

ANNUAL TECHNICAL REPORT 2023-2024



MINISTRY OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS
AND
FOREIGN TRADE

GOVERNMENT OF BELIZE

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Message from the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade



Hon. Francis Fonseca
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade

Over the 2023- 2024 period, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade (MFA&FT) has had to navigate an increasingly turbulent and divided world.

Around us multidimensional crises engulfed Haiti, geopolitical tensions reached new peaks and a brutal war erupted in Gaza. Amid conflicts, the climate crisis worsened – almost all climate records were broken in 2023. And the economic recovery anticipated in this post pandemic period appeared to sputter.

In this challenging context, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade maintained its resolve to pursue new trade opportunities for Belize, to seek multilateral solutions to common challenges and to project Belize’s principled, independent, and pragmatic foreign policy.

This technical report highlights several of the Ministry’s achievements over the past year.

Belize continued its effort to expand its diplomatic network by establishing diplomatic relations with the: Republic of Benin, Cape Verde, the Republic of Gambia, the Solomon Islands and the Republic of Uzbekistan.

During the first semester of 2023, Belize served as the President Pro Tempore of the Central American Integration System (SICA). While advancing the regional agenda, Belize also sought to reinvigorate Caribbean and Central American relations by convening the Ministers of Trade of both regions to discuss ways to enhance trade and commerce between them.

Notably, 2023 marked the 50th anniversary of CARICOM, the oldest integration movement of developing countries. Belize continues to work closely with other CARICOM Member States to

perfect the CARICOM Single Market for the benefit of all CARICOM nationals. The situation in Haiti preoccupied CARICOM in the past year. CARICOM deployed an Eminent Persons Group to facilitate political dialogue and lobbied for international security assistance to support the restoration of security and stability in Haiti. Supporting Haitians to design and implement a Haitian owned and Haitian led solution to their domestic challenges will remain a top priority for Belize and CARICOM in the year ahead.

I am pleased to share that trade has rebounded to pre-pandemic levels in 2022, reaching \$487 million BZD in exports, notably driven by increased market penetration of sugar, maize, lobster, and conch. In this vein, negotiations for a Partial Scope Agreement between Belize and El Salvador commenced in 2023, with the second-round scheduled for April this year.

Furthermore, in 2023 we inaugurated the International Cooperation Council (ICC). The ICC is a forum for inter-ministerial discussions aimed at optimizing the uptake of development assistance, aligning international partnerships with Belize's Medium-Term Development Strategy, and identifying areas of synergy.

Very importantly, in December 2023 we established a new diplomatic mission in Georgetown, Co-operative Republic of Guyana which is a concrete manifestation of Belize's intention to bolster its presence in South America. This historic move augurs well for Belize's foreign relations within the hemisphere.

In January 2024, Belize presented its fourth National Report under the Universal Periodic Review, which outlined to the international community government's efforts to promote and protect human rights in Belize.

And finally, with respect to the Belize - Guatemala and the Belize - Honduras cases before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), both are proceeding according to the time limits set by the Court. We look forward to the final ruling of the Court.

The MFA&FT is proud of its contribution to Belize's development.

I want to thank the staff of the MFA&FT at home and overseas for their hard work and commitment to Belize.

I want to acknowledge the sterling leadership of my predecessor Senator Eamon Courtenay who served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Immigration (MFA&FT&I) between 2020 - 2023.

Hon. Francis Fonseca
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade

Abbreviations

AMEXCID	Mexican Agency for International Development
AOSIS	Alliance of Small Island States
APEC	Atlantic Partnership for Economic Cooperation
AU	African Union
AZ	Adjacency Zone
BAHA	Belize Agricultural Health Authority
BARS	Belize Archives and Records Service
BATSUB	British Army Training Support Unit Belize
BBI	Build Belize Inc.
BBNJ	Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction
BBS	Belize Bureau of Standards
BCIP	Belize Country Implementation Plan
BDF	Belize Defence Force
BELTRAIDE	Belize Trade and Investment Development Service
BIE	The Bureau International des Exposition
BOT	British Overseas Territories
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
BSI	Belize Sugar Industry
BTB	Belize Tourism Board
CLE	Certificate of Legal Education
CAAP	Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Affairs
CABEI	Central American Bank for Economic Integration
CAMC	Central American Monetary Council

CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CBM	Confidence Building Measures
CCCCC	CARICOM Climate Change Centre
CCET	Cayo Centre for Employment and Training
CDB	Caribbean Development Bank
CED	Customs and Excise Department
CELAC	Community of Latin America and Caribbean States
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CESO	Canadian Executive Services Organization
CET	Common External Tariff
CF	Commonwealth Foundation
CGE	Computable General Equilibrium
CGLTF	Contact Group on Long Term Financing
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
CNN	Cable News Network
COFCOR	Council for Foreign and Community Relations
COMISCA	Council of Ministers of Health of Central America and the Dominican Republic
COP	Conference of the Parties
COP28	28th United Nations Climate Change Conference
CSME	CARICOM Single Market and Economy
CSO	Civil Society organizations
CSTD	Commission on Science and Technology for Development
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
CTMM	Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting
DAA	Deputy Assistant Administrator

DAOC.....	Diplomatic Academy of the Caribbean
DCGE	Dynamic Computational General Equilibrium
DEPM	Mesoamerican Integration and Development Project
DGFT	Directorate General for Foreign Trade
DOD	US Department of Defence
ECA	Economic Partnership Agreement
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EDCF	Korean Economic Development Co-operation Fund
EDF	European Development Fund
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreement
e-PICS	Electronic Passport Issuance and Control System
ESW.....	Electronic Single Window
EU	European Union
EU-CELAC	European Union - Community of Latin America and the Caribbean
EXIM	Export-Import
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FNS	Food and Nutrition Security
FOPNL	Front of Package Nutrition Label
GC	General Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFP	Global Financial Pact
GGIA	Global Gateway Investment Agenda
GHG	Greenhouse Gases

GISU	Geographic Information System Unit
GOB	Government of Belize
HAC	High Ambition Coalition
HC	High Commissioner
HCB	The High Commission of Belize
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
HRC	Human Rights Council
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IBU.....	International Boundaries Unit
ICC	International Cooperation Council
ICDF	International Cooperation and Development Fund
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICRT	International Community Radio Taipei
ICT	Information Communications Technology
IDA	International Development Association
IDB.....	Inter-American Development Bank
IFD	Investment Facilitation for Development
INEGI	National Institute of Statistics and Geography
INFF	Integrated National Financing Framework
INIFAP	National Institute of Forestry, Agriculture and Livestock Research
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISWG	Intersessional Working Group
ITF	Inter-agency Task Force
JDD	Joint Design Document
JIIFDA	Joint Initiative for the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement

JOB	Judiciary of Belize
JPA	Joint Parliamentary Assembly
KOICA	Korea International Cooperation Agency
LAC	Latin America and Caribbean
MAIP	Multi-Annual Indicative Programme
MBS	His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman
MC13	13th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
MEPC	Marine Environment Protection Committee
MFA&FT.....	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade
MFAFT&I	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, and Immigration
MHDFIPA	Ministry of Human Development Families and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs
MIRPS	Regional Integrated Framework for Protection and Solutions of Migrants
MLA	Maya Leaders Alliance
MMS	Monitoring Mechanism for Sugar
Mn	million
MNDBS	Ministry of National Defence and Border Security
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
MOAFSE	Ministry of Agriculture Food Security, and Enterprise
MOC	Members of Congress
MOE	Ministry of Economic Development
MOECST	Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology
MOED	Ministry of Economic Development
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOHANGI	Minister of Home Affairs and New Growth Industries

MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	Member of Parliament
MSDCC	Ministry of Sustainable Development and Climate Change
MSS	Multinational Security Support
MVI	Multi-vulnerability Index
MWP	Mitigation Work Programme
NCDs	Non-communicable Diseases
NCM	Non-Conforming Measures
NCTF	National Committee on Trade Facilitation
NDB	New Development Bank
NDC.....	Nationally Determined Contributions
NEMO	National Emergency Management Organization
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
NSS	National Statistical System
NTNC	National Trade Negotiating Commission
NTP	National Trade Policy
NWFZ	Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones
OACPS	Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States
OAS	Organization of American States
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights
OTA	Office of the Agent
OPANAL.....	Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean
OZA	Adjacency Zone
PFII	Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
PM	Prime Minister

POA	Plan of Action
PPT	Presidency Pro-tempore
PSA	Partial Scope Agreement
RLC	Regional Language Centre
ROC	Republic of China
ROK	Republic of Korea
RTC	Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas
RTI	Radio Taiwan International
SADER	Secretariat of Agriculture and Rural Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SFCICP	Strengthening the Framework of CARICOM Integration and Cooperation Process
SIB	Statistical Institute of Belize
SICA	Central American Integration System
SICA-SG	General Secretariat of the Central American Integration System
SIDS	Small Island and Low-Lying Developing States
SIECA	Secretariat for Economic Integration of Central America
SIP	Interconnected System of Payments
SOFF	Systematic Observing Financing Facility
SPA	Special Presidential Advisor
SPS	Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary
SSC	South-South Cooperation
STIAC	Science, Technology, and Innovation Advisory Committee
TCGA	Toledo Cacao Growers Association
TE	Trade Economists
TFA	Trade Facilitation Agreement

TFIR	Trade Facilitation Implementation Roadmap
TFP	Task Force on Payments
TRS	Time Release Study
UAE.....	United Arab Emirates
UB	University of Belize
UK	United Kingdom
UKCIF	United Kingdom Caribbean Infrastructure Fund
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECLAC	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFF	UN Forum on Forests
UN-GOB	United Nations-Government of Belize
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
UNSC	UN Security Council
US/USA	United States of America
USAID	US Agency for International Development
USCCC	US Chamber of Commerce Chapter
WD	Western Dairies Limited
WTO	World Trade Organization

A - Introduction: A salute to the past while looking forward with optimism

This comprehensive technical report highlights the achievements of the MFA&FT from April 1, 2023-March 31, 2024, which align closely with the objectives outlined in #planBelize 2020-2025. Further, it is a tangible manifestation of the Hon. John Briceño administration's commitment to transparency and accountability.

Very importantly, Belize's foreign policy is principled, pragmatic and focused on advancing national objectives including *inter alia*: sustainable economic and social development, human and national security, trade and tourism, environmental sustainability, and the preservation of our sovereignty and territorial integrity. Central to this is the proactive promotion and protection of these interests across national, bilateral, regional, and multilateral fora. Admittedly, this foreign policy is distinctly Belizean and aimed at building a resilient Belize.

Invariably the international system in which Belize conducts its international relations is highly complex and can be accurately characterized as being in flux at this juncture. The liberal democratic order is on the defensive with its institutions and organizations experiencing an onslaught of internal and external challenges; accompanied by a wilful diminution of respect for the rules-based system of international governance.

Situations like the: Russia-Ukraine War, which recently marked its second anniversary; Israel-Hamas War which commenced in October 2023; several intrastate conflicts across the continent of Africa; and simmering tensions throughout the Middle East; and South China Sea, augment this concern.

In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) there is: tension between the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Co-operative Republic of Guyana; political and security situations in the Republic of Nicaragua; as well as the Republic of Ecuador; and political upheaval in Haiti, among others. Additionally, the Central American Integration System's (SICA) progress remains challenged due to not having a Secretary General.

In Africa, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has witnessed the withdrawal of three (3) of its fifteen (15) members due to the interruption of the democratic order in said countries.

At the multilateral level, the United Nations system, particularly the UN Security Council (UNSC), has come under increased scrutiny due to the use of the veto power by permanent members which renders it ineffective in dealing with breaches of international peace and security. Similarly, the international financial architecture is in desperate need of reform to ensure that it supports states in achieving their development and climate goals.

On a positive note, however, the 15th BRICS Summit (August 2023) saw the grouping morph into BRICS 11 which accounts for 46% of the world's population and 37% of the global GDP (in terms

of PPP). In particular, the New Development Bank (seeded with US \$50 billion) to fund infrastructure and sustainability projects in emerging markets can potentially have a transformative impact on the global south if it translates into greater access to development financing and attainment of the sustainable development goals (SDG).

In addition to the context, when one adds the emergency that is climate change to the backdrop one gets a true sense of the magnitude of the challenges that Belize faces as a small developing state in the international system. This underscores the need for us to have a commensurate array of adaptive and comprehensive foreign policy approaches, which are intelligence led, to adroitly navigate in such an environment.

Finally, the year in review also saw a change in leadership of the MFA&FT. We therefore salute the sterling stewardship of the Foreign Ministry by the Hon. Eamon Courtenay over the past three (3) years; and by the same token we welcome the Hon. Francis Fonseca as we embark on a new and exciting chapter of diplomatic endeavours.

In short, the accomplishments and administrative concerns of the MFA&FT are categorized into key areas, namely: A) introduction, B) strengthening and expanding relations with bilateral partners, C) territorial disputes, D) regional engagements, E) multilateral engagements, F) international cooperation, G) human rights, H) main achievements of Belize's diplomatic missions, I) protocol and consular department, J) foreign trade, K) institutional strengthening and trainings, L) lessons learnt/challenges, M) staffing, organization, and financial considerations, and N) future priorities/looking forward.

Vision, Mission Statement, and Strategic Priorities

Vision

To enhance the quality of life of Belizeans through the proactive and effective promotion, protection, and coordination of Belize's interests in the bilateral, regional, and multilateral diplomatic spheres, as well as the provision of consular services.

Mission

To formulate, coordinate and implement foreign policy initiatives, addressing national economic, social, and security issues, while ensuring the preservation of Belize's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Strategic Priorities

1. Pursue trade, investment, tourism, scientific, academic and cultural opportunities for Belizeans.
2. Strengthen and consolidate the Ministry by reviewing its structures and institutions, and further professionalizing its human resources.
3. Foster integration with CARICOM, SICA, and other regional partners.
4. Seek and coordinate the signing and implementation of trade agreements by the World Trade Organization (WTO); and,
5. Increase cooperation with traditional and non-traditional development partners.

B - Strengthening and Expanding Relations with Bilateral Partners

In an age of global interconnectedness, MFA&FT recognizes the need to cultivate and strengthen connections with bilateral partners for mutual growth and prosperity. In 2023-2024, the Ministry hosted its annual Diplomatic Week, which was well attended by resident Ambassadors and non-resident Ambassadors. Several bilateral meetings were held in-country. On the other hand, the EU-CELAC Summit, which took place in Brussels, brought together Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), and the European Union (EU) to strengthen ties and discuss: global peace and security, climate change and sustainable development, trade and investment, diversity, justice and citizen security, and health resilience.

Prime Minister and Foreign Minister attend inauguration of Guatemalan President



Foreign Minister (FM) Fonseca's first official assignment was to attend the inauguration of incoming President of the Republic of Guatemala, H.E. César Bernardo Arévalo, on January 13, 2024. Alongside Prime Minister of Belize, Hon. John Briceño, they held various bilateral meetings.

Presentation of Credentials 2024



In February 2024, FM Fonseca accepted letters of credence from H.E. Mr. Shozab Abbas, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to Belize. They engaged in constructive dialogue focused on strengthening bilateral relations and sharing perspectives on Pakistan's recent election.



FM Fonseca received a copy of credence letters from H.E. Santiago De Wit Guzman of the Holy See. Their cordial discussions included: Catholic Church ties, Belize-Guatemala relations, and CARICOM's stance on Haiti. They reiterated their commitment to further collaboration. (February 2024)



FM Fonseca was honoured to receive a copy of letters of credence from H.E. Manuel Cansado Carvalho, non-resident Ambassador of Portugal to Belize. They discussed strengthening bilateral relations, trade, investment, tourism, and Portugal’s support for Belize’s Schengen visa waiver campaign. (February 2024)



In March 2024, Belize received the Russian Federation’s new non-resident Ambassador to Belize, H.E. Nicolay Sofinskiy, who presented copies of his letters of credence to FM Fonseca. Thereafter, they discussed opportunities in: tourism, trade, and investment, as well as cooperation in education.

Establishment of new High Commission in Georgetown, Co-operative Republic of Guyana



In December 2023, H.E. Gale Miller-Garnett presented her credentials to Guyana’s President, H.E. Dr. Irfaan Ali, thereby becoming Belize’s first resident High Commissioner to Guyana. During discussions held with President Ali, he lauded Belize’s “forthright and strong principled stance” on the Venezuela-Guyana border controversy. Among others, they also spoke on collaboration in: agriculture, tourism, climate, and energy and food security.

