significant to the financial statements are disclosed in Note 3.

The financial statements have been prepared on the going concern basis which assumes that the Chamber will continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. The validity of this assumption depends on the continuing support received from the members of the Chamber, its Western Union partner and its bankers.

#### **Foreign currency translation**

##### *Functional and presentation currency*

Items included in the financial statements are measured using the currency of the primary economic environment in which the Chamber operates ('the functional currency'). The financial statements are presented in Belize dollars which is the Chamber's functional and presentation currency.

Notes to the financial statements  
(In Belize Dollars)

## **2. Summary of Significant Accounting Policies (continued)**

### **Foreign currency translation (continued)**

#### *Transactions and balances*

Foreign currency transactions are translated into the functional currency using the exchange rates prevailing at the dates of the transactions. Foreign exchange gains and losses resulting from the settlement of such transactions and from the translation at year-end exchange rates of monetary assets and liabilities denominated in foreign currencies are recognized in the Statement of Activities. The official exchange rate for the Belize dollar is fixed at BZ\$2 to US\$1.

Foreign exchange gains and losses that relate to borrowings and cash and cash equivalents are presented in the Statement of Activities within "Loss on Exchange". All other foreign exchange gains and losses are presented in the Statement of Activities within the particular support, revenue or operating expense.

### **Cash and cash equivalents**

Cash and cash equivalents includes cash on hand, demand deposits and other short-term highly liquid investments with original maturities of three months or less and a bank overdraft which is presented in the statement of net assets within current liabilities.

### **Trade receivables**

Trade receivables are recognized initially at the transaction price. They are subsequently measured at amortized cost using the effective interest method, less provision for impairment. The Chamber makes use of a simplified approach in accounting for trade and other receivables as well as contract assets and records the loss allowance as lifetime expected credit losses. These are the expected shortfalls in contractual cash flows, considering the potential for default at any point during the life of the financial instrument. In calculating, the Chamber uses its historical experience, external indicators and forward-looking information to calculate the expected credit losses using a provision matrix. The Chamber assess impairment of trade receivables on a collective basis as they possess shared credit risk characteristics they have been grouped based on the days past due.

### **Property and equipment**

Property and equipment is stated at historical cost less accumulated depreciation and any accumulated impairment losses. Historical cost includes expenditure that is directly attributable to bringing the asset to the location and condition necessary for it to be capable of operating in the manner intended by management.

The Chamber adds to the carrying amount of an item of property and equipment the cost of replacing parts of such an item when the cost incurred for the replacement part is expected to provide incremental future benefits to the Chamber. The carrying amount of the replaced part is derecognized. All other repairs and maintenance are charged to the statement of activities during the period in which they are incurred.

Notes to the financial statements

(In Belize Dollars)

## 2. Summary of Significant Accounting Policies (continued)

### Property and equipment (continued)

Land is not depreciated. Depreciation on other assets is charged so as to allocate the cost of assets less their residual value over their estimated useful lives, using the straight-line method. The estimated useful lives range as follows:

Strata building	50 years
Office furniture, fixtures and equipment	4 and 10 years
Motor vehicles	5 years

The assets' residual values, useful lives and depreciation methods are reviewed and adjusted prospectively if appropriate, if there is an indication of a significant change since the last reporting date.

An asset's carrying amount is written down immediately to its recoverable amount if the asset's carrying amount is greater than its estimated recoverable amount.

Gains and losses on disposals are determined by comparing the proceeds with the carrying amount and are recognized within the classification 'Revenues' in the Statement of Activities.

### Impairment of non-financial assets other than inventories

Assets that are subject to depreciation or amortization are assessed at each reporting date to determine whether there is any indication that the assets are impaired. Where there is any indication that an asset may be impaired, the carrying value of the asset (or cash-generating unit (CGU) to which the asset has been allocated) is tested for impairment. An impairment loss is recognized for the amount by which the asset's carrying amount exceeds its recoverable amount. The recoverable amount is the higher of an asset's (or CGU's) fair value less costs to sell and value in use. For the purposes of assessing impairment, assets are grouped at the lowest levels for which there are separately identifiable cash flows (CGUs). Non-financial assets other than goodwill that suffered an impairment are reviewed for possible *reversal* of the impairment at each reporting date.

