

Independence Day Address 2015

By Leader of the Opposition

The Hon. Francis W. Fonseca

21 September 2015

The Governor General His Excellency Sir Colville Young and Lady Young

Prime Minister Honorable Dean Barrow and Mrs. Barrow

My Lord Chief Justice Kenneth Benjamin and Mrs. Benjamin

Our Most Reverend Bishops and Members of the Clergy

Members of the National assembly

His Worship the Mayor of Belmopan City Mr. Khalid Belisle

Members of the Diplomatic Corp

Our Public Officers and Members of our Security Forces

Invited Guests, Friends

My Fellow Belizeans

Today we celebrate our 34th anniversary of Independence.

As always, we do so with a deep sense of national pride.

And, as always, we recognize and acknowledge with deep gratitude the sacrifice and courage of the leaders of Belize's Nationalist Movement who, over many years, worked tirelessly to free Belize from the oppressive chains of Colonialism.

In these 34 years we have faced challenge and adversity as a nation and people but our spirit has remained strong and resilient.

Belize has claimed its rightful place in the global community as a proud, sovereign nation deeply committed to justice and equality for all peoples.

Indeed there are important lessons to be drawn from the past 34 years but today, for me, the more important question is: what will we make of the next 34 years? What is our national vision for this next chapter of our young nation's history? , and are we, each of us, prepared to work and sacrifice to achieve that vision and create the society we say we aspire to?

How can we stand and work together to give focused and urgent attention to job creation; to fixing our ailing education system; to ensuring that all our people, whoever they are and wherever they live, have access to affordable quality healthcare; to fighting the scourge of crime and violence.

Nation building is not about wishful thinking, it is about hard work, commitment and participation.

Each of us as citizens of this, our beloved Belize, has a duty and obligation to be engaged in its growth and development.

This, after all, is the central message of Independence-One Nation, One People united in purpose to build a stronger, better society in which hope and opportunity abound.

This Spirit of Unity and Sense of Purpose was on full display for all the world to see just over a month ago on August 16th when a group of some 200 Belizeans under the banner of the Belize Territorial Volunteers gathered in Barranco, Toledo and journeyed to the southernmost boundary of Belize on the Sarstoon.

This journey was a peaceful, powerful statement that Belize, all of Belize, from Rio Hondo to Sarstoon, from our Cayes and Atolls to our western border is ours to protect and defend.

A clear, strong message of unity and determination in the face of the unfounded Guatemalan claim.

I repeat today what I said on this occasion only last year, “ without the ability to quickly reach our borders, patrol our seas, and safeguard our natural resources, proclaiming our sovereignty and territorial integrity risks becoming nothing more than empty, clamorous rhetoric.”

34 years into Independence, our efforts to combat poverty and inequality demand and require an equal sense of purpose and unity.

True development calls for profound qualitative change not only of the economy but also of the society.

Central to this change is Governance Reform.

Governance is the hallmark of a democratic, peaceful, just society and is fundamental to eradicating poverty and corruption, bringing about economic growth and social progress.

It is concerned with the rules, regulations and procedures that apply to the decision making process.

Decisions made in our governance systems and structures determine how the collective wealth and resources of the nation is managed and allocated and ultimately the quality of life of each and every Belizean.

34 years after Independence. 17 years of PUP. 17 years of UDP. Our responsibility and obligation is to work together in good faith to change, improve and strengthen the failing systems and structures we have in place to govern and develop Belize.

On this Independence Day, let us embrace Governance Reform by: Committing to the appointment of the 13th Senator; to re-activating the Integrity Commission; and to restructuring the Public Accounts Committee.

On this 21st Day of September let us resolve to renew our commitment as a nation and people to building a society based on equality, justice and opportunity.

This must not only be our hope and dream. It must be the foundation of who we are as a people.

Delivering his National Day Address on September 10th, 1962 the Father of Our Nation, then Premier George Price had this to say:

“ Full internal Self-Government and Independence are neither easily achieved nor successfully maintained without great effort on our part. We must work harder, produce more and improve our skills more quickly and extensively.” End of quote.

53 years later the simple clarity and relevance of this message rings loudly. Today we must work harder, produce more, and improve our skills, all with a sense of purpose and urgency.

A few months later in a National Radio Address on December 11, 1962 George Price brilliantly and passionately captured the true essence of Independence:

“The dignity of the individual as a human being cannot be fully realized unless he or she is the citizen of an Independent country, unless he or she can proudly point to their national flag among the flags of nations, sing the anthem of their country, and carry a passport issued by no other country but their own.” End of quote.

That, my fellow Belizeans, is the true spirit and meaning of Independence.

Let us awaken that spirit in each of us.

I wish you all a peaceful, safe and happy Independence Day!!

Feliz Dia de Nuestra Independencia a todos en nuestro Pais!!

May God Bless each of you and our beloved Belize.