Very importantly, this historic occasion marks Belize’s first diplomatic mission in South America and demonstrates its commitment to further strengthen relations with countries in the region.

Establishment of Diplomatic Relations with New Bilateral Partners

Establishing formal diplomatic relations between countries marks an important moment in international relations, embodying mutual understanding and thereafter leading to cooperation. Belize seeks diplomatic relations with like-minded countries that promote peace, facilitate trade, and address shared challenges. As of March 2024, the Government of Belize (GOB) has established formal diplomatic relations with a hundred and thirty-four (134) of the hundred and ninety three (193) member states of the United Nations (UN).

New Bilateral Partners 2023



Strengthening relations with the Republic of Benin.



Strengthening relations with Africa, Belize establishes diplomatic relations with the Republic of Gambia.



Strengthening relations Belize establishes diplomatic relations with the Solomon Islands.

New Bilateral Partners 2024



Belize formally established diplomatic relations with the Republic of Cabo Verde. A joint communique was signed between H.E. Mr. Carlos Fuller, PR of Belize, and H.E. Tania Romualdo, PR of Cabo Verde in New York.



An agreement was reached to activate interactions in searching for mutually beneficial directions of bilateral cooperation. Belize has become the 147th state with which Uzbekistan has established diplomatic relations.

Engagement with Existing Bilateral Partners – 2023/2024

Enhancing engagement with our existing bilateral partners remains crucial, especially in the dynamic landscape of 2023-2024. As countries confront diverse global challenges and seize emerging opportunities, our established bilateral relationships become indispensable, providing stability, fostering collaboration, and propelling mutual advancement. Therefore, this section will highlight an array of bilateral engagements the MFA&FT undertook during 2023-2024.

Belize and Ukraine



In February 2023, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), H.E. Amalia Mai met with H.E. Andriy Melnyk, Deputy Foreign Minister of Ukraine at the Leigh Richardson Building, Belmopan during his official visit to Belize. The main purpose of his visit was to convey President Zelenky's gratitude to the GOB for its continued support since the Russian invasion. CEO Mai took this opportunity to underscore the MFA&FT's interest in finalizing the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Political Consultations with Ukraine. H.E. Melnyk

expressed confidence that Belize and Ukraine would be able to identify areas of mutual interest to strengthen the relationship.

Belize and the Republic of Korea



A meeting between H.E. Mai and H.E. Choi Young Sam, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Political Affairs of the Republic of Korea, took place during April 2023. The purpose of the meeting was to assess the state of the renewed bilateral relations between both countries and to discuss potential areas of future engagement.

Belize and Korea share 37 years of diplomatic relations as of April 2024. Korea's development cooperation with Belize is generally executed through small-scale programmes in the fields of capacity building and education, Information Communications Technology (ICT) and disaster management/relief efforts.

The relationship was bolstered by key visits of high-level Korean delegations from the Office of the President following Hurricane Lisa; as well as the visit of Officials from the Vice President of the Export-Import (EXIM) Bank of Korea. Prime Minister (PM) Briceño also conducted several high-level engagements in Korea with Prime Minister, Hon. Han Duck- Soo in March 2023; as well as with President, H.E. Yoon Suk Yeol in August 2023. PM Briceño also met President, H.E. Yeol in the margins of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2023.

In March 2024, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) signed an arrangement with the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) to strengthen Belize’s national infrastructure and institutional capacity for data and statistical management. With a total project budget of US\$3.4 million, the “Enabling of Belize’s Statistical System” project, which is part of a larger Record of Discussion Arrangement with the GOB. The Grant Arrangement will be implemented from 2024 to 2027 and is a joint initiative involving six (6) Government ministries and five (5) United Nations (UN) agencies with coordination support from the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator.

The UN agencies engaging in joint implementation include the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the World Food Programme, the Project will work closely with the Government of Belize, specifically: the Statistical Institute of Belize (SIB) of the Ministry of Economic Development, the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security, and Enterprise, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, the Judiciary of Belize, and the Attorney General’s Ministry of Belize. In the following areas:

- Improve and upgrade Belize’s Statistical infrastructure;
- Strengthen the data governance architecture;
- Strengthen both SIB and its data nodes; and,
- Expand SIB’s and National Statistical System (NSS) capabilities to respond to increasing demand.

From November 2023 to March 2024, the Government of Korea also supported the Procurement of various ICT equipment for seven (7) government Ministries in support of Belize’s digital transformation agenda. These Ministries included the: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, The Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, The Ministry of Sustainable Development and Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management, the Attorney General’s Ministry, the Ministry of Human Development Families and Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs and the SIB.

Belize and the United Mexican States



Dr. Beatriz Gutierrez Muller, the Spouse of the President of Mexico, embarked on a tour to deliver equipment to the Caribbean under the project “Recovery of Historical Archives in Latin America and the Caribbean” making stops in: Belize, Jamaica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and the Dominican Republic. As a Mexican writer, academic and researcher, Dr. Beatriz Gutierrez

Muller donated a book scanner (model Bookeye 5v5 Professional autonomous planetary type, manufactured by Image Access) for the Belize Archives and Records Service (BARS) along with the

necessary technical training (in English) to operate the equipment. Said equipment arrived in a Mexican-registered aircraft belonging to the Secretariat of the Navy.

Belize and the United Kingdom (UK)



The Eleventh UK-Caribbean Ministerial Forum was held in Kingston, Jamaica, on May 18, 2023. The Governments of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) and the Caribbean States reaffirmed their commitment to the Forum as an important vehicle for dialogue, partnership, and cooperation, reflecting the special relationship that exists between the UK, Caribbean states and the British Overseas Territories (BOT).

From September 4-7, 2023, Member of Parliament (MP) David Rutley, Minister for the Americas and Caribbean at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) visited Belize. On the first day of his visit, he had a meeting with the then-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, and Immigration of Belize, Hon. Eamon Courtenay. Both Minister Courtenay and MP Rutley emphasized the shared history and values that underpin the bilateral relationship. MP Rutley thanked the GOB for upholding the rules-based system, particularly regarding its unflinching support of Ukraine; on that note, Belize was applauded for its demonstrable courage in multilateral fora. The meeting touched on numerous areas, including economic opportunities, climate financing, regional security, and travel, and ended with reaffirmed commitment to shared priorities.

While in Belize, MP Rutley also met with PM Briceño, British Army Training Support Unit Belize (BATSUB), past Chevening scholars who now work in climate change science, and to visit the new Coastal Highway (funded through a \$78 million USD partnership between the UK, CDB and GOB under the United Kingdom Caribbean Infrastructure Fund (UKCIF).

Belize and the United States of America (USA/US)

In September 2023, a high-profile US delegation, representing various US government agencies including the Office of the Vice President, US Agency for International Development (USAID) - US Agency for International Development, US Department of State, US Department of Defence (DOD), US Department of State, and Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration visited Belize. The delegation was led by Ms. Mileydi Guilarte - USAID Deputy Assistant Administrator (DAA) and Mr. Daniel Erickson of the DOD. The delegation met with various Ministers of



Government and discussed key areas of cooperation in border security and defence, regional migration and continued support to Belize's amnesty programme.

The GOB reciprocated with an official visit to Washington, D.C. by PM Briceño in October 2023, where he met with members of congress (MOC), the State Department and had meetings at the Pentagon. The purpose of the visit was to engage with key US Government officials in an ongoing effort towards ensuring

that development assistance and aid is identified, matched with our development objectives, and efficiently utilized.

In January 2024, Foreign Minister Fonseca met with US Senator, Mr. Chris Dodd, Special Presidential Advisor (SPA) for the Americas. They addressed issues of mutual interest including a request for Belize to consider membership in the Atlantic Partnership for Economic Cooperation (APEC). Senator Dodd received an update on Belize-Guatemala relations, as well as held key discussion on potential security collaboration between the US and Belize.



Senator Dodd discussed investment opportunities as well as the re-engagement and reactivation of the US Chamber of Commerce Chapter (USCCC) in Belize.



Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, Ms. Uzra Zeya, travelled to Belize in February 2024 with a view to advance bilateral and regional cooperation on civilian security, migration, and human rights.

The delegation met with PM Briceño, Hon. Florencio Marin Jr., Minister of National Defence and Border Security, and Hon. Kareem Musa, Minister of Home Affairs and New Growth

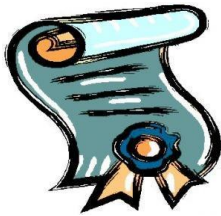
Industries. During these meetings substantive discussions were held on security issues, reaffirming the strong partnership between the US and Belize. The delegation stressed the importance of

enhancing citizen and human-centred security, strengthening the justice sector, and securing Belize's borders.

The recent high-level visits represent the approach of President Biden's administration to strengthen diplomatic ties with Caribbean nations, as well as promote international cooperation, and a deeper mutual understanding of the challenges developing countries like Belize face.

In February 2024, the Cabinet of Belize approved a Joint Design Document (JDD) which will form the basis for a compact between the GOB and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). Through this initiative, the GOB and the MCC will provide grants in the amount of BZ \$250 million (US \$125 million) for the Education Project and the Electricity Sector in Belize. The implementation of this project will see the USA become the largest bilateral partner in Belize.

Presentation of Credentials 2023



Throughout June, several ambassadors, including H.E. Heronia Telaku of Kosovo, H.E. Maeve Von Heynitz of Ireland, H.E. Atsumi Yasuhiro of Japan, and H.E. Kim Hojlund Christensen of Denmark, presented their credentials to Belize. In August, additional ambassadors, such as H.E. Mrs. Soledad Morales Echeverria of Chile, H.E. Mr. Sidi Mohamad Omar of Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), H.E. Ms. Lilybeth Rodriguez Deapara of the Philippines, and H.E. Mr. Haytham Hassan Mohammed Al-Malki of Saudi Arabia followed suit. In September, three more ambassadors, H.E. Mr. Carlos Alberto García Reyes of Guatemala, H.E. Mr. Agostinho de Carvalho dos Santos Van-Dúnem of Angola, and H.E. Mrs. Ragnhild Imerslund of Norway, presented their credentials. Each ambassador expressed their commitment to strengthening bilateral ties between their respective nations and Belize.

Diplomatic Week 2023



Visits by State Officials to Belize

The MFA&FT organized its annual diplomatic week in September 2023, during which Belize had the privilege of delivering a significant update on critical matters including national security, climate change, migration, and regional integration.

During the diplomatic briefing the MFA&FT's updated website, which is more user-friendly, was unveiled to guests. Furthermore, then-Foreign Minister Courtney convened bilateral discussions with the diplomats to foster stronger bilateral relations and identify novel opportunities for collaboration.

Further, Ambassadors were taken on a comprehensive tour of two (2) agricultural companies, Western Dairies Limited and Bel-Car Export and Import Co. Ltd., during which they interacted with industry professionals and witnessed operations first-hand.

State visits play a crucial role in international diplomacy, serving as a formal means for leaders of one country to engage with their counterparts in another. These visits are often marked by a series of ceremonial events and official meetings, aimed at strengthening diplomatic relations, discussing bilateral issues, and promoting cooperation between nations. In 2023-2024, the Ministry supported Prime Minister Briceño's official state visits to South Korea and the Republic of Guatemala.

South Korea



Prime Minister Hon. John Briceño, Hon. Eamon Courtenay, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Immigration, H.E. Jaime Briceño, Belize's Ambassador of Investment and to the Holy See, and Dr. Osmond Martinez, Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Development and Investment, attended a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Han Duck-soo of the Republic of Korea (ROK)/South Korea at the Seoul Government Complex.

PM Briceño requested South Korea's support for Belize's application for eligibility to join the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA). Should the application succeed, Belize would be eligible to access grants and concessionary financing for climate finance projects. Hon. Briceño also requested that PM Duck-soo consider Belize's eligibility for the Korean Economic Development Co-operation Fund (EDCF), a line of credit with a 0.18% interest rate.

Hon. John Briceño extended his gratitude to the Prime Minister and Government of South Korea for their hospitality and support to Belize, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, recovery efforts after hurricanes Eta and Iota, and the feasibility study conducted on hospitals in Belize through the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI), through the ROK trust fund.

PM Briceño and his delegation concluded the day by meeting the Mayor of the Busan Metropolitan City, Hon. Park Heong-joon. The conversation focused on exploring opportunities for student exchange programmes at their university, which specializes in oceanography. With such a programme, Belizean students can enjoy the experience of more applied research, with a focus on protecting the barrier reef.

Prime Minister visit to the Vatican



PM Briceño and Mrs. Briceño, along with Ambassadors Amalia Mai, Stuart Leslie, and Jaime Briceño met with Pope Francis at the Vatican in Rome. This underscored the good relations between Belize and the Vatican.

C - Update on Belize-Guatemala territorial dispute



The pursuit of a peaceful resolution to the territorial dispute with Guatemala remains the top foreign policy priority for Belize since it involves the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. In compliance with the timeline established by the ICJ, and in response to Guatemala's reply, Belize submitted its Rejoinder to the Court on 7 June 2023, with the first oral hearings expected in late spring or the summer of 2024. Very importantly, at the conclusion of said ICJ case we will need the support of our friends to execute the ICJ's judgement; specifically, the demarcation of Belize's western border and maritime borders with Guatemala and Honduras.

Although the case is before the ICJ, Belize continues to grapple with recurrent illegal crossings and encroachments into Belize by Guatemalan nationals that have resulted in significant deforestation and continuous destruction of our biodiversity, in our national forests and protected areas. These challenges include agricultural encroachments, illegal cattle ranching, poaching, destruction of Belize's watersheds and even coca cultivation and processing. Further, the illegal settlement of Guatemalans in Belizean territory, while Guatemalan authorities refuse to cooperate on the safe and orderly relocation of its nationals to Guatemalan territory, remains a pressing concern.

D - Regional Engagements

Belize occupies a unique and strategic location between the Caribbean and Central America which positions it as a bridge between the regions. This has enabled Belize to become a pivotal player in regional engagements and collaborative efforts, which was evident throughout 2023-2024. Belize's primary focus encompasses a diverse array of initiatives, spanning from political/diplomatic dialogue, trade agreements and cultural exchanges. These endeavours underscore Belize's commitment to fostering cooperation, enhancing regional stability, and advancing shared goals across said subregions.

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM)

CARICOM-Mexico Summit - March 14, 2023



CEO, H.E. Amalia Mai participated in the first Coordinating Meeting for the V CARICOM-Mexico Summit. The meeting reviewed the declaration and the cooperation between CARICOM and Mexico to be adopted by the respective Heads of State and Government. In preparation for the CARICOM-MEXICO Summit, the Mexican Agency for International Development (AMEXCID) addressed the cooperation projects which will be a part of the VIII Bilateral Technical, Scientific

Cooperation Programme Mexico-CARICOM, which are listed below:

- I. Development of protected agricultural solution, resilient to the adverse effects of climate variability and the ecological impacts of pests;
- II. Adaptation of agriculture to the effects of climate change;
- III. Drought monitor design;
- IV. Second phase of resilient cultivation of coconut trees; and,
- V. Addressing the water-energy nexus in agriculture.

Twenty-Sixth Meeting of the Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR)

The Twenty-Sixth Meeting of the Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR) of CARICOM was held in Kingston, Jamaica from May 16-17, 2023, under the Chairmanship of Senator the Hon. Kamina Johnson Smith, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Jamaica.



The Foreign Ministers discussed priority issues of regional and international interest, including the situation in Haiti, climate change, relations with Third States, and developments in hemispheric and multilateral bodies.

CARICOM-Canada Summit

The CARICOM-Canada Summit was held from October 17-19, 2023 in Ottawa, Canada. The Summit was an opportunity for both Canada and the Caribbean to fortify their partnership and



jointly confront the challenges they face. It was also an opportunity to lay the groundwork for a more prosperous and sustainable future for both Parties.

Under the Summit's theme, "Strategic Partners for a Resilient Future", the Prime Minister and CARICOM leaders discussed shared priorities, including building inclusive and sustainable economies, increasing trade and investment, and promoting multilateral collaboration. The leaders further discussed fighting climate change and addressing its impacts in the Caribbean; including exploring ways to improve access to financing for SIDS in the Caribbean.

First CARICOM-Saudi Arabia Summit



The First CARICOM-Saudi Arabia Summit was held on November 16, 2023 in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Summit was co-chaired by His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; and Hon. Roosevelt Skerrit, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica.