### Borrowings

Borrowings are recognized initially at the transaction price, that is, the present value of cash payable to the bank. Borrowings are subsequently stated at amortized cost. Interest expense is recognized on the basis of the effective interest method and is included in finance costs.

Borrowings are classified as current liabilities unless the Chamber has an unconditional right to defer settlement of the liability for at least *twelve* months after the reporting date.

### Trade payables

Trade payables are recognized initially at the transaction price and subsequently measured at amortized cost using the effective interest method.

Notes to the financial statements  
(In Belize Dollars)

**2. Summary of Significant Accounting Policies (continued)**

**Employee benefit obligations**

Termination benefit – severance

The Chamber recognizes termination benefits in accordance with the Labour Act (the Act), Chapter 297 of the Substantive Laws of Belize.

The Act was revised in April 2011 to require that employees who have been employed for (a) *five* to ten years be paid severance pay of one week's pay for each year of service if retiring on or after 60 years of age or on medical grounds or if terminated for other than good or sufficient cause and (b) employees with more than ten years be paid *severance* pay of one week's pay for each year of service prior to April 30, 2011 and two weeks pay for each year of service thereafter. The revision became effective on May 1, 2011.

**Support and revenue recognition**

Support and revenues comprise the fair value of the consideration received or receivable from membership dues, grants and *revenues* from income-generating activities in the ordinary course of the Chamber's activities. Revenues are shown net of general sales tax and discounts.

The Chamber recognizes support and *revenues* when the amounts of such support and revenues can be reliably measured; it is probable that future economic benefits will flow to the Chamber; and specific criteria have been met for each of the Chamber's activities, as described in the following page.

*Grant support*

Grants are recognized when there is reasonable assurance that the Chamber will comply with the conditions attached to the grant and the grant will be received.

Support for future periods is accounted for as deferred income or support.

*Membership dues and revenues*

Membership dues are recognized as income when received but, dues received in respect of future periods are deferred. All other revenue is recognized when earned.

*Interest income*

Interest income is recognized using the effective interest method.

*Rental income*

Rental income under an operating lease is recognized in the statement of activities as income on a straight-line basis over the lease term and is recognized within the classification 'Revenues' in the Statement of Activities.

Notes to the financial statements  
(In Belize Dollars)

## **2. Summary of Significant Accounting Policies (continued)**

### **Taxes**

The tax expense for the period comprises current tax. The tax charge is calculated on the basis of the tax laws enacted at the statement of net assets date. Management evaluates situations in which applicable tax regulation is subject to interpretation and establishes provisions where appropriate on the basis of the amounts expected to be paid to the tax authorities.

Taxes are based on monthly gross revenue receipts and are payable within the following month.

Complying with deferred taxation accounting pursuant to Section 29 of International Financial Reporting Standard for Small and Medium-sized Entities is not applicable.

### **Leases**

Leases in which substantially all the risks and rewards of ownership are retained by the lessor are classified as operating leases. Payments made under operating leases (net of any incentives received from the lessor) are charged to the statement of activities on a straight-line basis over the period of the lease.

Rental income from lease is recognized in accordance with the accounting policy described above.

### **Changes in accounting policies**

No changes to the accounting policies were identified and the comparative information has accordingly remained unchanged since the prior reporting period.

## **3. Information about key sources of estimation uncertainty and judgements**

Estimates and judgements are continually evaluated. They are based on historical experience and other factors, including future expectations.

### **Key sources of estimation uncertainty**

The organization makes estimates and assumptions concerning the future. The resulting accounting estimates will, by definition, seldom equal the related actual results. The estimates and assumptions that have a significant risk of causing a material adjustment to the carrying amounts of assets and liabilities within the next financial year would be the estimated collectability of accounts receivable, particularly from Western Union sub-agents and management's assessment as to the impairment of assets.

