

# **Independence Day Address 2010**

**By Leader of the Opposition**

**The Hon. John Briceño**

**21 September 2010**

Ladies and Gentlemen

Today we celebrate our 29<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as an Independent People.

In the preamble of our Constitution we state that WE, THE PEOPLE, affirm that we want to live in a nation that recognizes the supremacy of God, where every Belizean is entitled to live a dignified life; where we respect the principles of social justice; and remain free only if we respect the rule of law including the independence of the judiciary.

We believe fervently that the will of the people shall form the basis of government. We affirm that every man, woman and child in Belize should live in dignity.

We enshrined our beliefs in the very marrow of our nation's bones.

These are noble and manifest principles. They are worth defending. They are worth fighting for. They are worth our very lives.

The dream of our nation did not begin 29 years ago, it began as an idea. It was born as a whisper—a whisper which started hundreds of years ago.

It was whispered in our forests, in the camps where the men of the bay took axe and saw to fell mahogany and logwood.

It was whispered in the shade of ancient cities where flourishing milpas provided the sacred sustenance of corn and beans.

It was whispered along the landings and banks of the Sibun, Sarstoon, Hondo and Belize rivers, by settlers looking for a place to live in peace and freedom.

It was the reason that those Yurumein came to our shores and found a new home. It was spoken of in soft tones by women left behind in towns and villages nurturing the family's needs.

It was spoken of with vigour by those in our very first Assemblies, during our most pressing moments. It echoed in our coral isles and our blue lagoons, where we kept watch with the stars and where we awaited the freedom of tomorrow's noon.

That whisper grew louder as our servicemen came home to demand their rightful place after the Great War.

It grew more powerful with the labour movement of the 1930s and 40's.

The whisper became a great noise after World War 2 and on into the 50's, 60's and 70's when George Price, Phillip Goldson, Leigh Richardson, Antonio Soberanis, Madam Liz and other Belizean patriots demanded our right to self-determination.

The message was of a proud nation working for the peaceful, constructive Belizean revolution and the whisper became our nation's battle cry for freedom.

This was a bold idea, so bold that some feared that we would never be able to survive, let alone sustain ourselves. But we prevailed and today we sit proudly among the community of nations.

But while we take pride in our achievement of political independence and while we honour the great work of our forbearers, we must focus on what we have made of their legacy.

Independence Day is a time when Belizeans crave unity, and rightly, WANT to celebrate our nationhood. Independence Day is also the right time and it is our responsibility to address the state of our nation.

Today we are shackled by an economic recession whose untrammelled effect is being felt in every settlement, village, town and city in our Jewel.

Every day, businesses are forced to fold and more Belizeans continue to lose jobs. Our very infrastructure is breaking up before our eyes.

Too many of our children are out of school and our youth have little hope.

Rampant crime and violence, hatred and fear, stalk our beloved land, causing us to live as prisoners in our own homes.

Never before in the history of our country have we been forced to mourn so grievously and so often.

Every day there is news of more tragedy. 97 Belizeans have been murdered already this year, with the grim certainty of yet more to come.

We are killed in our homes, killed in the streets; mothers, fathers, families weeping over the bodies of loved ones while our prisons overflow.

Never before have there been so many failed investigations and prosecutions or so little justice for Belizean families.

Never before have so many Belizeans been so poor. All over the Jewel, so blessed by nature, our farmers struggle – working harder, earning less.

The problems faced by almost every sector of agro-industry, sugar, citrus, banana and papaya, mount daily, and aquaculture faces disaster.

In the services sector, business is increasingly precarious and in tourism the numbers continue to decline, threatening the very survival of our small hotel owners and tour operators.

Throughout the health system, things seem to be coming undone, babies dying due to a lack of doctors in hospitals, children dying from dengue, doctors and nurses threatening to go on strike, the delivery of NHI services being reduced instead of enhanced.

We were asked to imagine the possibilities, and this is the reality: telephone, water and light bills have NOT gone down.

The cost of living continues to rise unabated.

Gas prices are skyrocketing.

More taxes have been levied on already burdened Belizeans.

Everywhere across the Jewel, there is fear and trepidation and even despair.

Many families survive on noodles, and steak is beyond the reach of most.

So much of what we struggled to build is now being destroyed.

We can do better than this.

We ALL deserve better than this. We ARE better than this.

Beliceños, veintinueve años después de haber obtenido nuestra independencia deberíamos, nosotros los beliceños, de estar orgullosos de nuestra identidad, de nuestra nación y de nuestra gente.

Deberíamos de haber logrado un pueblo progresivo, creciente y viviendo con dignidad. Al contrario, hoy, no solo vivimos con la angustia de donde vendrá el pan del otro día pero ahora vivimos con la intranquilidad y la preocupación por el aumento en el crimen y los tantos asesinatos que se reportan día tras día.

Nuestro pueblo ha perdido la fe y un pueblo sin esperanza es un pueblo sin futuro.

Tenemos todos... la obligación de asegurar que el pueblo beliceño salga de este círculo vicioso en que se encuentra.

Empecemos hoy a trabajar en este proyecto.

¡Manos a la obra Beliceños! ¡Ayer ya fue muy tarde para empezar!

My friends

We all yearn for freedom.

We all yearn to live in a country where everyone has the opportunity to realize the dream of a good life.

It is the responsibility of our government to ensure that each of us has that opportunity.

Our leaders must develop and nurture plans to keep us moving forward.

It is the responsibility of government to keep our citizens safe.

And so on the 29th Anniversary of our Independence let us be brave like those before us were brave.

Let us determine that we will not give in to fear, that we will not allow anyone to take from us, our right to live in peace; our right to live in a society where justice and liberty prevail over fear and vindictiveness.

My friends I am not afraid of the future.

I am not afraid of the challenges before us.

I am not afraid because I believe in YOU.

I believe in the strength and determination of the Belizean people.

United and proud

And now, more than ever, I BELIEVE in BELIZE.

Long Live Belize!

Que Viva Belice!

Happy Independence Day Belize!