The High-Level Meeting took place against the background of ongoing developments at the global and hemispheric levels, particularly: the multifaceted crisis in Haiti, the ongoing war and humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, renewed instability in the Middle East due to the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Guyana-Venezuela border controversy, post COVID-19 economic recovery, the rising threat of migration, heightened levels of violence globally and the spread of organized crime.

Forty-Sixth Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM



The Forty-Sixth Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) convened from February 25-28, 2024 in Guyana, with H.E. Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana presiding as Chair.

Throughout the meeting, Heads of Government deliberated on several key issues, including: progress of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME), the Agri-Food Systems Agenda focusing on Food and Nutrition Security, Climate Change and Climate Financing, Global and Hemispheric Affairs, and the ongoing situation in Haiti.

Forty-Fifth Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM)



The Forty-fifth Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM was held from July 3-5, 2023. In acknowledgment of the 50th Anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Chaguaramas in 1973, it was agreed that the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago would host.

The packed agenda for the Meeting tackled several pressing issues for the Community, including food security concerns, climate change and the climate finance agenda, ongoing difficulties in Haiti, security issues, external relations matters and the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME).

The Heads of Government engaged several international guests, including the President of Rwanda, H.E. Paul Kagame; the UN Secretary-General, H.E. Antonio Guterres; President-Designate of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 28), H.E. Dr Sultan Ahmed Al Jabe; the Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea, H.E. Han Duck-Soo; US Secretary-of-State, Mr. Anthony Blinken; and Minority Leader in the US House of Representatives, Congressman, Mr. Hakeem Jeffries.

On July 4th, the 50th Anniversary of the signing of the Treaty was commemorated by Heads of Government and delegates who returned to Chaguaramas, the venue of the historic signing, for a commemorative ceremony which featured a flag-raising event, planting of a time capsule and an address by the CARICOM Chairman and host Prime Minister.



CARICOM-South Africa Ministerial Meeting

The CARICOM-South Africa Ministerial Meeting, convened on March 22, 2024, was co-chaired by H.E. Grace Naledia Mandisa Pandor, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa, and Jamaica's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Senator the Hon. Kamina Johnson Smith; and underscored a renewed phase of high-level engagement between CARICOM and the Republic of South Africa. The Meeting

One of the main action points arising from said Meeting was a commitment to sign an MOU with the African Union (AU) to establish a framework for cooperation. Additionally, the two sides treated matters such as: the ongoing situation in Gaza and Haiti, climate change and financing, development financing, and the upcoming Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS). As well as the development of infrastructure to facilitate trade between CARICOM and Africa.



The Central American Integration System (SICA)

Belize's Pro Tempore Presidency of SICA (first half of 2023)

Belize held the Presidency Pro-tempore of SICA from January to June 2023 under the theme “Inter-regional Unity: enhancing human security and environmental resilience” which reflected SICA’s thematic pillars. As members of both SICA and CARICOM, Belize prioritized intra-regional collaboration, particularly the implementation of the SICA - CARICOM Plan of Action and engagements with extra-regional partners.

Results of the Pro tempore Presidency of SICA



Belize focused its efforts on the approval of the regulation for the electronic signature within SICA which allows the use of technological resources to facilitate decision-making in a more agile manner; and convened an Extraordinary Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of SICA to engage in political dialogue. With the assistance of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the GOB addressed the very important issue of migration flows throughout the region.

Belize also prioritized engagements with third countries, principally SICA’s partners in Asia, such as the Republic of Korea, the Republic of India and the Republic of China (Taiwan) to strengthen existing regional and bilateral cooperation mechanisms in several areas of interest including: health, education, technology, environment, agriculture, and infrastructure among others.



XIV Forum of Dialogue and Cooperation between SICA and the Republic of Korea

On April 17, 2023, Belize hosted the XIV Forum of Dialogue and Cooperation between SICA and the Republic of Korea at the Leigh Richardson Building, Belmopan. SICA member countries and Korea expressed their interest in continuing to strengthen existing regional and bilateral cooperation, mainly in the areas of health, education, technology, environment, agriculture and infrastructure, while

agreeing to continue exploring areas of collaboration in line with national and regional development agendas. The Forum also discussed the establishment of the SICA-Korea Cooperation Centre and reaffirmed their willingness to finalize the text of the Agreement between the Government of Korea and SICA for the establishment of said Cooperation Centre in the present year. The SICA member

countries expressed their gratitude for the reestablishment, in 2022, of the Korea-SICA Cooperation Fund, highlighting its contribution in critical areas of development. Further, SICA member countries welcomed Korea's contribution of approximately \$950,000 to the Korea-SICA Cooperation Fund in 2023, for social and economic integration, as well as improvement of water security in the region. The Forum was attended by the Vice Ministers of Foreign Affairs of SICA, H.E. Choi Youngsam, Deputy Foreign Minister of Korea, and H.E. Werner Vargas, Secretary General of SICA.

The Mechanism for Political Dialogue and Cooperation between SICA and the Republic of India



In April 2023, Belize chaired the



Mechanism for Political Dialogue and Cooperation between SICA and India.

The dialogue was aimed at expanding trade and investment, strengthening the regional digital strategy for the development of the information and knowledge society, and the execution of a cooperation programme that supports SICA's efforts in

areas of: connectivity, agriculture, renewable energy, information technologies, health, among others. During the meeting, the SICA member states recognized India's role in financial cooperation and extended an invitation for them to be part of the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI), as an extra-regional partner, which would serve to facilitate future projects. The dialogue



was led by Hon. Eamon Courtenay, as the Presidency Pro-Tempore (PPT) of SICA; the Panamanian Foreign Minister, H.E. Janaina Tewaney was the host of the event. Notably, the Secretary General of SICA, H.E. Werner Vargas and special guest H.E. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Minister of Foreign Affairs of India also participated.

Meeting of the Joint Commission on Cooperation between countries of the Central American Isthmus (Belize and Guatemala) and the Republic of China, Taiwan



In June 2023, CEO, H.E. Mai, in the capacity of PPT of SICA chaired the Meeting of the Joint Commission on Cooperation between countries of the Central American Isthmus (Belize and Guatemala) and the Republic of China, Taiwan; held at the Leigh Richardson Building. The meeting agreed on the prioritized areas in which the Republic of China, Taiwan will provide cooperation for the next two years, which totals \$23,000,000.00. These areas include the following: institutional strengthening, public health, climate change, protection of the marine environment, development of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSME), digital transformation, renewable energy and sustainable development. The Meeting was attended by the Foreign Minister of Guatemala, H.E. Mario Bucaro, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China (Taiwan), H.E. Alexander Tah-ray Yui, and Secretary General of SICA, H.E. Werner Vargas.

SICA-Proyecto Mesoamérica MOU - June 26, 2023

The Executive Directorate of the Mesoamerican Integration and Development Project (DEPM) and the General Secretariat of the Central American Integration System (SICA-SG) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in Placencia, Belize, on June 26, 2023, during Belize's hosting of the LVII Summit of Heads of State and Government of SICA, as PPT of SICA. The purpose of this MOU was to enhance collaboration and synergy between the two organizations to strengthen the coordination of their actions for the benefit of the integration process and inclusive development of the Mesoamerican Region and its inhabitants.

57th Summit of Heads of State and Government of SICA

During Belize's Presidency Pro-tempore of SICA, it hosted the 57th Summit of Heads of State and Government on June 27, 2023, in Placencia. Important advances on issues of central relevance to the region were highlighted such as: sustainable development, cooperation and economic reactivation, food and nutrition security (FNS), digital transformation and the strengthening of alliances with other subregions. The Summit adopted the Declaration of Placencia which included implementing actions to benefit food security and promoting more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agri-food systems. Likewise, a call was made to partners, regional and international organizations to promote greater technical and financial collaboration for the development of the region.



SICA-CARICOM Ministerial Economic and Political Dialogue



In keeping with Belize's key role as the bridge between Central America and the Caribbean Community, we also held a SICA-CARICOM Ministerial Economic and Political Dialogue. Foreign Ministers and Ministers of Trade from both regions met in Placencia to discuss issues regarding economic and trade integration, climate change, migration, and the implementation of the Revised CARICOM-SICA Plan of

Action (POA).

E - Multilateral Engagements

The MFA&FT has significantly bolstered Belize's global presence and advanced its foreign policy agenda. In today's interconnected world, tackling global challenges demands collective action rather than unilateral approaches. SIDS, such as Belize, must actively participate in regional and international organizations to effectively address these challenges.

Given the intricacies of the current international landscape, international cooperation and coordination have become indispensable. Belize recognizes the inherent opportunities in this globalized system and has prioritized strengthening regional alliances while actively engaging with other nations on the multilateral stage.

Currently, Belize's multilateral efforts Centre on raising awareness about the unique challenges faced by SIDS and garnering support that not only benefits Belize but also contributes to the welfare of the wider region and global community.

Belize - EU Political Dialogue

Annual Belize-European Union (EU) Political Dialogue 2023



The Belize-EU Annual Political Dialogue was co-chaired by Hon. Eamon Courtenay, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Immigration, and H.E. Marianne Van Steen, EU's Ambassador to Belize. It was held in a very constructive atmosphere and addressed the multidimensional relationship between Belize and the EU. Both are like-minded on many critical global issues and share a commitment to working together within the framework of the rules-

based international order, as well as the preservation of multilateralism.

At the top of the agenda was Belize's desire to be added to the Schengen visa waiver list and the necessity of the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) agreement to enter into force. Belize and the EU stressed the importance of the relationship of the EU-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which would be considered at the summit in Brussels from July 17-18, 2023.

The EU underlined the key role Belize plays as part of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Central American Integration System (SICA). Belize shared achievements of its SICA Presidency Pro Tempore and committed to efficiently leading regional efforts towards overcoming the difficulties SICA countries currently face and promoting development and prosperity for all.

The development-cooperation dimension reviewed the implementation of ongoing projects and programmes under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF) and sought to identify the actions under the EU-Belize Multi-Annual Indicative Programme (MAIP) 2021-2027. The EU provided further updates on the progress of programming under their sub-regional programmes earmarked for the Caribbean and Central America, both of which are accessible to Belize.

The trade and investment dimension followed up on the implementation of the EU-Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and the challenges and opportunities contained therein. In so doing, the broader challenge of access to affordable and sustainable financing was addressed. In this regard, Belize highlighted the importance of the ongoing discussion of a Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI), which is expected to change the criteria for small island developing states (SIDS) to access concessional financing. Under this dimension, the EU also highlighted the Global Gateway Investment Agenda (GGIA), which is a new mechanism for alternative financing that brings the EU's private sector into the fold. The specific goal of this mechanism is to hit targets set by the sustainable development goals (SDG).

Other issues on the agenda included: good governance, human rights, condemnation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and its impact on food and energy security, deterioration of the security situation in Haiti, EU support for confidence-building measures (CBM) in the Adjacency Zone (AZ) between Belize and Guatemala ahead of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling, and the preparation of the new Global Financial Pact (GFP). Regarding climate change, both sides shared their views on adaptation and mitigation measures, loss and damage reparations, and more ambitious climate financing.

Conference of Parties (COP) 28 - 2023



Hon. Orlando Habet, Minister of Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management, led Belize's delegation to the 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28), including the 18th Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol and the 5th Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement.

The conference was hosted in Dubai, United Arab Emirates from November 30 to December 12, 2023.

Organization of American States (OAS) Adjacency Zone Office (AZO)

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs continues to serve as the intermediary between the Belize Defence Force (BDF) and the OAS AZO. In this established mechanism, the Ministry's role is to relay requests made by the BDF to verify incidents that breach the confidence building measures (CBM). Having conducted a field verification, the OAS then submits a report on their findings. Of the thirteen (13) verification requests that were sent to the OAS AZO in 2023, twelve (12 or 92%) were answered. The OAS has attributed this satisfactory rate of response to technical enhancements.



F- International Cooperation

International Cooperation Programmes

In the past year, the Ministry significantly enhanced its collaboration with diverse countries through a myriad of approaches such as: grant aid, technical assistance, humanitarian aid, and an array of capacity-building initiatives and scholarships tailored for Belizeans. Additionally, the Ministry ventured into novel realms of support, notably bolstering the national statistical system, integrating internet technology within the public sector, and fortifying the trade ecosystem.

X Joint Commission for Technical and Scientific Cooperation Belize-Mexico

The Governments of Belize and Mexico launched three new projects under the X Meeting of the Joint Commission for Technical and Scientific Cooperation between the Governments of Belize and Mexico for the period 2023 to 2025. The three projects include two in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise; and one with the Statistical Institute of Belize (SIB). Namely:

- 1) Diagnosis of the beekeeping subsector and capacity building for new and existing beekeepers in Belize with the Secretariat of Agriculture and Rural Development (SADER) of Mexico;

- 2) Reproductive technology in livestock production in Belize with the National Institute of Forestry, Agriculture and Livestock Research (INIFAP) of Mexico; and,
- 3) Strengthening the capacity of the Geographic Information System Unit (GISU) for spatial database management, statistical spatial analysis, and remote sensing applications with the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) of Mexico.

‘Sembrando Vida’ - Belize Launch - June 15, 2023



On June 15, 2023, the MFA&FT, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise, and the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation (AMEXCID) launched the ‘*Sembrando Vida - Belize*’ project at the Yo Creek Agriculture Station in the Orange Walk District. The *Sembrando Vida* project is the product of the signed Letter of Intent by the Secretary of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, H.E. Marcelo

Ebrard Casaubon, and the Hon. Eamon Courtenay, during the official visit of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador in 2022.

The project seeks to contribute to the social welfare of two thousand (2,000) Belizean small farmers and their families. The three main components of the project are: 1) an economic package consisting of BZ\$2,000 for the duration of the eight-month project, 2) an agriculture package of seeds, fertilizers, tools, and fruit and forest trees, and 3) capacity-building training. The programme will not only enhance productivity but will also provide income generation to small farmers.



SICA - Proyecto Mesoamérica MOU – June 26, 2023

The Executive Directorate of the Mesoamerican Integration and Development Project (DEPM) and the General Secretariat of the Central American Integration System (SICA-SG) signed a MOU in Placencia, Belize, on June 26, 2023, during Belize’s hosting of the LVII Summit of Heads of State and Government of SICA as PPT of SICA. The purpose of the MOU is to enhance collaboration and synergy

between the two organizations to strengthen the coordination of their actions for the benefit of the integration process and inclusive development of the Mesoamerican region and its inhabitants.

The MFA&FT has renewed emphasis on strengthening South-South cooperation (SSC) with our partners in Central and South America to develop innovative forms of knowledge-sharing, technology transfers, emergency responses, and recovery in the health, economic, social, and environmental arenas. In Latin America, South-South cooperation is seen as an expression of

solidarity among our peoples and countries with the aim of contributing to the pursuit of development goals.

II Mixed Commission for Technical, Cultural, Educational, and Sports Cooperation between the Republic Colombia and CARICOM



The MFA&FT participated in the II Mixed Commission for Technical, Cultural, Educational and Sports Cooperation between Colombia and CARICOM where a portfolio of projects for the period 2023-2025 were approved. The portfolio includes twelve (12) projects in various areas including: inclusion and equity, agricultural innovation, climate change, security, defence, health, trade, industry, and culture which will be implemented through training actions and technical advice which is expected to generate significant contributions to our national sustainable development.

Bilateral Cooperation Programme with the Republic of Peru - 2022-2024



Further, the GOB currently has a Bilateral Cooperation Programme 2022-2024 with the Government of Peru which seeks to transfer best practices, strengthen capacities, and share experiences in the areas of tourism, gastronomy, and archaeology.

Humanitarian aid from the Federative Republic of Brazil



Belize has also benefitted from humanitarian aid from Brazil with the donation of Paediatric 10 Valent Pneumococcal conjugate vaccines (PCV -10) to the Ministry of Health and Wellness of Belize who integrated these vaccines into Belize's national vaccination schedule.

MOU for diplomatic training with the Argentine Republic



A MOU between the MFA&FT of Belize and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship of Argentina was also signed for the diplomatic training of Belize's Foreign Service Officers.

Short term trainings through the Republic of Chile



Belize and Chile also have several cooperation initiatives which include short-term courses and training in: diplomacy, foreign trade, public policy, Spanish as a second language, and disaster risk management. Several foreign service officers have been recipients of Chile's diplomatic training offered by the Chilean Diplomatic Academy.