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**Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry**

Notes to the financial statements

*(In Belize Dollars)***4. Endowment Fund account**

The Endowment Fund account which is a restricted cash balance, is held in a bank savings account. See Note 12 for more detail.

**5. Financial risk factors**

The Chamber's activities expose it to a variety of risks including credit risk and liquidity risk.

*Credit risk*

The Chamber has no significant concentrations of credit risk. Sales are made in cash or on credit terms. Credit sales are made to customers with appropriate credit histories.

*Liquidity risk*

Liquidity risk management involves maintaining significant cash and cash equivalents and having funding available through adequate and committed credit facilities.

**6. Trade and other receivables**

	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>
Western Union and sub-agents	1,201,765	939,339
Others	34,622	48,612
Employee loans receivable	3,082	-
	<u>1,239,469</u>	<u>987,951</u>
Less: bad debt provision	(450)	(3,000)
	<u>1,239,019</u>	<u>984,951</u>

Movement in the bad debt provision:

	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>
At 1 January	3,000	-
Additional provision during the year	450	3,000
Amounts written off during the year	(3,000)	-
At 31 December	<u>450</u>	<u>3,000</u>

**Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry**

Notes to the financial statements

*(In Belize Dollars)***7. Property and equipment**

	<b>Land</b>	<b>Strata land and building</b>	<b>Office furniture, fixtures, and equipment</b>	<b>Motor vehicles</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Cost</b>					
At 1 January 2022	853,848	2,045,938	513,299	84,972	3,498,057
Additions	-	-	60,601	74,987	135,588
Disposals	(105,015)	-	-	-	(105,015)
At 31 December 2022	<u>748,833</u>	<u>2,045,938</u>	<u>573,900</u>	<u>159,959</u>	<u>3,528,630</u>
<b>Accumulated depreciation</b>					
At 1 January 2022	-	(510,668)	(450,173)	(83,749)	(1,044,590)
Charge for the year	-	(40,838)	(25,208)	(15,503)	(81,549)
At 31 December 2022	-	<u>(551,506)</u>	<u>(475,381)</u>	<u>(99,252)</u>	<u>(1,126,139)</u>
<b>Net book values</b>					
At 31 December 2022	<u>748,833</u>	<u>1,494,432</u>	<u>98,519</u>	<u>60,707</u>	<u>2,402,491</u>

	<b>Land</b>	<b>Strata land and building</b>	<b>Office furniture, fixtures, and equipment</b>	<b>Motor vehicles</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Cost</b>					
At 1 January 2021	853,848	2,045,938	507,512	164,604	3,571,902
Additions	-	-	5,787	-	5,787
Disposals	-	-	-	(79,632)	(79,632)
At 31 December 2021	<u>853,848</u>	<u>2,045,938</u>	<u>513,299</u>	<u>84,972</u>	<u>3,498,057</u>
<b>Accumulated depreciation</b>					
At 1 January 2021	-	(469,830)	(431,392)	(160,127)	(1,061,349)
Charge for the year	-	(40,838)	(18,781)	(3,254)	(62,873)
Disposals	-	-	-	79,632	79,632
At 31 December 2021	-	<u>(510,668)</u>	<u>(450,173)</u>	<u>(83,749)</u>	<u>(1,044,590)</u>
<b>Net book values</b>					
At 31 December 2021	<u>853,848</u>	<u>1,535,270</u>	<u>63,126</u>	<u>1,223</u>	<u>2,453,467</u>

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**Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry**

Notes to the financial statements

*(In Belize Dollars)***8. Bank overdraft**

Bank overdraft and other facilities with the Atlantic Bank Limited are secured by a mortgage over the Chamber's strata titles 4792 (H1 and H3), Block 16, Caribbean Shores stamped to secure \$400,000 and mortgage over the Chamber's Regent Street property stamped to secure \$450,000.

