



BELIZE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

4792 Coney Drive, 2nd Floor Withfield Tower, P.O. Box 291 , Belize City, Belize, Central America



President's Speech

With protocol already established let me start by thanking and recognizing the tremendous efforts everyone has made to be part of and participate in the 2018 edition of Expo Belize Market Place. Your presence alone means a lot to us, especially to the Secretariat and the Executive Council of the Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

The BCCI is proud to be the lead organizer of these annual events where producers, manufacturers, vendors and suppliers can meet current and prospective customers in a two-day act of fun, entertainment, and business deals. If you were looking for a deal, I can assure you that this is the place, and this is the weekend. As we move around the different booths, exploring and discovering specials, promotions, and give-aways, we encourage you to be vigilant of things happening around you. The BCCI has gone to great lengths to ensure your security, but your individual awareness will contribute greatly towards the safety and security of everyone.

Today I welcome the opportunity to share with you, and with all those who are listening to us by radio or joining us through their television sets, or watching us via streaming internet channels. We are glad that you are tuning in.

At this time, I would like to ask for something, perhaps never before asked or done during an Expo event like this. I would like to ask all of you to kindly stand; I would like to ask all music here at the Expo to be paused; I would like to ask all those moving around to stay still for a brief moment. I would like us all to

maintain a minute of silence and stillness in remembrance of those precious souls and victims lost to the merciless wave of crime and criminals across Belize. We want to let all suffering families know that we feel their pain too, we share their loss, and we understand the urgency of uniting resolutely now to restore peace and tranquility in our streets once again.

Every assault, every robbery, every rape, every kidnap, every murder, every home invasion, every hold-up, every stab, every chop, and every criminal that goes free... destroys our way of life; destroys our confidence in a system that's wobbling under the weight and curse of its own corruption.

Start 1-minute watch.

Thank you. Two years ago, we started an initiative to get the government to accede to become a state party to the UN Convention against Corruption, referred to as UNCAC. The official resistance encountered was not a surprise, but the public pressure was such that on December 9, 2016 the Government of Belize formally signed the documents to become a state party to the UNCAC. We always knew that this was the first step in a long and arduous journey to develop the tools to combat the scourge of corruption in government and in both private and public sectors.

It was our hope that government would not require pressure from civil society and the public at large to appreciate how urgent it is to proceed rapidly towards the full implementation of this anti-corruption framework. It was also our hope to avert its violent manifestation in our streets and alleys, in towns and villages, in our homes and businesses, in our schools and churches, in our courts of justice and centres of power - but corruption and the corrupt keep taunting us, and they keep getting stronger and bolder every day.

Corruption and the corrupt are like a thick dark cloud spreading across the sky. They are the deep shadows of night overcoming the last rays of light. It is frightening. It is painful. It is frustrating. However, more than anything it is utterly unacceptable.

- The rising tide of crime against our vulnerable society is unacceptable.
- The coordinated attacks on businesses and entrepreneurs are unacceptable.
- The usual justification of shameless acts of corruption in government and the public sector is unacceptable.
- The inability to arrest, judge, and convict elected and street criminals is unacceptable.
- The betrayal of honour, decorum and patriotism in Parliament is unacceptable

- The loss of our traditional sense of peace and security is unacceptable
- The trivializing of matters of great financial significance in parliament is unacceptable
- The inability or unwillingness to address the inequities in our tax system is unacceptable
- The official statistics and communications that crime is down are unacceptable.

I could go on and on listing many other unacceptable actions, conditions, and events, but my sense is that perhaps that too would be unacceptable in this heat.

I say all this not merely because I wish to add one more voice to the thousands already critical of those whose failures, and lies, and incompetence, need to be pushed back like tyrants, and despots, but because this miasma of corruption pervading our shores is choking the arteries of the private sector.

A vibrant private sector transforms the socio-economic landscape of a nation through capital investments, job creation, and the efficient production and supply of goods and services. Driven by individuals whose entrepreneurial spirit and creativity harness the financial, economic, and social infrastructure of society, the private sector is the engine of growth, development and progress.

It is the private sector's hard work reflected in the Gross Domestic Product numbers published by the Statistical Institute of Belize. The most recent GDP figures published by the SIB shows that GDP grew 3.4% in the first half of 2018 when compared against the same period of 2017. It shows that in the second quarter, economic activity in all three sectors were up when compared with the same period in 2017.

- The report shows growth for major industries in the primary sector – sugar, bananas, and livestock, and declines in Citrus and Marine production.
- In the secondary sector, growth took place in Electricity, Water, Construction, and Beverage Manufacturing, with Citrus Concentrate showing a decline of 36%.
- The growth in the tertiary or tourism & services sector, which accounts for more than half of GDP, was 3.8%. Both cruise and overnight tourism keeps growing as more and more visitors come to our shores.

The past twenty years has seen the tertiary sector – tourism and services - grow to account for more than 50% of our annual GDP. This transformation has been possible because we have managed to leverage our natural beauty and heritage, our culture of peace, our stable political traditions, and relative safety and security across the land. Private sector investment and confidence has also been a key enabling factor for the growth trend over the years.

However, we find ourselves in a sort of perilous position.

All the things we listed as unacceptable along with those we all know but did not say, are unacceptable not only because they bring so much pain, suffering and despair to our families, but because it also places Belize into a category of high-risk destinations for tourists to visit, and investors to invest. The gross corruption of officials in positions of power, the shocking toll of organized crime in our streets and homes have the potential to not only destroy our traditional sense of security, but also the vitality of more than 50% of our economy.

That is why it is so important that we join ranks and demand from parliamentary leaders the urgent implementation and enforcement of the laws and measures making up the anti-corruption framework of the UNCAC. That is why we must hold our elected leaders individually accountable and answerable for shamefully squandering our precious financial resources and impoverishing our people. That is why it is so important to take immediate and forceful action against all forms of crimes and criminals.

The Expo Belize Market Place is a good example of what our sweet Belize can be if only we manage to get the right leaders in the right places doing the right things. The Expo Belize Market Place is a good model for how business ought to be - a secure place where businesses and consumers can come together and freely transact. I am encouraged by what I see here today, and I am confident that we will find the strength in us to rise as one people – as sons and daughters of the Baymen’s clan – to drive back the despots, and to make them flee.

Belize must always be that ‘land of the free by the Carib Sea’.

God Bless!