First Joint Commission Meeting for Technical, Scientific, Educational, and Cultural Cooperation between the Republic of Panama and Belize - 2024-2025



Looking ahead, the MFA&FT is planning to participate in the First Joint Commission Meeting for Technical, Scientific, Educational, and Cultural Cooperation between Panama and Belize - 2024-2025; scheduled to be held in May 2024 to strengthen cooperation in tourism, health, education, agriculture, entrepreneurship, and citizen security.

Cooperation with Extra-Regional Partners

Republic of China (ROC), Taiwan

MFA&FT MSME Entrepreneurship Competition: Women Who Boss - May 28, 2023



Under the Woman Economic Empowerment Project which is co-implemented by the Governments of Belize and ROC Taiwan, the MFA&FT organized a MSME Entrepreneurship Competition entitled ‘Women Who Boss’. The competition provided an opportunity for women who had previously participated in the capacity building programmes, or vocational training, to apply

their newly acquired skills. Women entrepreneurs pitched start-ups and current business plans to a panel of judges who assessed their investment plans. The panel included representatives from the MFA&FT, Human Development, Embassy of ROC Taiwan, ROC Taiwan International Cooperation and Development Fund (ICDF), the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI), and a businesswoman from the private sector.

The MFA&FT hosted an Award Ceremony on May 8, 2023 for the winners of the “Women Who Boss” competition. The five (5) winners were presented with modest investment funds for the development of their women-led businesses. Specifically, the winners were: 1) MonTrans Consulting, Katia Montenegro Hoare; 2) Inner Peace Financials, Nicolyn C. Raymond; 3) Yessi’s Cuisine, Ysenia Guerra; 4) Chuc’s Delight, Candice Wade; and 5) Barauda’s Secret, Denese Enriquez and Jennifer Arzu-Williams, respectively.

Promotion of Peace in the AZ of Belize - March 2, 2023 - August 15, 2023

The MFA&FT in collaboration with the Embassy of the ROC, Taiwan launched the “Culture of Peace Programme - Women Economic Empowerment in the Adjacency Zone of Belize Project”. The Project provided for technical training and certification by Cayo Centre for Employment and Training (CCET) at the Ta’Amay Centre for Training and Promotion of Peace in Benque Viejo del Carmen, Cayo to complement the work of the OAS in the AZ. The Project, which concluded in

August 2023, hosted 16 cohorts of vocational and technical training targeted at women and girls. The sessions focused on areas such as: beauty, baking and cooking, hospitality, foreign languages, customer service, bartending, and front desk management training, to name a few, for micro and small business. In total, 110 women and 60 men benefitted from said project.

Belize, Guatemala, and ROC (Taiwan) Mixed Commission - June 14, 2023



The MFA&FT hosted the Meeting of the Mixed Commission for Cooperation between countries of Central America and the ROC Taiwan in June 2023 at MFA&FT Headquarters, Belmopan. The participating countries, Belize and Guatemala, expressed their appreciation for the regional cooperation provided by

the ROC Taiwan, highlighting its contribution to the pillars of SICA’s integration process.

Further, the meeting agreed on the prioritized areas in which the ROC Taiwan would provide cooperation, totalling \$23,000,000 over the next two years. The prioritized areas included: institutional strengthening, public health, climate change, protection of the marine environment, development of MSMEs, digital transformation and sustainable development, and renewable energy.

Over the years, ROC Taiwan has supported over 100 projects making it one of SICA’s largest development partners.

ROC Taiwan donates to Hurricane Lisa Fund – August 28, 2023

Belize received a significant donation of supplies pledged by the Taiwanese business community to support Hurricane Lisa relief efforts. Following the devastating impact of Hurricane Lisa in



November 2022, the Embassy of Belize in the Republic of China (Taiwan) initiated the “We are Family: Help for Belize” fundraiser. The campaign mobilized support from 32 donors among Taiwan’s business community and private sector. The donation included US\$10,000 from St. Dominic Catholic High School and a container of essential supplies, including: clothing, medical supplies, food, laptops and tablets. These contributions complemented the prompt assistance rendered by the

Government of ROC Taiwan in the wake of Hurricane Lisa’s aftermath.

The strong response from Taiwan’s business community reflected the enduring 34-year friendship between Belize and Taiwan. Integral to the fundraiser’s success were: Taiwanese businesses, Happy Home World Alliance International Taiwan and the Industry Development Association, which

leveraged their connections to facilitate donations. During the handing over ceremony, H.E. Amalia Mai, CEO in the MFA&FT, and H.E. Lily Li-Wen Hsu, Ambassador of the ROC Taiwan to Belize, formally handed over said items to Mr. Daniel Mendez, National Emergency Coordinator for the National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO); for distribution to the communities still rebuilding after the impact of Hurricane Lisa.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Loan Agreement with Saudi Fund for Development (SFD)



On May 30, 2023, Prime Minister Hon. John Briceño signed a US\$45 million development loan agreement with the SFD for the construction of a tertiary hospital in Belmopan. His Excellency Ahmed Al-Khateeb, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Tourism and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the SFD, signed on behalf of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The signing was part of efforts taken by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to support developing countries and small island developing states, like Belize, to overcome sustainable development and climate change challenges.

Loan Agreement with SFD for Solar Energy Plant

The Government of Belize signed a US\$77 million loan agreement with the SFD, for the construction of a 60MW Solar Energy Plant in Belize. Prime Minister Hon. John Briceño, Minister of Finance, Economic Development and Investment, signed on behalf of Belize, along with H.E. Sultan Al-Marshad, CEO for the SFD.

Scholarship Programme



A key cooperation programme remains the securing of scholarships, training and internships through bilateral partners, regional and international organizations. Through the OAS, 276 Belizeans were granted scholarships in 2023; an increase of 300% compared to 2021. In promoting cooperation, the MFA&FT was also able to secure scholarship and training opportunities for Belizeans in diverse fields from various countries including: Chile, Taiwan, Brazil, Honduras, Cuba, Colombia, Mexico, Serbia, Romania, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Qatar, Thailand, India, South Korea, Indonesia, Japan, the Erasmus Mundus Programme, IAEA, among others.

Additionally, through the Colombia - Agriculture Scholarships, thirty (30) Belizean farmers received scholarships for a 90-day agriculture training programme in rural communities, in Colombia.

International Cooperation Council (ICC)



Recognizing the value of international cooperation to complement Belize's national development agenda, the MFA&FT established the ICC. Its objective is to streamline cooperation efforts. Specifically, inter-ministerial collaboration to maximize efficiency and minimize duplication. Currently, the ICC is working on gathering data to develop a comprehensive cooperation matrix to ensure that cooperation partners are aligned with the country's needs.

Very importantly, the ICC with support from the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office, organized an Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) Technical Workshop in January 2024. The INFF is a country-led approach for strengthening public and private financing for sustainable development by bringing together the policies used to mobilize and govern public and private financing. The INFF aligns and strengthens national policies towards the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The INFF Technical Workshop brought together expertise and lessons from relevant country experiences to inform the development of an Action Plan by GOB to adopt and adapt the INFF approach in service of its most pressing needs and priorities.

On February 14, 2024, Prime Minister Hon. John Briceño and H.E. Marianne van Steen, Ambassador of the European Union (EU) to Belize, reaffirmed the long-standing partnership between the GOB and the EU with the signature of the Financing Agreement (grant) of EUR 12.6 million (around USD 13.5 million). The funds are part of the current EU commitment of EUR 17 million. Said EU funds support the GOB to achieve certain targets contained in the #planBelize Medium-Term Development Strategy. The new areas of bilateral collaboration comprise the sectors of: green growth and socio-economic development of the south, trade and regional integration, and border management. The overall objective of the project is to reduce inequality and enhance the sustainable management of the southern and western regions of Belize.

G - Human Rights

4th National Report - Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

The MFA&FT led the coordination and the drafting of the GOB's 4th National Report under the UPR mechanism, where the human rights records of all UN Member States are reviewed at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). During this process each country presents its progress, challenges, and commitments to human rights improvement. Recommendations for enhancing human rights are provided by other member states, and various stakeholders, with the reviewed country having the opportunity to accept or note these recommendations. The UPR aims



to promote dialogue, cooperation, and the sharing of best practices in human rights, ultimately contributing to the advancement of human rights globally.

The GOB, through the assistance of the MFA&FT, and civil society stakeholders finalized and submitted Belize's National Report to the Human Rights Council in October 2023. The report was presented at the UNHRC, Geneva, Switzerland on January 29, 2024, where Belize received positive feedback from member states on its national progress and additional recommendations on how to further improve its human rights situation. Further, on February 2, 2024 Belize adopted its fourth report under the UPR mechanism.

During this fourth cycle, the GOB received a total of 166 recommendations. Currently, the MFA&FT is finalizing plans for national stakeholder consultations to engage with them. In short, the GOB intends to 1) inform stakeholders, 2) take a decision on the recommendations made, and 3) prepare a plan of action (POA) for accepted recommendations which will be implemented prior to the next cycle of the UPR, scheduled for 2029.

National Human Rights Institution (NHRI)



Following engagement with the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), in 2018, the MFA&FT subsequently conducted a feasibility study to explore the establishment of a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) consistent with the Paris Principles. Three viable options were identified: 1) merging existing institutions into a hybrid NHRI, 2) maintaining multiple institutions alongside the Ombudsman, or 3) enhancing the Ombudsman's structure to comply with the Paris Principles. After extensive consultations, including with public stakeholders and civil society, improving the Ombudsman's Office emerged as the most practical choice. In 2023, the MFA&FT presented the feasibility study to Cabinet and gained its support and endorsement for said proposal, including a necessary amendment to the Ombudsman Act. Notably, key criteria for the NHRI include autonomy, independence, pluralism, adequate resources, and investigative powers.

H - Main Achievements of Belize's Diplomatic Missions - 2023-2024

This section seeks to highlight some of the main achievements by Belize's diplomatic missions overseas during the reporting period. Said missions pursue Belize's foreign policy goals and national interests, as well as service the consular needs of Belizeans, in their respective area of jurisdiction. Each diplomatic mission is unique and the work that they undertake reflects the diverse scope of activities which occur at the respective capitals. Ultimately, their goal is to provide

effective diplomatic representation, protect and promote Belize's interests in a manner that will accrue benefits to all Belizeans, as per #planBelize.

Permanent Mission of Belize - New York City



Climate Change

Through the Permanent Mission of Belize, New York, led by H.E. Mr. Carlos Fuller, the GOB continued to play a leadership role in the international response to climate change. It was represented at the Subsidiary Body sessions in June and at COP 28 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE). At these sessions Ambassador Fuller co-facilitated the informal consultations on the Mitigation Work Programme (MWP), while at COP 28 the Presidency invited him to also co-chair the Contact Group on Long Term Financing (CGLTF). Members

of the Belize delegation coordinated and represented the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) in the negotiations on finance, mitigation, and transparency. Belize was elected to several posts at COP 28, including on the: Adaptation Fund Board, the newly established Loss and Damage Fund Board, and the Adaptation Committee.

COP 28 delivered several substantive outcomes including: 1) operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund with pledges of USD 7.5 million to date; 2) decision to transition away from the use of fossil fuels and ramping up the use of renewable energy; and 3) decision to develop a work programme on the Global Goal on Adaptation. It also concluded the first Global Stocktake of the Paris Agreement which recognized that parties were: 1) not on track to meet the 1.5 °C target; and 2) developed countries are failing in their financing obligations to assist developing countries in adaptation, mitigation, and loss and damage. Ultimately, all parties are to submit more ambitious nationally determined contributions (NDC) in 2025 in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and capabilities.

Ambassador Fuller served as the Chairman of World Meteorological Organization's Climate Advisory Group which provided policy guidance to the World Meteorological Organization's Secretariat for its engagement in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process. It sought to provide negotiators with scientific advice to inform the negotiations so that the response to climate change would be the best. The group was able to influence the decisions and conclusions at COP 28 on issues such as the strengthening of the observing network in SIDS and data for adaptation. Belize was also selected as one of the first countries to receive support from the newly established Systematic Observing Financing Facility (SOFF) to strengthen the country's observing network and its data processing, storage and archiving facilities.

Belize became a core member of the Cartagena Dialogue, a group of countries consisting of developed and developing countries from North, Central and South America, the Caribbean, Europe, Africa and the Pacific. Although the members of the group do not hold common positions on all issues, the group does promote ambitious climate action to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases to meet the 1.5-degree target, and advocates for ambitious outcomes at the negotiations. It held two preparatory workshops during the year and met with the UNFCCC Secretariat, the Chairs of the Subsidiary Bodies and the COP Presidencies to emphasize the need for strong climate action. Belize was also a member of the High Ambition Coalition (HAC) which also advocates for ambitious climate action at the political level.

Belize participated in the IMO Working Group on Reduction of greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions from ships Intersessional Working Group (ISWG) in July 2023 which developed a draft strategy and targets to eliminate emissions from shipping by 2050, with interim targets in 2030 and 2040. The Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) adopted these the following week. Belize is now working with the UN Foundation to increase the Caribbean's engagement in the process as the region is poorly represented even though the region has a vested interest in maritime shipping as flag states, dependence on shipping for the movement of goods, and as a major component of our tourism sector.

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)



United Nations
Economic and Social
Council (ECOSOC)

In 2023 Belize served the second year of its term on the ECOSOC. Belize participated actively in the Forum on Financing for Development, April 2023, including coordinating the outcome document for the Group of 77 and China; and contributing its experience in accessing private and climate financing in the panel discussions.

Belize also spoke on behalf of CARICOM at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) during the general debate of the Ministerial Segment, and at the segment dedicated to SIDS on the trajectory of the COVID-19 recovery.

On the margins of the 22nd Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII) Belize co-organized a side event with Guyana and the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF) focused on governance and land tenure in Indigenous Communities. It also co-organized a side event on renewable energy with the Dominican Republic and the Stakeholder Forum.

Belize continued to participate in the ECOSOC Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti. The Group was chaired by Canada and met monthly at its Permanent Mission. It established two committees to focus on humanitarian needs and food security; and general security issues.

Belize commenced its four-year term on the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD). It was represented at the CSTD annual session in Geneva and the Intersessional Panel in Lisbon. Belize will access support from the CSTD and UNCTAD in developing its first National Science, Technology, and Innovation Strategy. Ambassador Fuller was drafted to serve on the country's Science, Technology, and Innovation Advisory Committee (STIAC) which was tasked to complete its work by June 2024.

Haiti



The crisis in Haiti remains a top priority for CARICOM at the UN and in that respect, Belize has used every opportunity to express its view on the urgency of UN support for Haiti. In October 2023, the Security Council authorized the deployment of a multinational security support (MSS) mission to Haiti during which Belize indicated its willingness to participate. Belize engaged with the UN Peacekeeping Office and the UNSG Special Representative on Haiti at various points in the year. Belize also participated in the ECOSOC Ad Hoc Advisory Group which advocated for scaling up the humanitarian response in Haiti.

SIDS Coalition for Nature

The Mission has been participating actively as a co-lead for the Caribbean in the SIDS Coalition for Nature. This Coalition seeks to facilitate the development of partnerships to support the implementation of the biodiversity agenda in SIDS by tackling issues related to finance, technical capacity and the synergies across related Conventions. Belize participated in three (3) High Level Events organized by said coalition in 2023. These included a presentation of the work programme by Hon. Orlando Habet, Minister of Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management at the HLPF; and Prime Minister, Hon. John Briceno during High Level Week at UNGA. The Mission coordinated the work of the Coalition in the fourth quarter of 2023. At COP 28 in Dubai, Minister Habet represented the Coalition at high level events on mangroves and the blue economy. The Coalition is scheduled to organize a regional workshop in April 2024, in Belize, to develop a project to be funded by Spain on data acquisition.

Fourth International SIDS Conference (SIDS4)

In 2023, the Mission participated actively in preparatory meetings for SIDS4. Belize served on the Bureau of the Caribbean SIDS Regional Preparatory Meeting held in St.



Vincent and the Grenadines, in August 2023; and contributed significantly to the outcomes of the Interregional Preparatory Meeting in Cabo Verde, in September 2023. The Mission will continue to participate in the meetings of the Preparatory Committee and in the negotiations of the

programme of action through the first half of 2024. The SIDS4 Conference is expected to adopt a new 10-year development programme for SIDS 2024-2034.

Multidimensional Vulnerability Index

The Mission participated actively in the negotiation of the General Assembly resolution to launch an intergovernmental process during the 78th session to consider the Report and its recommendations. The High-Level Panel on the Development of the MVI submitted its Report including a prototype of the MVI, in September 2023.