**9. Trade and other payables**

	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>
Trade payables	36,456	25,320
Western Union Settlements for sub-agents	796,297	599,087
Western Union sub-agents' share of transfer charges	83,979	85,585
Stamp duties on money transfers payable	72,351	65,588
Deferred revenue - membership dues	83,918	60,975
Gratuity payable	143,156	123,200
Other payables and accruals	495,324	482,218
	<u>1,711,481</u>	<u>1,441,973</u>

**10. Borrowings**

The Atlantic Bank Limited loan is secured (see note 8) and repayable by way of 108 monthly blended payments of principal and interest of \$9,240.61. Interest is payable at 7.0% per annum. See also Note 8 for security.

	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>
Atlantic Bank Limited Loan	165,560	568,760
Less: current portion	<u>(102,547)</u>	<u>(70,985)</u>
	<u>63,013</u>	<u>497,775</u>

The loan balance is repayable as follows:

	2023	102,547
	2024	63,013
2025 and thereafter	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
		<u>165,560</u>

**11. Severance provision**

	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>
Employee benefit obligation		
At 1 January	89,598	83,460
Increase in provision during the year	<u>6,526</u>	<u>6,138</u>
At 31 December	<u>96,124</u>	<u>89,598</u>



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**Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry**

Notes to the financial statements

*(In Belize Dollars)***12. Endowment reserve fund, restricted**

The Government of Belize and the United States of America were parties to a U.S. funded programme designated as the Economic Stabilization Fund (ESF) Local Currency Programme, whereby assistance was provided to the country of Belize. In February 1993, an allocation of BZ\$100,000 of the Private Sector Development Fund was earmarked under the ESF for the Chamber as seed capital for the establishment of an Endowment Fund. In April 1996, an agreement between the Government of Belize and the Chamber was formally executed establishing the Endowment Fund. The purpose of the Endowment Fund is to assist private sector developmental activities.

**13. Business tax**

On 29 June 1998, the Government of Belize passed the Income Tax (Amendment) Act, (the Act). The Act which became effective 1 July 1998 replaced Corporate Tax with a Business Tax chargeable on gross trading receipts. The amendment made civic organizations such as the Chamber (which were wholly-exempt from taxation under the previous tax regime) chargeable to business tax on membership dues and receipts from revenue-generating activities.

Business tax is levied on the various categories of income at the rates set out from time to time in the Ninth Schedule to the Act.

**14. Employees' salaries and benefits**

	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>
Wages and salaries	516,239	445,246
Social security costs	22,166	19,202
Severance	6,526	7,881
Gratuity	19,956	19,900
Staff benefits	85,685	71,907
	<u>650,572</u>	<u>564,136</u>

**15. Key management compensation**

	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>
Key management excludes the Executive Council (provides pro-bono services to the BCCI). Total compensation paid to key management for employee services was	99,780	99,024
	<u>99,780</u>	<u>99,024</u>

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## **Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry**

Notes to the financial statements

*(In Belize Dollars)*

### **16. Commitments and contingencies**

The Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry signed a Technical Cooperation Agreement with the Inter-American Development Bank in October 2017 for a project entitled, Pro-adapt Belize-Increasing Climate Change. Chamber is to manage project funding in the sum of US \$203,000.00. The Chamber provided counterpart funding of US \$138,000.00 for this project. The duration is for three years.

On 12 October 2017, Belize Chamber of Commerce was appointed by Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) as Executing Agency for the private sector focused project, Pro-adapt Belize – Increasing Climate Change Resilience and Related Business Opportunities. The Chamber received in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 funding of \$100,400 (US\$50,200), \$71,400 (US\$35,700), \$108,952.92 (US\$54,475.96) and \$95,064 (US\$47,532) respectively, for the project. At 31 December 2022, nil (2020 - nil) remained undisbursed. IDB funds disbursed in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 have been included in the audit of these financial statements. IDB project concluded in 2021.

### **17. Post reporting date events**

No adjusting or significant non-adjusting events have occurred between the 31 December 2022 reporting date and the date of authorization for issuance.

**MINUTES OF THE  
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM)  
of the  
BELIZE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY (BCCI)  
April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
at the Best Western Belize Biltmore Plaza**

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**1.0 Call to Order**

The meeting was chaired by Councilor, Ambassador Daniel Gutierrez, and commenced at 5:55 p.m. with the singing of the national anthem by Mr. Leslie Jenkins which was followed with a prayer by Rt. Rev Philip Wright, Bishop of the Anglican Church of Belize.