Other UN Processes

Following active participation in the negotiation of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ); and the adoption of the agreement in August 2023, Belize signed the agreement in September 2023 during High Level Week.

The Mission coordinated the SICA Group during the first semester of 2023, as well as the CARICOM Caucus in July and August 2023. In the latter capacity, Belize coordinated the consensual adoption of the biennial UN CARICOM Cooperation resolution, in August 2023.

Belize was represented by high level delegations in several meetings at the UN including the: 1) Commission on the Status of Women (CSW); 2) UN 2023 Water Conference where Ambassador Fuller served as a Vice-President; 3) Mid Term Review of the Sendai Framework; 4) SDG Summit; 5) High-Level Meetings on Tuberculosis, Universal Health Coverage and Pandemic Prevention Preparedness and Response; and 6) General Debate of the UN General Assembly.

Consular Services

A “soft opening” of the Consular Office was held in September 2023 following the installation of doors and refurbishment of the office to separate the consular section from the Mission. The office is staffed by a consular/administrative officer from the Ministry of Immigration. Presently, the office only receives and processes applications for passports including the capturing of biometric data from applicants.

Embassy of Belize - Washington, D.C.

The Embassy of Belize in Washington, D.C. is led by H.E. Mr. Lynn Young.

Bilateral Relations

Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection



Very importantly, the GOB and the government of the USA hosted and co-chaired the Anniversary Ministerial of the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection in June 2023. The Hon. Eamon Courtenay alongside his counterpart Secretary of State, H.E. Antony Blinken chaired the meeting to commemorate the one-year anniversary of said Declaration and highlighted its achievements. Minister Courtenay delivered a well-received statement highlighting Belize's lead in managing the migration crisis.

In October 2023, the Embassy coordinated bilateral meetings with a Belize delegation led by Prime Minister, the Hon. John Briceno. Meetings were held with US representatives from the State Department, the Pentagon, the Department of Homeland Security, Congresswoman Mrs. Sydney Kamlager-Dove, Congressman Mr. Steven Horsford, and Senator Mr. Tim Kaine.

The Embassy coordinated the annual IMF-World Bank Spring Meetings attended by the Hon. Christopher Coye, Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance, Financial Secretary Mr. Joseph Waight, Governor of the Central Bank, Mr. Kareem Michael, and CEO in the Ministry of Economic Development, Dr. Osmond Martinez.

Further, the Embassy facilitated the transfer of a new Cessna Caravan 208 aircraft to our Ministry of National Defence and Border Security. This US\$7.84M donation from the USA is to be used in reconnaissance, search and rescue, and other military operations across the country.

On October 16, 2023, Ambassador Young presented credentials to the Prime Minister of Canada, Hon. Justin Trudeau confirming his appointment as Belize's High Commissioner to Canada. After the presentation Ambassador Young had the opportunity to speak with PM Trudeau, where he highlighted Belize's request for visa free travel to Canada.

Regional and Hemispheric Relations

CARICOM

Belize was a member of the CARICOM Subcommittee on Congressional Matters which met with Congressman, Mr. Joaquin Castro, Ranking Member of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere on Capitol Hill; to discuss the region's concern regarding the impact of illicit American firearms on CARICOM countries. The Subcommittee called on the USA to join the region's "War on Guns", and to urgently adopt and take action to stop the illegal exportation of firearms and ammunition into the Caribbean. The Subcommittee also discussed the situation in



Haiti, climate change, and the need for new avenues to promote regional integration and economic growth.

Additionally, Belize participated, at the ministerial and ambassadorial levels, to address challenges relating to human rights abuses, “democratic backsliding”, and security concerns in Peru, Guatemala, and Haiti.

Organization of American States (OAS)



At the OAS, Belize was elected Vice-Chair of the Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Affairs (CAAP); and Chaired the Working Group to Review the Scale of Quota Contributions, and General Secretariat Structural Reform of the OAS, to ensure the financial prudence and stability of the organization. This work was aimed at re-purposing the OAS to meet the new and unprecedented challenges facing the Americas today, to best serve its citizens.

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR)



On November 9, 2024, the Embassy represented Belize at a working meeting convened by the IACHR, at the request of the Maya Leaders Alliance (MLA), to engage the Commission in a discussion with representatives of the Maya communities of southern Belize and GOB’s legal representatives.

53rd General Assembly (GA) of the OAS

In June 2023, Belize participated in the 53rd GA of the OAS. Minister Courtenay led the GOB delegation.

Consular, Protocol and Administrative Matters

Through the Department of Immigration, the Embassy of Belize facilitated the launch of the new application process for electronic passports using the Electronic Passport Issuance and Control System (e-PICS) across all Consulates in the USA. Under this new system the Embassy processed 357 passport applications in 2023.

After closure during the pandemic, the Consulate in New York was re-opened on September 25, 2023; under the jurisdiction of the Embassy of Belize, Washington, D.C. The reopening has allowed the government to resume consular services to Belizeans in the tri state area, clearing the backlog of applications and significantly improving services to the Diaspora in said area.

Ambassador Young also visited the Consulates in Miami and Chicago as a part of ongoing efforts to improve and harmonize consular services across Consulates in the USA.

The Embassy managed a considerable number of cases for deportees, ensuring their well-being and processing necessary documents.

Additionally, the Embassy consistently provides protocolary services to Belizean government officials, as well as coordinating port courtesies for the Office of the Prime Minister, and senior government officials from all Ministries of the GOB during their travels to and through the USA for official travel.

Regarding administrative matters, the Embassy introduced credit card processing in Washington, D.C. and the New York Consulate and discontinued receiving cash and money orders. In addition to making the process more convenient for applicants to pay for services, the Embassy can now monitor collections at these two locations daily.

Also, a cloud-based telephone service was implemented in Washington, D.C. and New York to better handle calls. The system allows calls to be transferred between the two locations and enables daily monitoring of responses and performance.

Diaspora and Community Outreach

The Embassy worked closely with the Ministry of Tourism and Diaspora Relations in coordinating Diaspora outreach events. Ambassador Young gave presentations at events in: Dallas, Atlanta, Chicago, and Miami.



Other events undertaken by the Embassy include: 1) a meet and greet with the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, 2) celebration of Belize's Independence on September 23, 2023, 3) participation in the 2023 Around the World Embassy, and 4) celebration of SICA's Independence alongside Central American Embassies in Washington, D.C.

Further, the Embassy collaborated with Build Belize Inc. (BBI) to channel assistance to Belize, played a key role in obtaining computers for BBI's computer in schools programme, and also participated in BBI's successful ham, turkey, and toy drive for needy families in Belize.

Finally, the Embassy maintains an active social media presence and submits a monthly message from the Ambassador in the newsletter issued by the Consulate in Miami.



Embassy of Belize, Guatemala City

The Embassy of Belize in Guatemala City is led by H.E. Mr. Jose Alpuche.

Foreign Policy and Bilateral Relations

Border Cooperation

Since 2021, the Embassy of Belize in Guatemala City has led ad hoc binational working group meetings of border authorities in a forum that seeks to discuss and address operational border issues, specifically along the Belize Western Border. Matters such as trade facilitation, immigration, student crossing, tourism, customs and security are addressed through a collaborative approach, which yield positive results. During this period, Belize Customs expanded its operations to process cargo on Saturdays; and the process of student crossing was enhanced for student safety.

Near Border Outreach



The Embassy of Belize in Guatemala embarked on outreach to near border areas within Guatemala to develop linkages and networks aimed at improving dialogue among officials and at the community level. Since late 2021 encounters have been had with authorities from Petén (Melchor De Mencos, San Benito, Flores) and Izabal (Puerto Barrios). Additionally, the Embassy participated in three (3) OAS events within the Adjacency Zone aimed at promoting human development and peace among the population of both countries.

For 2024, visits are planned to include: Poptun, Santa Cruz and Livingston as well as a revisit to communities already visited to meet newly installed Governors, elected Municipal representatives and officials with a view to promote binational trade, security and community cooperation.

The Embassy participated in multiple meetings and seminars hosted by the Government of Guatemala, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, the private sector and non-governmental organizations in preparation for the Presidential, Congressional and Municipal elections which were all held together. The election process became unpredictable and very tense leading to months of domestic protest and international action especially in the OAS, the USA and the EU. Eventually, Bernardo Arévalo was elected President in a surprise landslide win that saw many legal challenges with some residual issues still in process, although he was inaugurated as President on January 14, 2024.

Migration and Human Trafficking



The Embassy participated in a Symposium on Human Trafficking for Central American countries; and a Conference of Vice Presidents of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras to address trafficking in persons in these countries. These two forums examined best practices aimed at curbing human trafficking and the need for greater collaboration to fight said transnational crime. This and the illegal migration crisis are

issues in which Guatemala is a critical partner as they are a major transit country, in addition to a country of origin.

The Embassy was represented by Ambassador Alpuche at the MIRPS Conference (The regional integrated framework for protection and solutions of migrants) in Panama. The Belize delegation was led by Attorney General Anthony Sylvester and included CEO Tanya Santos. Belize assumed the Pro-Tempore Presidency of the *Marco Integral Regional para la Protección y Soluciones* (MIRPS) for 2024. This grouping involves Central America and Mexico but excludes Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic. The Declaration of Panama was signed which included achievements to date and aspirational statements of intent.

Presentation of Credentials

On January 25, 2024, H.E. Jose Alpuche presented his Letters of Credence to H.E. Laurentino Cortizo, President of Panama. Ambassador Alpuche also met with H.E. Jenaina Tewaney Mencomo, Foreign Minister of Panama to discuss bilateral and regional issues. As such, Ambassador Alpuche is now fully accredited to Guatemala and Panama.

Inauguration of new Guatemalan President

The Embassy supported the Belize delegation that attended the inauguration of H.E. Cesar Bernardo Arevalo de Leon, President of Guatemala, on January 14, 2024. The delegation was headed by Prime Minister, Hon. John Briceño, and included Hon. Francis Fonseca, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade.

Within the margins of the inauguration ceremony, the Belize delegation held bilateral meetings with high officials from: Guatemala, Mexico, Qatar, Canada, Paraguay, and ROC Taiwan.



As a consequence of uncertainty and political unrest that occurred during the inauguration events, the Embassy coordinated air transportation for the delegation to return to Belize on January 15, 2024 utilizing the Belize Defence Force (BDF) Air Wing.

Forum on Liberty and Justice for All

On the 75th Anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, the Embassy represented Belize at the Forum for Liberty and Justice in December 2023. The forum was held under the slogan “75 years alive defending our rights” and sought to reflect the past, present and future of efforts for the protection and Defence of human rights within Guatemala and to appraise on the implementation of said Declaration.

Furthermore, the Embassy participated in the XXVIII Session of the General Conference of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (OPANAL) held at the National Palace of Culture in Guatemala City on November 3, 2024. Member States used the platform to reaffirm their commitment to the Treaty of Tlatelcolco and to create actions that promote world peace. They emphasized the Treaty’s importance for its contribution to the reduction of nuclear tensions in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), and as a model for other regions to establish their own Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones (NWFZ).

Independence Reception

The Embassy hosted a reception in September 2023 to celebrate the anniversary of Belize’s Independence. Belizeans living in Guatemala, including students, as well as members of the Diplomatic corp. and friends of Belize attended the event.

IX Summit of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS)



The Embassy supported the Belize delegation that participated in the IX Summit of the ACS held in Antigua, in May 2023, which was led by the Prime Minister. The theme of the Summit was “Innovating integration through the sustainable development of the Greater Caribbean”.

During the Summit themes such as: strengthening and developing the collective capacities of the Greater Caribbean, promoting the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea, post COVID-19 recovery, and revitalizing and strengthening the ACS, were deliberated on. The Summit concluded with adoption of the Declaration of Antigua.

Prime Minister Briceño also had a fruitful bilateral meeting with the President of Guatemala, H.E. Dr. Alejandro Giammattei Falla, during which it was agreed that the informal crossing at Tree Tops/Santa Cruz de las Fronteras would be formalized by the installation of all relevant border agencies.

As a result of participation in a Belize Tourism Board (BTB) sponsored breakfast and presentation to tour guides, which was attended by fifty-four (54) companies and individual operators, the Embassy was able to ascertain that the GOB should concentrate on terrestrial tourism in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. In this regard, a key to success would be to improve border facilitation and reduce border fees. Notably, among these countries terrestrial visitors travel without passports, only using their National Identification Card; and they do not pay border fees.

Administrative and Financial Matters

Following the financial audits of 2022, the Embassy updated its financial management system to be more compliant with GOB Financial Regulations and to improve accountability. Since 2023, the Embassy has consistently submitted detailed financial reports to headquarters, and financial documents are stored both digitally and physically.

On instruction from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology (MOECST), Belizean students studying in Guatemala are granted a semi-annual stipend or financial assistance. Funds are remitted to the Embassy by the MOECST for disbursement. During the reporting period, all students approved by the MOECST have received their stipends or financial assistance. The Embassy continues to work closely with said Ministry to ensure the smooth dispensation and accountability of this process.

Since 2023, the Embassy has been updating its filing system to reflect GOB's records management system.

Embassy of Belize, Brussels

The Embassy of Belize in Brussels is led by H.E. Dr. Gianni Avila.



Presentation of Credentials

Ambassador Gianni Avila presented the following credentials in 2023: 1) Kingdom of Belgium - February 8, 2023 (Brussels, Belgium); 2) Kingdom of The Netherlands - May 24, 2023 (The Hague, The Netherlands); 3) European Union Council - June 14, 2023 (Brussels, Belgium); 4) World Trade Organization - June 16, 2023 (Geneva, Switzerland); European Commission - July 28, 2023 (Brussels, Belgium); and Kingdom of Spain - October 10, 2023 (copies presented to the Introducer of Ambassadors).

Working Visit of Hon. Eamon Courtenay - Schengen Visa Waiver Lobby

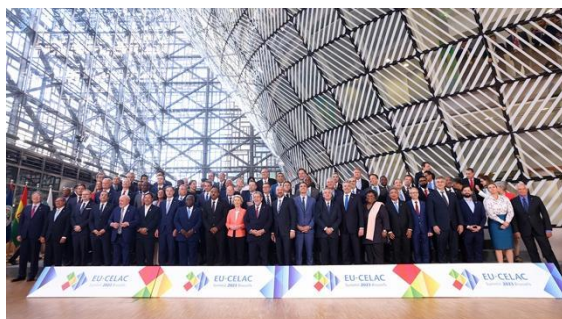
In February 2023, the Hon. Eamon Courtenay, visited Brussels and was able to advance lobbying efforts for the GOB's request for a Schengen visa waiver by meeting with several high-level EU officials. Director General Pariat of the DG Home assured Belize that it fulfils the required criteria for the grant of a Schengen visa waiver, which is outlined in *EU Regulation 2018/1806*; but the political angle of granting a Schengen visa waiver remains outstanding.



In short, Belize is caught between two opposing positions: 1) EU Member States that view the granting of a Schengen visa waiver as the exclusive competence of the European Commission; and 2) European Commission (DG Home), which states that EU Member States must move the matter forward politically.

Although Belize fulfils the required criteria, greater political support is needed for a Schengen visa waiver to be granted.

3rd European Union - Community of Latin America and the Caribbean (EU-CELAC) Summit



The 3rd European Union - Community of Latin America and the Caribbean (EU-CELAC) Summit was held in Brussels, Belgium from July 17-18, 2023. Prime Minister Briceño led the Belize delegation and was accompanied by the Hon. Eamon Courtenay.

Prior to this, the last EU-CELAC Summit was convened in 2015 and since that time there have been a myriad of changes in the global geopolitical environment, as well as the international political economy. Considering this, the key aim of the 2023 Summit was centred around restarting the bi-regional relationship given the longstanding shared values, history, culture and people to people ties that exist between the two regions.

Discussion points that were addressed during the 2023 Summit included, *inter alia*: reform of the international financial architecture, climate change and its associated financing, and security and transnational crime. It has been widely recognized that the 2023 Summit aided in laying a foundation to modernize and deepen the bi-regional relationship, whereby the EU can continue to play the role of a strategic partner for CELAC, in the multilateral fora, as well as continue to be a significant trade and investment partner. Both the EU and CELAC have committed to maintain regular high-level dialogues in furtherance of this bi-regional relationship.

World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies



In June 2023, Belize deposited its instrument of acceptance for the *WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies*. This Agreement is aimed at ocean sustainability through the prohibition of fisheries subsidies and the prevention of the depletion of the world’s fish stocks. It should be noted that this Agreement also fulfils Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14, which places emphasis on conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources.