**2.0 Welcome**

Mr. Jody Williams – Councillor gave the welcome address.

**3.0 Presentation by Nominees**

The ten nominees each gave a short two-minute presentation about themselves and why they should be voted in as Councilors. The voting was done online and started at 1:00 p.m. and closed at 7:30 p.m.

**4.0 Video Presentation**

A video presentation was shown to members on the Year in Review – 2021.

**5.0 Introduction of Guest Speaker**

The Guest Speaker, Mr. Guillermo Foscarini – IDB Investment Management – Principal Officer – Agri Businesses & Food, was introduced by the Master of Ceremonies, Ambassador Daniel Gutierrez.

**6.0 Presentation by Guest Speaker**

Mr. Guillermo Foscarini did a Power Point presentation on the topic “*Helping Private Sector predict, prepare for, and cope with international price shocks on food and logistics.*” This was shared with members on the big screen. (For a copy of this presentation please [click here.](#))

**7.0 Opening of Business Session**

The business session was opened by the CEO – Mrs. Kim Aikman.

## **8.0 Review and Confirmation of Minutes**

Mrs. Kim Aikman reviewed the minutes of the 2021 AGM. The minutes were confirmed upon a motion by Mrs. Claudette El Ters and seconded by Mr. Arturo Vasquez.

## **9.0 President's Report**

Members, it is my pleasure to address you on the occasion of our 102<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting.

When you entrusted me with the role of President in July 2020, we were about four months into life with pandemic regulations, facing the unknown, but optimistic about the lighter restrictions at that moment compared to what existed a few months earlier in March 2020. None of us could have truly predicted the scale and impact COVID-19 would have on our lives and businesses. The BCCI as an organization would have to face that impact head on. It is during times like the last two years that leadership and teamwork is truly tested. Thanks be to God that, in more ways than one, the BCCI has continued to strive and thrive through it all. Despite being restricted to online meetings for much of the time as a team, and despite the personal and professional issues that each Executive Council member dealt with outside of Chamber responsibilities, our own challenges had the effect of sharpening our focus on you, our members, as well as the wider business community who are undoubtedly going through similar, if not more difficult, circumstances. We soon understood the potential and real impacts of the pandemic all around but resolved that the BCCI would need to hold steady and stable. In fact, we became even more aggressive in our approach to ensure that we could continue to serve the business community at the highest standard and in the most efficient way.

To ensure sustainability, we have put our assets to work with the leasing of the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor at Coney Drive and dedication of those lease proceeds to the previously out-of-pocket mortgage. The amazing staff of the Secretariat have graciously accepted the 'cozier accommodations' on the ground floor. We also gained the Trustees' approval to sell one of three lots in downtown Belize City, and with those proceeds along with a recently negotiated 0.5% reduction in our mortgage rate, we are on a new timeline to discharge that debt in the next two years, leaving us with room to consider new investments to meet new needs.

When it came to focusing on our members, we aggressively offered discounts and payment plans to fit various budgets. We converted our physical Expo to the new concept of Expo2You broadcasted on the radio and television through our partnership with Love FM. We kept the Business Perspective Show running with guests from home and abroad appearing using Skype, bringing relevant information and context to the hot topic matters being dealt with in Belize. The Vice Presidents held several sectoral meetings, and we ramped up our use of surveys, virtual informational mixers and consultations to stay connected. We also revamped our weekly email newsletter, all in an effort to keep you informed and engaged. Flyers which summarized the constantly changing COVID-19 regulations were created to assist businesses with less reading and interpreting of complex statutory instruments, allowing more time for the task of pivoting to adjust to those changes.

Based on data showing the steadily climbing numbers of members joining the BCCI, the evidence shows that, not only our existing members, but other businesses that were not previously members see the value and relevance of this Chamber. In fact, we were recently recognized by the Caribbean Employers Confederation as one of only two member employers' organizations in the region that have experienced growth in membership over the last year. Before I go into more detail on the great impact that some of these actions and more have had on the business community as well as the community at large, please join me in congratulating this team, including our former Vice President of Industry Allen Reimer who served for a part of the term with us, for so effectively steering this ship through the squalls, sometimes with no compass to rely on. Your Executive Council took its responsibilities seriously; we bucked heads, brainstormed, discussed issues exhaustively, and put our best foot forward.

Staff morale and ability to cope with the increased cost of living also needed to be addressed. We were able to authorize a small (but we hope helpful) staff salary increase, the first in more than a decade. Rather than reduce a staff pool that already needed more personnel, we determined the priority area for capacity building and expanded only there. Research-driven advocacy was that priority, especially with the rapidly changing legislative and policy environment, so we expanded our Governance and Trade Division, allowing us to produce even more research and publications that have informed our lobbying on issues ranging from public health to bilateral trade agreements to labour matters. The standard of the research products being generated from that division is truly worth special recognition, and those works are valuable contributions to national intellectual discourse.

Our Membership and Public Relations representatives poured their hearts into several initiatives, including the Nurses Give Back Programme, coordinated by Vice President Katherine Meighan, which resulted in contributions of cash and kind from 42 businesses at a value of BZ\$30,000.00. Nationwide distribution was done district by district, much to the delight of our team who had the privilege of presenting the packages directly to dozens of nurses. It is absolutely due to the staff of the Secretariat that the Executive Council is able to maximize the impact of each two-year term. On behalf of the Executive Council and the members, I express sincere gratitude to the entire staff, ably led by CEO Mrs. Kim Aikman.

Special mention should be made about the solid partnerships and investments, which boosted our ability to meet our goals. The partnership with and investment in Western Union was a saving grace for the BCCI, especially during the pandemic. In difficult financial times, remittances to Belize spiked, which qualified us to receive a substantial bonus from Western Union. That alleviated the pressure of potential financial instability so we could focus on other activities to serve members, to explore new business ideas and to expand our reach on national issues.

Turning to partnerships with the Government, our input has been sought and welcomed on several committees and commissions so that we have a voice at the table, including the Social Partnership Advisory Committee, the National Trade Negotiating Commission, the Minimum Wage Task Force, the Essential Services Tribunal and several others adding up to 50+

external commitments to various committees. A part of our ability to lobby effectively is first to be at the table to listen, to bring the realities of the business community into the conversation and to insist on transparency and accountability. In some cases, our commitment to that cause exposes us to legal risk, but that makes our reason for being there no less valiant or brave. We should not be deterred from participating in these processes. Additionally, we have held audience with members of the Government on several occasions to give input on several issues such as trade license reform, COVID-19 response and recovery, fuel and freight costs, and much more. We have seen some of our recommendations come to fruition, though it must be said that for some that do not come to fruition, the rationale and logic for not taking those recommendations with obvious widespread detriment is concerning at a time when actual necessity ought to supersede political gains. We remain committed to our role as a stakeholder, as a partner and also, importantly, as a watchdog.

The relationship with social partners and how it deepens in the future, particularly on issues of good governance, will continue to be guided by the Joint Declaration signed in September 2020. Additionally, the NTUCB and BCCI have cooperated extensively with each other through a technical working group on the occupational safety and health legislation and we are extremely close to coming to a consensus on the provisions. We are also in agreement as it relates to the need to comprehensively review the outdated Labour Act through the tripartite mechanism, which the Government has also endorsed, as well as to have a clear path ahead with all considerations fully on the table through the Task Force for minimum wage increase. We know that there may never be full agreement on every issue between employers and employees but, where we can align our efforts, it is powerful and effective to seize those opportunities.

As I wrap up this report on the last year and the 2-year term of this Executive Council, please indulge me for a moment to touch on some personal thoughts. I am hesitantly proud to wear the 'Pandemic President' title. The successes outlined in these remarks and otherwise manifested in our records outperformed the stable and steady baseline. It is my sincere hope that the contributions during this time continue to bear fruit for many years to come, which is what the continuity of the Executive Council succession provides for. I am a true convert now, due to this Chamber, having decided to start my law practice at the start of 2021. I instantly became better able to relate to business owners, who really are red tape fighting, tax assessment challenging, budget readjusting super-heroes. It is an intense daily battle sometimes with more resistance than progress, which is why I am so grateful for the nourishment from my support system which includes my beloved family and friends, and God at the pinnacle of that system.