In depositing its instrument of acceptance, Belize was the first country in both the Caribbean and Central America to do so. It is hoped that two-thirds of the WTO membership will ratify and deposit their instruments of acceptance for the *WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies* to enter into force by the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC 13).

Furthermore, the Embassy of Belize in Brussels has recalibrated its efforts to provide representational support for Belize at meetings of the WTO particularly with respect to the meetings leading up to MC13 as well as the regular meetings of the WTO General Council (GC). This is important given the fact that Belize does not have a resident Permanent Mission accredited to the WTO.

The Embassy of Belize in Brussels also provided representational support at the WTO for the Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) process. At present, the IFD Agreement is still in the process of being finalized. The proposed Agreement itself is aimed at improving transparency, streamlining administrative procedures, and exchanging best practices on various issues pertaining to investment policy. All these aspects resonate with Belize’s national priorities for its investment policy; therefore, Belize formally joined the structured negotiations process in October 2023.

Bureau International des Expositions (BIE)

The BIE is an intergovernmental organization that oversees and regulates all international exhibitions and currently maintains responsibility for four types of expositions: World Expos, Specialized Expos, Horticultural Expos and the Triennale di Milano. The organization was established in 1928 and is based in Paris, France. At present, there are 182 BIE Member States. Belize joined the BIE in 1997.

In 2023, Belize was represented at both meetings of the BIE General Assembly in June and November 2023; during which the host for the 2027 Specialized Expo and the host of the 2030 World Expo were selected.

OACPS Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA)

The OACPS JPA consists of Members of Parliament of both the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries as well as Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). It is a democratic parliamentary body that aims to promote and defend democratic processes to guarantee policy autonomy in the development objectives of its member countries. As such, the JPA monitors the progress of the partnership between its member countries with an emphasis on social and economic development as well as trade relations.

Belize sustained its regular attendance at the OACPS Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA) in 2023 as the President of the Senate, Hon. Ms. Carolyn Trench Sandiford participated in both sessions that were held in February and June 2023, respectively.

Further, Belize attended the OACPS Council of Ministers that was held on July 19, 2023. One of the main issues was the future signature and implementation of the *EU-OACPS Partnership Agreement*. Subsequently, on July 20, 2023, the European Council adopted a decision on the signature and provisional application of the Agreement.

The Samoa Agreement

On October 27, 2023, Belize signed The *Samoa Agreement* in Brussels, Belgium. The official signature was held in Apia, Samoa on November 15, 2023. This Agreement replaced the 2000 *Cotonou Partnership Agreement*, which had previously endured for a 20-year period. It consists of a common foundation at the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States level and three regional protocols. This Agreement is now the legal framework that governs EU relations with the OACPS Member States.

It aims to strengthen capacities to allow both the EU and OACPS to address global challenges together. All signatories have agreed to common principles for six priority areas: democracy and human rights, sustainable economic growth and development, climate change, human and social development, peace and security, and migration and mobility.

International Court of Justice (ICJ)

The Embassy of Belize in Brussels has assisted the Office of the Agent (OTA) with representation at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague. In May 2023, Ambassador Gianni Avila, on behalf of the Agent, Ambassador Assad Shoman, assisted a member of the London-based Belize legal team in delivering the Memorial of Belize in the *Sovereignty over the Sapodilla Cayes (Belize vs. Honduras)* case.

67th General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) & Italy - Latin America and Caribbean Conference

The Embassy of Belize in Brussels provided representational support at the 67th General Conference of the IAEA, which was held in Vienna, Austria from September 25-29, 2023. In addition, the Embassy of Belize in Brussels provided support to CEO, H. E. Ms. Amalia Mai, at the 11th Italy-Latin America and Caribbean Conference, which was held in Rome, Italy from October 12-13, 2023. Belize delivered a statement that emphasized the potential benefits to be derived from the increased role of economic diplomacy between the region and Italy. This area was identified as fertile ground for further exploration.

Embassy of Belize, Havana



culture.

The Embassy of Belize in the Republic of Cuba, led by H.E. Ms. Annie Lou Burns Martinez, is continuously engaged in strengthening diplomatic and technical relations, prioritizing student welfare, encouraging collaboration and technical cooperation between both states. Bilateral and triangular efforts to build capacity reflect the priorities of Plan Belize in health and wellness, fisheries, the environment, youth mobilization, and

Notably, 2023 marked 50 years of Cuba-CARICOM relations and Ambassador Lou-Anne Burns, as Dean of the CARICOM Caucus in Cuba, helped to organize a series of successful events to highlight different aspects of cooperation in: education, arts and culture, solidarity for just causes, and events of joint historical importance. These events included: 1) a food and culture festival, 2) faith-based and secular concerts, 3) film-festival, 4) discussions and presentations, and 5) solemn political observances. The Cuban First Vice President, H.E. Salvador Valdes Mesa hosted the last such event in honour of Cuba-CARICOM Day on December 8, 2023.

The presence of 124 embassies and international Organizations in Cuba also allowed for greater exposure of Belizean and CARICOM priorities through these events and through monthly information meetings with African Union (AU) and other regional groupings.

Making Education Work - Belize and Cuba



The University of Havana maintains a schedule of CARICOM-related conferences and research in the Cathedra del Caribe in which Belizean and other regional academics participate, although the negotiation of an agreement between the national universities of both countries remains pending.

In 2023, eight (8) Cuban professionals were awarded scholarships to study English as a Second Language by the MOECST through the Regional Language Centre (RLC) of the University of Belize (UB). Six (6) accepted said scholarships and were scheduled to commence their studies in February 2024.

Conversely, eight (8) Belizean doctors graduated in 2023, with five (5) having received highest honours in the fields of general medicine, epidemiology, and radiology. Also, one (1) completed a surgery specialization and another completed a specialization in psychology. They have all returned home and are now contributing to Belize's public health system.

Currently, there are four (4) scholarship recipients that commenced their residencies in February 2024; in the fields of nephrology, paediatrics, and gynaecology, which have been jointly prioritized by both countries. In total, there are forty-eight (48) students on scholarship in Cuba, along with other students that self-fund their studies.

Support to Belizean Students

The Embassy provides significant support to all Belizean students in Cuba. As a policy, close communication is developed from the start to the end of their studies; with regular interaction with officials visiting Cuba, whenever possible. This is to ensure connections across the public service and to foster a sense of inclusion and purpose. The Embassy also supports Belizean students who opt to participate in acts of solidarity, such as encounters with Palestinian students currently in fear of the well-being of their families, friends, and compatriots.



Community-oriented Engagement

Belizean medical students also volunteer their time to support Belizean patients and their families. The Embassy fosters this type of community-oriented engagement to highlight the value of public service, in line with Plan Belize's goals of servant-leadership, integrity and teamwork. There are regular activities for students, and they are also invited to participate in events, where appropriate, with the diplomatic corps to broaden their worldviews, and to build communication skills and networks.

Official Visits, Meetings, and Agreements



In 2023, Cuba held the PPT of the Group of 77 + China. Cuba's presidency was marked by inclusion and advocacy. The series of SDG related ministerial meetings took place over the course of the year in Havana, with delegations from Belize able to benefit from bilateral meetings with Cuban officials, at high levels, to advance our interests in cooperation.

The Summit of the G77 + China took place in September 2023, in Havana. Belize was represented by the Hon. Cordel Hyde, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Natural Resources, Petroleum, and Mining.

The Hon. Orlando Habet and a technical team also attended the G77 + China Ministers of the Environment Meeting, making use of the opportunity to meet with Cuban Minister, H.E. Elba Rosa Pérez Montoya, to identify areas for collaboration in relation to an agreement signed between both countries in 2022. A project on sargassum was identified through triangular assistance. There was also a commitment to pursue cooperation in meteorology, and an early warning system.

At said Environment Meeting, Belize was also asked for assistance in Protected Areas System Management, including: funding of same, co-management agreement models and the management of protected areas. Other areas identified for assistance were: best practice in mitigation and adaptation, payment for environmental services, and the identification of joint projects for submission to funding agencies.

Finally, the Embassy also coordinated and assisted officials from Belize by providing or receiving training in areas relating to: climate change and the environment, engineering and hydrology, and cultural exchanges via triangular assistance from UNESCO's Transcultural Programme.

Looking Forward

Looking forward, Cuba remains receptive for collaboration and the sharing of best practices in other fields such as: agriculture, agro-tourism and agro-processing, youth programmes for rural youth, and the development of artisan and community art projects.

Embassy of Belize, Mexico City



Oscar Arnold
has commenced.

The Embassy of Belize in Mexico, led by H.E. Mr. Oscar Arnold, remains engaged in a wide gamut of activities, including political dialogue to obtain support for implementation of the ICJ's eventual ruling; and increasing the export of Belizean agricultural products, such as cattle, into the Mexican market. Although a formal trade agreement is not yet in place the process

On the investment promotion front, the Embassy continues to promote Belizean products and investment opportunities in Belize. Several high-end tourism projects have Mexican investors as their principal beneficiaries. Several prospective investors from Mexico also participated in the Second Belize Investment Summit held on August 30, 2023, in San Pedro Ambergris Caye.



Investors from a wide cross section of industries such as: tourism, medical, agricultural, renewable energy, and pharmaceuticals participated in said summit.

Notably, Belize was the first country to formally support the civil case brought against US gun manufacturers, in US courts, by the Mexican Government. The legal suit is in relation to firearms manufactured in the US being illegally exported to the region, which support the narco trade and resulted in the increase of firearm related deaths in the region. In 2023, Ambassador Arnold was invited to be part of a panel that presented on the illicit firearms trade in the region. In a landmark ruling, US courts handed down a decision that US gun manufacturers do have a case to answer.

In April 2023, the Embassy hosted four events at *Gran Café Parroquia* and the *Museo Recinto de la Reforma* in Vera Cruz; a local coffee brand that has been in business for over 200 years. The events titled “*Sabor Del Caribe*” and “*Hilando el Mar*” brought local Belizean cuisine and steel pan



music to the tourist destination and port city of Puerto Vera Cruz. The four-day event introduced Veracruzanos to Belizean made conch soup, rice and beans, stew chicken, potato salad, conch fritters and bread pudding. Additionally, two (2) young Belizean musicians played three steel pan concerts much to the delight of their audiences. This event was held to promote Belize's tourism product through gastronomy, music, and culture.

During bilateral meetings, several hot button regional issues have risen, for instance: climate change, illegal migration, human trafficking, and regional security. Specifically, there was a key high-level meeting between a Belizean delegation, led by Hon. Florencio Marin Jr., Minister of National Defence and Border Security, Minister of Home Affairs and Mexican President, H.E. Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's Security Cabinet. Very importantly, this meeting brought together the brain trust of the security apparatus of both countries to strategize on how best to combat the trans-shipment of narcotics and the illicit firearms trade, among other security concerns.

Embassy of Belize, San Salvador



The Embassy of Belize, El Salvador, led by H.E. Ms. Cherie Nisbet, continuously: explored new markets, expanded present markets, promoted Belizean products, including tourism, explored new investment opportunities and assisted Belizeans living in El Salvador.

In July 2023, Ambassador Nisbet held a meeting with the El Salvador Chamber of Commerce with a view to promote the Belize Investment Summit; as well as to invite possible investors to participate in said Summit. Furthermore, Ambassador Nisbet organized a Webinar with the Chamber of Commerce of El Salvador, in July 2023, with presentations by Mrs. Narda Garcia, CEO in the Prime Minister's Office, and Dr. Leroy Almendarez, Director of Belize Trade and Investment Development Service (BELTRAIDE). The webinar was attended virtually by one hundred and fourteen (114) companies from El Salvador, resulting in at least three (3) Salvadoran investors that committed to participate in the Investment Summit, and others interested in visiting Belize soon.



In August 2023, Ambassador Nisbet secured a meeting between Hon. Eamon Courtenay and the Vice President of El Salvador, H.E. Félix Ulloa, where both sides discussed Belize's deepening integration with SICA. Very importantly, resulting from a meeting between Minister Courtenay and H.E. Maria Luisa Hayem, Minister of Economy of El Salvador negotiations began for a Partial Scope Agreement between Belize and El Salvador. The first meeting took place in December 2023, in Belize; with a second meeting scheduled for March 2024, in El Salvador.

Also, in August 2023, Ambassador Nisbet accompanied Hon. Abelardo Mai, Minister of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise to a meeting with Lic. Óscar Enrique Guardado Calderón, Minister of Agriculture, El Salvador to continue strengthening the robust relations between Belize and El Salvador in agriculture; particularly the exportation of fruits and vegetables from Belize to El

Salvador. Soon thereafter, in September 2023, there was a follow-up meeting between both Ministers in Belize to establish formal linkages for trade via a Partial Scope Agreement.

In November 2023, Ambassador Nisbet, along with Mr. Victor Manjarres, Account Director-Latin America TM Americas, a marketing agency presently representing BTB in the Latin American Region, hosted a breakfast meeting and met with approximately 20 Salvadoran tour operators to promote tourism in Belize; which was well-received.



Additionally, the Ministry of Tourism of El Salvador is currently reviewing a MOU in Tourism between both countries which is scheduled to be signed in 2024.

SICA

During Belize’s PPT of SICA, Ambassador Nisbet was invited to and attended several presentations given by the different bodies of SICA. Ambassador Nisbet delivered remarks at three of said presentations, namely: 1) presentation of SICA’s Work plan 2022-2026, 2 Call for Papers - *“La Integración Centroamericana Avanzando Hacia El Desarrollo Sostenible, Resiliente, Innovador e Inclusivo”*, and 3) opening remarks for the results of the INCAVPESCA Project - OSPESCA.

Activities undertaken by Ambassador Nisbet



November 2023.

Notably, Ambassador Nisbet participated in the group of Women Ambassadors in El Salvador, comprised of 7, which actively promoted gender equality. One of the many activities that they organized was the illumination of the National Palace of El Salvador in the colour orange to promote the International Day for the Elimination of All Types of Violence against Women and Girls, in

Other Diplomatic Work

Ambassador Nisbet is also the concurrent Ambassador of Belize to the Republic of Honduras and to the Republic of Costa Rica, and as such oversees Mr. Richard Vinelli, *Charge’ d’Affaires a.i.* of Belize in Honduras; and Mr. Luis Fernando Salazar, Honorary Consul in Costa Rica. In general, they consult with the Embassy of Belize on consular matters and investment matters, report on investment opportunities and political emergencies, and assist Belizeans living in said countries.

Belizeans detained in El Salvador

During the reporting period, six (6) Belizeans were detained in El Salvador; however, in June 2023 and in January 2024, two (2) of said Belizeans were freed. As such, there are only four (4) Belizeans that are currently detained in El Salvador. Ambassador Nisbet liaises with Belizeans detained in El Salvador approximately every three (3) months to know of their status, assist them where possible, and to ascertain humane treatment within the detention centres.



Embassy of Belize, Taipei



The Embassy of Belize in the Republic of China (Taiwan), led by H.E. Dr. Candice Pitts, continued to strengthen diplomatic relations through the facilitation of commercial opportunities between both countries, tourism promotion, academic and cultural engagements, and people-to-people exchanges. One of the highlights during this reporting period was President, H.E. Tsai Ing-wen’s official visit to Belize from April 2-4, 2023. During her visit, President Tsai attended the signing ceremony of the Technical Cooperation Framework Agreement, where President Tsai presented Prime Minister John Briceño with a donation of 5,000 laptops from Taiwanese manufacturers to assist Belize to improve learning resources for disadvantaged groups, such as children and women in rural areas.

President Tsai also: delivered an address at a Joint Sitting of Parliament, received “2023 Resolution to Support Democratic Taiwan Motion,” inspected the “Sheep and Goat Project” in Central Farm, and attended the Achievement Exhibition of the Women Economic Empowerment Programme. This visit displayed the strength of the bilateral relations between both countries.

Trade and Investment

As a part of the Embassy’s efforts to introduce Belize’s products to Taiwanese trading partners, the Embassy participated in several major trade exhibitions in Taiwan, such as: Taipei International Food Show, and the Taiwan International Tea, Coffee and Wine Expo. At these trade shows, the Embassy displayed Belize’s products, such as: cacao, coffee, tea, jam, juice, wine, rum, pepper sauce, and seafood. The Embassy also invited representatives from BELTRAIDE to engage with the Taiwanese business community at said events. Thousands of visitors stopped by Belize’s booth to learn about Belize, and numerous Taiwanese importers showed interest in Belize’s products.