Members, here we are once again in an election year where we will usher in a newly constituted Executive Council to take on whatever challenges come in the next two years, which we are cautiously optimistic will be closer to normal than the past two years have been. Once again, though, we have shown the strength of the BCCI's foundation. At the 100<sup>th</sup> AGM in 2020 where I made my acceptance speech as President, I said: *"What is significant is the fact that the Chamber was born in the year of the last 'once in a century' pandemic of epic proportions, the Spanish Flu... we were BUILT FOR THIS. Though the*

*exact circumstances are different, the crisis-ready abilities are on repeat: rescue, recovery, relief... re-evaluate, innovate, create.*” And so we have done and continue to do. If not for the Chamber, who would collectively fight these fights with such alacrity and dedication of resources on behalf of the business community?

I will end with a quote from our Guest Speaker at that very 100<sup>th</sup> AGM, Prime Minister Mia Mottley of Barbados, who said in her address, *“If there is one thing that 2020 is teaching us, it is that history matters. Institutions and their maturity matter. But not so much that they cannot and should not continually revisit their origins, their mandate and those whom they serve, and ensure that they reflect the values and aspirations of an evolving nation.”* If there is one thing that we have PROVEN as a Chamber over the last two years of this pandemic, it is that institutional maturity indeed hinges on the recognition of a need to constantly re-evaluate the old and to introduce change where necessary to adapt and grow. We remain committed to that approach and look forward to reporting on our future successes.

Thank you!

#### **10.0 Presentation and Adoption of the 2019 Financial Statements**

The Treasurer – Mr. Giacomo Sanchez presented the financials. A motion was made to adopt the Financials by Mr. Michael Young and seconded by Dr. Sylvia Cattouse.

#### **11.0 Resolution to Re-appoint Auditors for 2022/2024**

A resolution was passed to reappoint BDO BELIZE LLP as the BCCI's auditors for the fiscal year 2020/2021. The motion was adopted by Dr. Sharmayne Saunders and seconded by Ms. Karen Diaz.

#### **12.0 New President's Address**

Fellow Members,

Today, the 28th of April 2022 marks a momentous occasion that started over 10 decades ago. It is not only about parties and politics, rules or regulations, markets, or currencies. It is ultimately – and above all else – about the business community and our aspirations. It is about our business community standing together. For our liberty, for our values, simply for the betterment of our future.

There is one quote from the great Václav Havel – former president of the Czech Republic – that stands out for me when I look ahead to the future. He said:

*“Work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed.”*

I chose this quote, because over the next two years, our membership will continue the pace that was set by many past presidents including, Mr. Tux Vasquez, Mr. Emil Mena, Ms. Kay Menzies, Mr. Nikita Usher, and I definitely can't forget our, as she puts it, *“Pandemic President-Marissa Longworth”* together on the continued transformation for

our business community. And we will do it because it is the right thing to do. Not because it will be easy.

Having served the Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry for a little under a decade on the Executive Council and an additional three years prior on several sub committees including the Tripartite Body and Labor Advisory Board Sub Committee, the time has finally come for me to step up and take on the leadership of this 102-year-old organization.

Over those 102 years and in the most recent decade we have been able to setup corporate headquarters at Coney Drive, sign on to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), participate in the Economic Development Council (EDC) formation and continue to push for tax reform.

Having more than two decades in commerce experiencing the challenges of the day from BAHA and BBS to customs, to overnight changes in licensing requirements, I have fought to keep our voices heard not only as the private sector but as your commerce representative.

As president my focus now widens. With my consultancy firm starting back in 2017, I've had the opportunity to appreciate the challenges of micro and small business in the services sector from registration to setting up a bank account to registering for taxes and trying to access financing. Hurdles that the majority of our MSME members face.

And it has been a great learning opportunity to work with my colleagues from industry and to see the great strides they have made as well as the challenges they face, particularly as we begin to work harder on development of export markets for our products.

To this end -overcoming the hurdles and the challenges- great focus must be placed on enhancing the enabling environment required for the private sector to foster Belize's economic growth. Three major challenges that require addressing include access to and the cost of financing, lack of access to the kind of training and education that encourages an entrepreneurial culture and corruption within regulatory and government agencies.

In the 2020 Ease of Doing Business Report, Belize ranked 173 of 190 economies with a score of 20 out of 100. While the strength of legal rights scored 4 out of 12 all other areas including depth of credit information index, credit registry coverage and credit bureau coverage all scored zeros. It's not that strides have not been taken, the Government through the Central Bank has worked on and produced a Credit Bureau Bill and a Collateral Registry framework. We call on the Government of Belize to enact the bill and place the framework into practical use to allow MSMEs the access to finance that can be fostered through these two initiatives.



Far too long has the focus on an entrepreneurial culture been ignored, **however** I am elated to see that in the most recent publication of the Belize Education Sector Plan 2021-2025,

Strategic response to Key Result Area (KRA) 2.1 Curriculum Reform: Learning What Matters, as an action point from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology and I quote *“Ensure that subjects which promote entrepreneurship are integrated into the national curriculum at all levels”*.

On our end as the employers’ organization, we can help to further foster this development through an incubator system for young entrepreneurs to help startup businesses grow and succeed by providing free or low-cost workspace, mentorship, expertise, and access to investors. A tall order that can only be achieved through your individual and collective assistance to make this incubator a reality. Giving of yourself and your company is not always financial but in kind.

Furthermore, Belize signed on to UNCAC in 2016, fast forward six years and we are moving at a snail’s pace to ensure full and fair enforcement of the laws that were strengthened or introduced to combat corruption. Another avenue for support can be gotten from the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), an agreement signed in March of this year between the Government of Belize and MCC. MCC’s model of reducing poverty through economic growth is based on a set of core principles — good governance, country ownership, a focus on results, and transparency — and fighting corruption is a key part of that approach. MCC promotes measures to prevent and detect fraud and corruption before they occur, and to responsibly address any problems after they emerge. So, access to the resources is not the problem, political will is.

Therefore, your Chamber remains committed to championing the need for predictability and a level playing field for all businesses. We continue to champion recent issues such as freight and fuel stability, trade license reform, determination of an appropriate FoPL scheme and as always comprehensive tax reform.

As I close, I must firmly mention that it is never enough to identify the problems: we must also determine the actions needed to solve them, and then carry out those actions *together*. I pledge my commitment -and I ask each and every one of you to join me in doing so- to working with the government, social partners and unions to develop a true partnership to bring back Belize and put Belize on the right path for success. As we know, the only way to take Belize down that path of success is from the 102 years of advocacy! **We must not forget that our greatest achievements will only be realized when we are bold. I Thank You!**

### **13.0 Presentation of New Board**

A new Executive Council was elected. They are as follows:

President - Marcello Blake

Past President	-	Marissa Longsworth
V.P. Commerce	-	Vacant
V.P. Industry	-	William Usher
V.P. Services	-	Katherine Meighan
Secretary	-	Ashanti Martin
Treasurer	-	Giacomo Sanchez
Councillor	-	William A. Neal
Councillor	-	Jody Williams
Councillor	-	Allan Sharp
Councillor	-	Marnix Perez
Councillor	-	Noriko Gamero

#### 14.0 Presentation of Awards & Gifts

The CEO presented the Secretariat's Award to Mr. Jody Williams and Ms. Katherine Meighan. A gift was presented to the President – Ms. Marissa Longsworth by the CEO, to the members of the EC and lastly a gift was presented to the Guest Speaker.

#### 15.0 Thank You

The official thank you and invitation to the Social was given by Ambassador Daniel Gutierrez – Councillor.

Approved by:

  
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*Mrs. Ashanti Arthurs-Martin - Secretary*

Prepared by:

  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
*Ms. Ruth Gillett – Senior Administrator*