During the Hon. Christopher Coye’s visit to Taiwan, from June 26 to 28, 2023, Ambassador Pitts accompanied Minister to meetings with: Johnson Seafood Co. Ltd., King Bou Sugar Co., Suntown Chocolate C., and Yen & Brothers Enterprise Co. Ltd. to and discuss further collaboration. Through these meetings, Taiwanese trading partners were able to learn more about Belize’s products and industries, as well as the benefits of trading with Belize.

Tourism Promotion

The Embassy took a multifaceted approach to promoting Belize’s tourism product in Taiwan. Ambassador Pitts accepted interviews from Taiwanese media such as Taiwan News, Focus Taiwan, Radio Taiwan International (RTI), International Community Radio Taipei (ICRT), and Travel Luxe Magazine to showcase Belize’s cultures, cuisines, people, and tourist attractions to Taiwanese and the international community; and to encourage them to visit Belize.

To further promote Belize’s cultures and tourism product in Taiwan, the Embassy coordinated with two major bus companies, with a fleet of 30 buses, to highlight same on 30 different routes in Taipei and New Taipei City.

Diplomatic Representation in Taiwan

The Embassy initiated a Hurricane Lisa Relief Drive and hosted a Donation Ceremony where Taiwanese donors provided information on donated items. Also, the Embassy presented certificates of appreciation to donors at said event.

On September 21, 2023, the Embassy hosted the 42nd Anniversary of Belize’s Independence Day Reception to celebrate Belize’s Independence Day and to promote Belize’s culture to Taiwanese government officials, media, and business community through cultural exhibitions and performances.

Further, Ambassador Pitts hosted visits by Belizean officials such as: H.E. Rossana Briceno, Hon. Oscar Requena and delegation; Hon. Florencio Marín Jr., Dr. Leroy Almendarez and delegation; Hon. Orlando Habet and delegation; Hon. Ramiro Ramirez, Hon. Rodwell Ferguson and Hon. Ramon Cervantes, Hon. Christopher Coye, among others.



Belizean students and nationals in Taiwan

During the reporting period, the Embassy welcomed a total of fifty-eight (58) Belizean scholarship recipients to Taiwan, including forty-five (45) ICDF Scholarship recipients, and thirteen (13) MOFA Scholarship students. Upon their arrival, the Embassy dispatched information on studying and living

in Taiwan to each of the students. Further, Ambassador Pitts met with the new students at the ICDF Scholarship Orientation and MOFA Scholarship Welcome Party.



initiatives.

The Embassy also provided consular services and assistance to Belizean students and nationals, such as: document authentication, passport applications, representation, and funds for selective student-led

High Commission of Belize, London

The High Commission of Belize (HCB), London, led by H.E. Mrs. Therese Rath, continued its engagement at both the bilateral and multilateral levels. In addition, the HCB has cultivated Belize's relations with its non-resident accreditations, notably Ireland and Estonia. Regional coordination with the CARICOM Caucus of Heads of Missions in London remained a central function of the HCB. Furthermore, the HCB continued to maintain and strengthen relations with members of the diplomatic corps and other international organizations in London. The HCB possesses the only consular office in Europe, and as such continued to provide essential consular services to Belizeans.

Coronation of King Charles III



The Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla on May 6, 2023 was attended by: H.E. Dame



Froyla Tzalam, the Governor-General of Belize; Hon Francis Fonseca, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Education, Culture, Science and Technology; H.E. Rath; and Ambassador Stuart Leslie, Cabinet Secretary.

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)

A key objective of the Quarterly Meetings is to advance the UK-Caribbean relationship through the UK-Caribbean Forum, which occurs biennially. At the UK-Caribbean Forum held in Kingston, Jamaica on May 18, 2023, the Forum concluded with the adoption of a Communiqué and Action Plan which charts the advancement of the special Caribbean-UK relationship over the next two (2)

years. The HCB worked with the CARICOM Caucus of Heads of Missions in London and the FCDO to draft the adopted Communiqué and Action Plan.



Economic Relations

CARIFORUM-UK Economic Partnership Agreement

The HCB supports the protection of Belize’s economic and trade interests under the CARIFORUM-UK Economic Partnership Agreement. This included monitoring the fair-trade situation; maintaining contact with commercial partners such as Tate and Lyle and Fyffes; and liaising with the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) on responses to the fair-trade situation.

In this regard, the HCB recently facilitated an exchange of letters between Hon. Eamon Courtenay and Rt. Hon. Kemi Badenoch MP, UK Secretary of State for the Department for Business and Trade, December 2023 and January 2024, concerning the potential expansion of similar preferential arrangements of competing banana exporters into the UK market.

UK-Caribbean Business and Investment Forum

The UK-Caribbean Business and Investment Forum was held on November 28, 2023 in London. The forum was the result of growing interest in Belize and the rest of the Caribbean among UK government and private sector representatives and a changing approach on partnerships in trade, business and investment.

Public Diplomacy

UK Premiere of “Unknown Belize”



The UK premiere of the documentary film series “Unknown Belize” was held on June 7, 2023 at the Royal Geographic Society in London. The four-part series explored Belize’s natural heritage and work in conservation. It featured Belizean conservationists and sustainable agribusinesses which provide a blueprint for the world.

Over 340 guests attended the premiere which was a success in that it elevated Belize’s profile among a diverse range of people, including: Belizean diaspora, Belizean students, UK government officials, the Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General, and UK private sector.

Commonwealth Secretariat (CS)

HCB supported the planning of the Secretariat’s Country Evaluation team’s visit to Belize in May 2023. This team was tasked to review the Secretariat’s programming in the country. Belize is one of the Member States most involved in Commonwealth projects as beneficiaries/partners. Under the strategic plan for 2017-2021, which consists of fifty-one (51) projects, Belize was involved in twenty (20).

Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting (CTMM)

H.E. Rath represented Belize at the CTMM from June 5-6, 2023. Trade Ministers agreed on a Commonwealth Statement delivered by Rwanda to the 13th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (MC13) in February 2024. Said statement was noticeably broad and general on key trade issues, given the varied positions of Commonwealth Member States in these negotiations at the WTO.

Commonwealth Foundation (CF)

In May 2023, Belize accepted the offer to reinstate its lapsed membership to the CF which provides grants to civil society. Very importantly, CF added a special fund for SIDS grants which ought to be promoted in Belize as a funding opportunity.

Non-Resident Accreditations

Republic of Estonia



H.E. Rath presented her credentials to the President of Estonia in Tallinn on November 15, 2023.

Republic of Ireland



H.E. Rath presented her credentials to the President of Ireland in Dublin on December 19, 2023.

Representation at Ireland's Latin America and the Caribbean Business and Economic Forum

H.E. Rath represented Belize at Ireland's first Latin America-Caribbean Business and Economic Forum held on November 21, 2023 in Dublin, which was intended to encourage knowledge exchanges and deepen engagements between representatives from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and Irish investors. H.E. Rath participated in the panel discussion on "Strengthening Connectivity Connecting Ireland and LAC: Trade, Tourism, and People to People Linkages".

Regional Coordination

CARICOM

The CARICOM Caucus of Heads of Missions in London continued to meet monthly to discuss political matters, coordinate actions at the bilateral and multilateral levels, and organize joint events.



Belize Delegation and Visitor Support

Office of the Agent (OOTA) to the International Court of Justice (ICJ)

HCB continues to provide logistical support to the OOTA. On January 5, 2024, H.E. Rath accompanied Ambassador Assad Shoman to a procedural meeting with the President of the ICJ regarding the case against Honduras.

Belize Defence Force (BDF)

The BHC continued its support BDF soldiers undergoing training in the UK.

Chevening Scholars

H.E. Rath hosted a welcome dinner at the High Commissioner's residence for the new cohort of Chevening Scholars to the UK.

Belizean Diaspora

The BHC continued to build its database of contact information for the Belizean diaspora in the UK, with a view to involve them in BHC events.

Consular Services

Since the HCB possesses the only consular office in Europe it processed one hundred and seventy-three (173) e-passports and thirty-one (31) nationality certificates, from April to December 2023.

I - Protocol and Consular Department

The Protocol Department ensured that proper procedures were followed in accordance with national and international codes in relation to diplomatic formality and etiquette. The Protocol Unit coordinated all official events undertaken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade and planned events such as: Royal Visits, State and Official Visits, State Receptions, presentation of credentials by Ambassadors-Designate, State and Official Funerals, International Conferences and Meetings, National Day Events and Diplomatic Week.

The Protocol Department stood at the front line of diplomatic engagement and welcomed visiting Heads of States and Government and international visitors to Belize, providing courtesies to all visiting dignitaries, and other guests.

In addition, the Protocol Department administered the arrangements to facilitate the operation of foreign missions and organizations accredited to Belize. The Department oversaw the administrative services offered to the Diplomatic and Consular Corps, and International and Regional Organizations.

The Consular Department assisted Belize's Embassies and Consulates abroad in providing consular services to Belizeans in the diaspora, specifically in cases of personal matters of Belizeans abroad, such as: Belizeans in distress, death of Belizeans abroad, political emergencies and natural disasters.

J - Foreign Trade

Developments in the Trade Landscape 2023/2024

Economic Partnership Agreement with ROC (Taiwan)



The *Belize-Taiwan Economic Cooperation Agreement (ECA)* came into effect in January 2022 after ratification by the Taiwanese Government. The Agreement provides duty free access for 200 agricultural goods from Belize including: sugar, beef, turkey, tilapia and other fish fillets, lobster and shrimp, cheese, beans, dried fruits, corn meal, cassava starch and flour, soya products, orange juice concentrate, and sauces, jams and jellies, and 45 industrial goods from Taiwan. In 2023, the DGFT conducted a review of the Agreement with a view to advance its implementation and encourage more Belizean firms to utilize the enhanced market access.

The Belizean private sector has slowly begun to take advantage of the agreement, with BSI sending its first shipment of sugar to Taiwan (a total of eight containers) in December 2023. In 2024, it is anticipated that trade flows will be strengthened once Belize's ability to meet import regulations for shrimp is clarified between the food safety agencies of both countries. Further, the first meeting of the Administrative Commission was held on January 18, 2024.

CARIFORUM - EU Economic Partnership Agreement

The Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) is a trade and development partnership agreement within the framework of the Cotonou Agreement, between 15 CARIFORUM Countries and the 27 European Union (EU) Member States. It establishes a comprehensive trade agreement not limited to trade in goods to promote sustainable development, improving CARIFORUM access to the EU market while granting EU imports improved access to CARIFORUM's market.



The EPA also promotes cooperation in a range of trade-related areas such as competition, innovation and intellectual property, public property, environment, social aspects, and protection of personal data.

This EPA transitioned the UK's trade obligations as a member of the EU into a stand-alone EPA with the Caribbean Forum of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States following Britain's exit from the EU in 2020. This agreement secured preferential market access to a key market for Belize's traditional exports of sugar, banana, and every other exportable product. Converting market

access into market presence is critical to realizing the benefits and successful implementation of the CARIFORUM-EU EPA.

In recognition of the need to reduce time and facilitate the ease of doing business, the GOB secured grant funding from the CDB utilizing funds available under the CSME Standby Facility, established under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF) for four (4) projects.

These trade facilitation projects, valued at US\$1.5mm, benefited interfacing agencies such as: 1) Customs and Excise Department (CED), 2) Belize Bureau of Standards (BBS) and 3) Belize Agricultural Health Authority (BAHA). The long-term benefits will contribute to building capacity and resilience in the public sector while simultaneously supporting modernization initiatives. The Toledo Cacao Growers Association (TCGA), a private entity, was the beneficiary of project financing to build its productive capacity, to establish a processing facility, attain international certification and improve its marketing for cacao and cacao-based products.

CARIFORUM - UK Economic Partnership Agreement



Belize is a party to the rollover *CARIFORUM-UK EPA* that was signed in 2019 and came into force when the UK left the EU in 2020. The Agreement ensures continued access to the UK market that was secured under the *CARIFORUM-EU EPA*. The UK remains the largest export market for Belize and a primary destination for Belizean sugar and bananas. Since the inception of the Agreement, the first preparatory meeting of Ministers of CARIFORUM was held on November 12, 2021 where the draft rules of procedure for the Joint Council, and other matters were approved. The First Meeting of the CARIFORUM/UK Joint Council was held (virtually) on 19th December 2023.

CARICOM Matters



Regarding Belize's engagement with CARICOM (Caribbean Community), several key activities occurred in 2023 to continue shaping our involvement with the region. In 2023, CARICOM commemorated its 50th year anniversary with a week filled with diverse events. Activities ranged from a captivating poetry competition to the creation of a signature CARICOM dish. Cafes proudly featured CARICOM labels on their coffee drinks. Across the nation, churches held special services dedicated to highlighting CARICOM's significance. The week ended with a high-level forum, delving into Belize's pivotal role and the broader current affairs within CARICOM.

Also, the implementation of the CARICOM Interactive Marketplace and Suspension Procedure has progressed. This CARICOM marketplace will register suppliers and buyers of CARICOM originating goods, allowing regional buyers to find sellers of regionally produced goods, thereby creating the conditions for direct contact between the parties. To further advance the work of the Secretariat, on April 14, 2023, Belize held an introductory session with the private sector to familiarize them with the features of said online platform.



Additionally in 2023, the Conference of Heads resolved to give top priority to slashing CARICOM's food import bill by 25% by 2025. This initiative will focus particularly on key products that are heavily imported within the region. Achieving this goal entails ramping up the production of essential agricultural goods in which the region holds a comparative advantage, and which Belizean farmers are well positioned to capitalize on.

Also, discussions on implementing the Front of Package Nutrition Label (FOPNL) to effectively combat the escalating rates of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in the Caribbean are ongoing, with Belize advocating for flexibility in endorsing multiple FOPNL systems. In October 2023 the Cabinet agreed for Belize to include Multiple FOPNL Systems. This would allow Belize to incorporate one or more FOPNL systems in their adaptation of the standard. This approach recognizes the diversity of labelling models available and allows Member States to select the FOPNL system(s) that align best with their existing practices, consumer preferences, and trading environment.

Ongoing developments include the implementation of the Monitoring Mechanism for Sugar (MMS) and instruments for the regional competition framework continues. Efforts to engage Article 164 firms for regional development through the CARICOM Development Fund (CDF) continue, with a mid-term review scheduled for 2024.



Enactment of Legislation to facilitate CARICOM Nationals

Five key amendments were made to both the *Immigration Act* and *Caribbean Community (Free Movement of Skilled Persons) Act* to further the application of the rights and obligations provided for under the *Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas (RTC)*.

These key amendments include: (i) the insertion of two new categories of skilled persons entitled to free movement within CARICOM (agricultural workers and private security officers), (ii) the amendments to the qualification requirements for Household Domestics (now Domestic Workers),

(iii) amendment to the definition of a CARICOM national to reflect the new definition as laid out in the Protocol to Amend Article 32 of the *RTC*, (iv) the separation of the application for a business name registration from the application for indefinite stay and simplify the process, and (v) the amendment to both Acts to provide greater clarity of the rights granted to CARICOM Nationals. These amendments are included within the *Immigration Act (Amendment) 2023* SI No. 11 of 2023 and *CARICOM (Free Movement of Skilled Persons) (Amendment) SI No. 12 of 2023*).

Also, the regulations under the *CARICOM (Free Movement of Skilled Persons) Act* were enacted (SI No. 50 of 2023). The regulations under the *CARICOM (Free Movement of Skilled Persons) Act* outlines procedures associated with the: application, issuance, upgrade, replacement, amendment and verification of Qualifying Certificates, procedures for the revocation, surrendering and cancellation of Qualifying Certificates, procedures to be observed when an offence is committed, and procedures for the maintenance of a register and registrar of qualified Skilled CARICOM nationals.

CSME Focal Points Exchange



The CSME Focal Points Attachment Programme which was funded under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF) - “Strengthening the Framework of CARICOM Integration and Cooperation Process” (SFCICP) Programme was a week-long activity that commenced in Barbados in October 2023 and continued in Belize in November 2023; and was subsequently replicated in other Member States.

During their visit to Belize, the CSME focal points from Trinidad and Tobago and Saint Lucia observed, learned, shared and gathered information on the national integration process. It was also an opportunity for the focal points to immerse themselves in diverse cultures, traditions, and languages of Belize. This firsthand experience fostered a sense of regional identity, understanding, and appreciation, strengthening the bonds of trust and friendship among CSME Member States.

The exchange programme between CSME focal points from Trinidad and Tobago and Saint Lucia with Belize offered significant benefits. It facilitated knowledge sharing, allowed participants to learn from Belize's successes in the integration process and apply these insights in their own countries. Networking opportunities with Belizean counterparts, government officials, and business leaders fostered increased cooperation and information sharing. Moreover, the exchange helped to identify common challenges to integration, informing policy discussions and collective problem-solving efforts. It reinforced a sense of regional identity and promoted policy adaptation tailored to each country's unique circumstances.

World Trade Organization (WTO) Matters

In 2023, Belize ratified the *Fisheries Subsidies Agreement (FSA)* and became a party to the *Joint Initiative for the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement (IIFDA)*. Given the lack of resident representation in Geneva, Belize does not actively participate in any WTO committees. However, Belize continues to monitor the Trade Facilitation Committee, as the implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement is a high priority for the Government.



Belize participated in the 12th Ministerial Conference of the WTO in July 2022 and the Senior Officials Meeting in October 2023 in preparation for the upcoming Ministerial Conference. In 2024, Belize participated in the 13th Ministerial Conference for the WTO. In preparation for the Ministerial, Belize's Senior Officials remained actively engaged in both the CARICOM and OACPS Senior Officials Meetings to build convergence on key issues of interest for the regions.



The Ministerial Conference was held from February 26 to March 1, 2024, in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Belize engaged the meeting through participation in the CARICOM Caucus that attended, which resulted in the advancement of beneficial outcomes for Belize on matters such as: fisheries subsidies, development, and e-commerce. Additionally, Belize's participation in the now concluded *Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement* was noted, though the Agreement was not considered for inclusion in Annex IV of the *Marrakesh Agreement*.

The Ministerial concluded on March 1, 2024, without significant progress in key areas for Belize such as: a) work programme to reform harmful agricultural subsidies, b) concluded agreement on the second wave of the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement negotiations to discipline overcapacity and overfishing, and c) work programme to mainstream environment and climate change into the WTO's core deliberating functions.

Belize will, however, continue to monitor deliberations and negotiations at the WTO in Geneva through dialogue with CARICOM counterparts. Notwithstanding, this approach to intelligence gathering significantly disenfranchises Belize in the WTO, as it creates significant lags in receiving information from the WTO and creates undue burdens and delays on staff engagement in capital on multilateral trade issues, which is something that merits careful consideration going forward.

Trade Facilitation Implementation Roadmap

The MFA&FT secured the Cabinet's support for a Trade Facilitation Implementation Roadmap (TFIR), which seeks to facilitate and ensure Belize's implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). The objective of the TFA is to reduce time and costs associated with clearance of goods at border points. Additionally, a National Committee on Trade Facilitation (NCTF) was constituted to implement the roadmap. Notably, the roadmap is not only a guide for implementation, but a policy instrument for accessing donor funds to aid implementation.

At the end of 2023, Belize had fulfilled 37.8% of its commitments and obligations under the WTO TFA for Categories A & B. Belize's implementation performance will further improve in 2024, given that two (2) projects emanating from the roadmap under technical assistance extended by the CDB are underway.

Work on the projects started in 2022, continued in 2023 and is expected to be completed in 2024. [ZG1] [JW2] The first project was to conduct a Time Release Study (TRS) for Belize; and the second project is a consultancy for an Electronic Single Window (ESW) for trade. Regarding current project status, the consultancy for an ESW for trade in Belize is about to be finalized with only one (1) project deliverable outstanding, which is expected in March 2024. For the TRS, the team is at Phase 3: Analysis of data and conclusions and that project is expected to finalize in May/June 2024. Lastly, the Customs Harmonized Bill, which addresses several areas covered by the WTO TFA, is before Parliament awaiting enactment and is expected to improve Belize's capacity to bolster cross border trade and support businesses.

National Trade Negotiation Commission

In line with #planBelize, the MFA&FT reactivated the NTNC in 2021 to provide a forum for tripartite dialogue and consultations between the government, the private sector and civil society of Belize on trade and related matters. The NTNC has met six (6) times since it was reactivated. The NTNC provides the private sector, academia, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with an appropriate forum to support national dialogue, and approval on important trade policy matters. In 2023 some key decisions from the NTNC included:

- A. Commissioning of Belize's first Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) study focusing on trade between Belize and Mexico.
- B. Approval of the Task Force on Payments (TFP) charged to access and implement the obligations under payment facilitation.
- C. The commencement of negotiations with El Salvador and the expansion of the Belize - Guatemala Partial Scope Agreement.

- D. Endorsement of the Belize positions tabled for the 13th Ministerial Conference of the WTO; and,
- E. Support for the roadmap created for the National Committee for Trade Facilitation (NCTF).

Belize-Mexico Trade Relations

Presidential Decree (DOF: 16/05/22)

Mexico implemented a Presidential Decree (DOF: 16/05/22) to address inflation, granting duty-free-quota-free access to seventy-two (72) agricultural products. Originating from the President's visit to Belize in May 2022, the decree was extended to December 31, 2023. This has proven to be a fruitful arrangement for the Belizean private sector noted by the increase in export value to Mexico from \$5.6 Million BZD in 2021 to \$11.4 Million BZD in 2023, representing a more than doubling of sales when compared to the previous year. Notable increases can be seen in the exports of cattle and soya bean oil from Belize to Mexico. Subsequent modifications, published on December 27, 2023, introduced provisions exempting import tariff payments for specific products until March 31, 2025, contingent on fulfilling certain conditions.

Dynamic Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) Study



Anticipating negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement with Mexico, Belize's National Trade Negotiating Committee (NTNC) commissioned the implementation of a CGE Study. The study, spearheaded by consultant Dr. Miles Light and supported by an Inter-agency Task Force (ITF), comprises two phases. Phase One, focusing on trade in goods was completed and presented outcomes in November 2023, with the report undergoing final review by the UNECLAC team. Phase Two, covering trade in services, commenced with private sector consultations in various sectors during the week of November 13-17, 2023. These consultations aimed to provide insights into services trade and contribute to the overall model development. The objective is to assess the economy-wide impact of a possible free trade agreement with Mexico on Belize, particularly in terms of GDP, exports, imports, employment, production, and the competitiveness of various sectors.

Belize - El Salvador Trade Relations



The General Framework for the Negotiation of a Partial Scope Agreement (PSA) between Belize and El Salvador was signed on August 11, 2023, in El Salvador. The agreement was signed by the then-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, and Immigration of Belize, Hon. Eamon Courtenay; and the Minister of Economy of El Salvador, H.E. María Luisa Hayem Brevé. After the signing both parties engaged in a series of activities, including the exchange of Trade and Economic Information on August 25, 2023; Belize's submission of the draft text of said Agreement on September 26, 2023; and the simultaneous exchange of product lists of interest on October 11, 2023.

The First Round of Negotiations on the PSA text took place from December 11 to 13, 2023 in Belmopan City, Belize at the Leigh Richardson Building (MFA&FT Headquarters). It covered various issues under three (3) main points: 1) Legal and Institutional Issues - Market Access, Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, 2) Technical Barriers to Trade, and 3) Investment Promotion and Cooperation. Both parties agreed to commence the second round of negotiations 30 days after the exchange of first offers on products of export interest and specific rules of origin, on February 2, 2024. Technical group meetings will continue in the interim to address outstanding matters from the first round. The second round of negotiations is expected to occur in April 2024.

K - Institutional Strengthening and training

Social media

Re-launch of MFA&FT's Website - September 20, 2023

During the MFA's annual diplomatic week, the Ministry unveiled its revamped website, aiming to enhance its user-friendliness for both domestic and international audiences. The initiative aimed to ensure the website provides accurate data and information reflecting the Ministry's ongoing work and operations. With these goals in mind, the updated website was reimagined as an easily accessible platform where visitors can seamlessly navigate and access information on:

- The Ministry's organizational structure, featuring a brief history of Belize, its mission and vision, and other informative aspects.
- The Foreign Affairs section offering a summary of Belize's bilateral relations, as well as its involvement in regional and international organizations.
- The Cooperation segment highlighting the Ministry's international cooperation efforts and introducing the newly established International Cooperation Council. Additionally, it includes a dedicated section for the latest scholarship opportunities offered to Belizeans by partner organizations.

- Improved accessibility of information for overseas embassies, consulates, and international partners accredited to Belize, available under the Consular Service tab. This section features a filter tool for easy navigation; and,
- The Resource tab providing access to public speeches by the Minister, videos, and the Ministry's annual technical reports.

Revamping the MFA&FT Brand

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade recognized the importance of a robust brand that mirrors our forward-thinking foreign policy, thereby bolstering our nation's credibility, professionalism, and coherence in international representation. Thus, in January 2024, the Ministry embarked on a rebranding initiative, standardizing its logo, creating logos for its diplomatic missions, and establishing a cohesive visual brand identity for both digital platforms and everyday tangible use.

Elevating Our Online Social Media Engagement

As part of its rebranding efforts, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade acknowledged the necessity of a strategic communication plan to effectively showcase and garner support for its initiatives. Consequently, the Ministry shifted its communication strategy, particularly focusing on enhancing its presence across social media platforms.

To achieve this, the Ministry undertook the following key actions:

- Conducted a comprehensive assessment of its social media presence.
- Implemented enhanced security measures for all social media profiles.
- Established a presence on Instagram, becoming the third government ministry to do so, aimed at showcasing its work to a local and younger audience.
- Leveraged Instagram as the primary platform for sharing short videos highlighting its initiatives; and,
- Enhanced its communication approach on Facebook and Twitter by curating more relevant and engaging content.

Trainings (Foreign Affairs)

The following trainings were undertaken by the Foreign Affairs Unit during the reporting period:

- Disarmament and non-proliferation for diplomats in Latin America and the Caribbean, July 2023, Mexico City.
- Diplomatic Training Programme for Mid-Career Diplomats from Latin America and the Caribbean, November 6-17, 2023, The Hague, Netherlands.
- Regional BBNJ Multi-stakeholder Sensitization Workshop, Miami, USA, December 6-7, 2023.
- Workshop and Executive Seminar on Armed Violence Reduction and Prevention and Human Rights - USA Embassy, Belmopan, January 30-February 1, 2024; and,

- CARICOM Regional BBNJ Workshop, Miami, USA, April 11-12, 2024.

Trainings (Foreign Trade)

The following trainings were undertaken by the Foreign Trade Unit during the reporting period:

- OACPS Senior Officials Meeting on Critical Raw Materials, November 20-22, 2023, Lusaka, Zambia.
- Trade in Services training, September 18-22, 2023.
- WTO Advanced Workshop on Agriculture Notifications, October 3-5, 2023.
- Introduction to WTO, E-learning platform.
- Multilateral Agreements in the WTO, E-learning platform.
- WTO Young Professionals Programme, July-September 2023.
- The CSME Focal Points Attachment Programme, October 30-November 3, 2023; and,
- WTO Regional Trade Policy Course, July-September 2023.

L - Lessons Learnt/Challenges (Foreign Affairs)

The 2023/2024 reporting period continued to be a year of lessons on all fronts for the MFA&FT. Some of the recurrent lessons learnt were the need to/for:

1. protect Belize's sovereignty and territorial integrity;
2. keep abreast of key issues to ensure long term continuity and succession planning in a fast-paced, political environment;
3. establish a recruitment process to attract highly skilled young professionals;
4. establish a rotation schedule for diplomatic postings;
5. secure training and capacity building opportunities for technical staff of MFAFT;
6. identify adequate cooperation (technical and financial) execute MFAFT ambitious agenda;
7. promote better internal coordination to obtain information for inclusion in the annual technical report;
8. enhanced coordination and effective communication with key stakeholders and ministries;
9. active participation at key meetings - cooperation meetings, negotiations on key issues such as climate change, economic development forums and sustainable development issues;
10. ensure better coordination with key government ministries - obtain list of focal points;
11. expand physical space at MFA HQ to accommodate the recruitment of more technical staff to strengthen the MFAFT; and,
12. a systematic approach to establish diplomatic relations with pending countries.

Lessons Learnt/Challenges (Foreign Trade)

The complex demands of the regional and multilateral trading systems, anchored on strong rules-based criteria, have necessitated the demand for focused, coherent and harmonious collaborative engagement with relevant trade interfacing agencies. The re-activation of the National Trade Negotiation Commission (NTNC) in 2021 was the first step to deepening this collaboration with not only the private sector but also with the other non-state actors - including labour, academia and civil society organizations.

Another avenue of opportunity rests within SICA and SIECA. Further deepening of trade opportunities of our Central American neighbours through bilateral and multilateral agreements will have positive outcomes for Belizeans through enhanced market access.

With SIECA, full accession to the Central American Monetary Council (CAMC) will give Belize access to the Interconnected System of Payments (SIP), thus providing an easier mechanism for lodging payments for imports from Central American countries and for receiving proceeds from exports. Currently, these market access opportunities remain untapped. Therefore, public awareness on Belize's trade agreements is key to promoting the use of these agreements and private sector firms must be ready to compete as Belize continues to liberalize.

M - Staffing, Organization, and Financial Considerations

The work of the MFA&FT is implemented through six (6) directorates: 1) Foreign Policy Unit, 2) International Cooperation Council (ICC), 3) Protocol and Consular Department, 4) Directorate General for Foreign Trade, 5) International Boundaries Unit (IBU), and 6) Office of the Agent. Said directorates are comprised of a cadre of technical professionals, with specialization in diverse areas, who are assigned responsibilities either on a geographic or thematic basis, as appropriate.

Heads of Mission (High Commissioners and Ambassadors, Consul-Generals, Permanent Representatives) report to and receive direction from the MFA&FT through the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and directorates. In most cases, their policy, thematic, geographic, or administrative issues are responded to by foreign service officers, administrative, financial, and clerical and support staff at headquarters.

The current process of the Belize-Guatemala Territorial Differendum necessitated the establishment of the Office of the Agent and Co-agent to diligently prepare the GOB's written and oral submissions to the ICJ. Also, the International Boundaries Unit (IBU) was established to support the work of said office.

The recurrent budget and capital budget approved for the MFA&FT for the 2023/2024 financial year was \$25,142,720.00. However, the actual budget spent by the MFA&FT was \$21,058,264.00; of which

\$20,104,432.00 was spent by Foreign Affairs, and \$953,832.00 was spent by Foreign Trade. (Source: Approved Budget Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2024/2025).

N - Future Priorities/Looking Forward

The programmatic focus of the MFA&FT is based on its annual work plan that is continuously monitored to ensure compliance. As the country continues to focus on rebuilding the economy, in the post-COVID context, the MFA&FT will reflect this priority through scaled-up and sustained engagement with strategic partners, optimizing all opportunities for international cooperation, increasing trade by insisting on reducing barriers to trade and continued advocacy and representation at the multilateral level to create avenues for growth and development for small countries. In addition, the Office of the Agent will continue to work apace to prepare for oral hearings which commence around midyear 2024. Attention will also remain on keeping the country's engagement with Guatemala peaceful and productive.

Looking forward, the MFA&FT will continue to be guided by #planBelize to rebuild a better Belize that works for everyone. The objective is to ensure that the Government grows the economy, reduces poverty, and that such growth is sustainable and inclusive.



***ANNEX I - Official Biography -
The Honourable Francis William Fonseca***

Hon. Francis W. Fonseca is Belize's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, Education, Culture, Science and Technology.

He is a duly elected Member of Belize's National Assembly representing the Freetown Constituency since 2003. He has also served as Belize's Attorney General and Minister of Education, Youth, Sports, Culture and Labour.

By profession, Fonseca is an attorney-at-law and trained economist.

Education

Norman Manley Law School 1996
Certificate of Legal Education (C.L.E)

University of West Indies 1994
Bachelor of Law (L.L.B. Hons.)

University of Louisiana (Lafayette) 1988
Bachelor of Science (Hons.) in Economics (major)

Career

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, Education, Culture, Science and Technology 2024-present

Minister of Education, Culture, Science and Technology 2020-2024

Member of the House of Representatives for Freetown 2003-Present

Minister of Education, Youth, Sports, Culture and Labour 2003-2008

Attorney General 2005-2008

Chief of Staff - Office of the Prime Minister 2000-2002

Attorney-at-Law in Private Practice 1997-2000

Crown Counsel- Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions 1996-1997

Economist- Ministry of Economic Development 1990-1991

Research Officer- Society for the Promotion of Education and Research 1989-1990

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ANNEX II: Directory of Heads of Mission/Permanent Representatives



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