



Integrated Country Strategy

Belize

FOR PUBLIC RELEASE

Table of Contents

1. Chief of Mission Priorities..... 2

2. Mission Strategic Framework 4

3. Mission Goals and Objectives..... 5

4. Management Objectives..... 9

1. Chief of Mission Priorities

Belize, despite its image to many Americans as an idyllic Caribbean paradise, is a country with many deep-seated challenges. Belize's strengths include macro-economic stability, an established two-party democratic system with competitive elections, and broad respect for civil liberties including the right to protest and freedom of the press. Belize has institutionalized constitutional norms such as civilian control of the military and the right to public trial. However, Belize's challenges in the areas of citizen security, economic prosperity, and public corruption often overshadow these strengths. Belize lacks economies of scale because of its small population and poor transportation and communication links with countries outside its immediate vicinity. This results in poor quality and expensive goods and public services, including everything from electricity to healthcare. Like other Northern Tier countries in Central America, Belize suffers from widespread corruption, gang violence, low levels of education, high levels of unemployment, little public confidence in civic institutions, and trafficking in persons, drugs, arms, and illicitly-sourced natural resources. Underlying all these issues is a lack of accountability at all levels and the perception that one can act with impunity.

To address these concerns, U.S. Embassy Belmopan's efforts have focused on three areas aligned with the U.S. Strategy for Central America: citizen security, economic prosperity, and good governance. We will continue to pursue these goals with a renewed emphasis on supporting local institutions and drivers of reform while demanding transparency and accountability from the Government of Belize. The Mission will address accountability at all levels of its programming, from large-scale issues such as greater transparency in public procurement to smaller issues such as ensuring there are adequate monitoring plans in place for U.S. government-supported programs, training, and equipment donations. Addressing these areas will not only help Belize to prosper and keep illicit goods and criminals away from U.S. borders, but they will also help protect the over one million U.S. citizens who visit Belize annually and the approximately 30,000 U.S. citizens who reside permanently in Belize.

The relationship between the United States and Belize is strong. Belize relies heavily on USG-funded support for citizen security, as well as over one million tourists annually who visit Belize and provide a major source of revenue for Belizeans. Despite this, Belize looks to its CARICOM partners on how to vote on key issues in international bodies such as the United Nations and Organization of American States. While at times our interests align, often CARICOM countries will vote on key issues against U.S. interests, such as their support for Venezuela. The Mission needs to continue to press Belize on these key votes, demonstrating how working with the United States in the long term will be beneficial to Belize.

On April 10, 2019, Belize will hold a referendum to determine whether Belize should send the longstanding territorial dispute issue with Guatemala to the International Court of Justice. Many Belizeans are not educated about the issue, and fear is driving many of them to vote "no"

FOR PUBLIC RELEASE

because they are afraid a “yes” vote will mean they are surrendering a large part of their territory to Guatemala. The Mission is actively engaged to ensure that voters are educated about the issue. We see it as the only peaceful way to resolve this dispute and open up economic opportunities for a great part of the country.

Belize is extremely vulnerable to possible infiltration by transnational criminal organizations (TCOs). As U.S. assistance to other Northern Tier neighbors increases their resilience against narco-traffickers and criminal gangs’ activities, Belize, with its vast ungoverned spaces and low conviction rates, becomes more attractive as a convenient, alternative route for traffickers of persons and illicit goods. Public sector corruption and mismanagement remain endemic in Belize and limit opportunities for growth and human development. Traffickers, perpetrators of murder and other violent crimes, and corrupt public officials often believe they can act with impunity, exacerbating already poor public confidence in the effectiveness of law enforcement entities. We will work to promote transparency, efficacy, and accountability at all levels of government in Belize, with particular focus on the security services, judicial and rule of law institutions, and public finances.

Aside from tourism, there are few bright spots in Belize’s economic landscape. The government depends on external borrowing to finance regular operations, routinely kicking the can of mounting external debt down the road. Agriculture is struggling as a source of foreign investment and large-scale employment. Belize needs to reform its tax and regulatory environment to make the country more attractive to foreign investment outside the tourism industry and to create jobs in services and light manufacturing. The Embassy will look to assist drivers of economic growth, including connecting U.S. businesses to investment opportunities with Belizean counterparts, supporting young entrepreneurs to start and grow businesses, and pushing for pro-growth changes to Belize’s tax and investment laws.

Of course, none of these efforts will be fruitful if we do not have partners within the Government of Belize who are professional, competent, and trustworthy enough to implement the changes needed for Belize to thrive. Public sector reform across the board is critical to improve transparency and service delivery. Belize needs to professionalize its security forces and legal system to root out corruption and inefficiencies that hamper effective law enforcement and the swift application of justice. Moreover, to build public confidence in civic institutions, the Government of Belize must show that it can be both prudent and transparent with public finances, acting as good stewards of the country’s resources and faithful executors of the law. Government must also work to support the most vulnerable populations, including women, at-risk youth, and the LGBTI community.

None of our goals will be swiftly or easily accomplished – indeed many of these goals closely mirror previous strategies. But with diligent work and the efforts of our Belizean partners, we can make incremental progress toward making Belize a more secure, prosperous and well-governed country, and true partner in the region in combatting transnational threats.

FOR PUBLIC RELEASE

Approved: OCTOBER 29, 2018

2. Mission Strategic Framework

Mission Goal 1: *Security*—Support improved security for citizens, U.S. citizen residents, and visitors through border protection, increased institutional resiliency, and the disruption of criminal activity.

Mission Objective 1.1: Border security is improved through strengthened immigration systems and increased control over land and maritime borders.

Mission Objective 1.2: The sphere of influence of transnational criminal organizations (TCO) and gangs is reduced.

Mission Objective 1.3: Support improvements to the quality and professionalization of Belize's police and military forces.

Mission Objective 1.4: Strengthened Belizean institutions and capacity for responding to natural and man-made disasters.

Mission Goal 2: *Prosperity*—Increase Belize's economic prosperity through improved educational outcomes and sustainable development to attract investment.

Mission Objective 2.1: Support for a more stable and transparent business climate that attracts greater investment, allows for inclusive growth, and builds on existing resources.

Mission Objective 2.2: Support for an improved education system that prioritizes literacy, raises the compulsory education age, expands educational opportunities, and matches education to the needs of the economy.

Mission Goal 3: *Governance*—Promote more effective and accountable government institutions that promote and protect civil and human rights.

Mission Objective 3.1: Support improved efficiency and transparency of security, judicial, and public service delivery institutions.

Mission Objective 3.2: Improved transparency and efficacy of public financial management and adherence to anti-money laundering and countering financing of terrorism norms.

Mission Objective 3.3: Support to citizens of Belize to hold the government accountable for increased adherence to democratic values and protection of human rights, especially for vulnerable populations including women, persons with disabilities, and the LGBTI community.

Management Objective 1: Embassy Belmopan utilizes innovative programs and policies to improve morale at post for U.S. Direct Hire employees, family members, and locally employed staff to enhance recruitment and retention of the best talent and to create a safe and harmonious work/life environment for employees to be fully productive.

Management Objective 2: Embassy Belmopan reinvigorates existing management controls and institutes additional performance management tools to improve accountability across all areas of activity, including formal performance management and evaluation, property management and fiscal accountability.

3. Mission Goals and Objectives

Mission Goal 1: *Security*—Support improved security for citizens, U.S. citizen residents, and visitors, through border protection, increased institutional resiliency, and the disruption of criminal activity.

Description and Linkages: This goal directly supports the U.S. National Security Strategy’s goals to “Strengthen Border Control and Immigration Policy,” “Dismantle Transnational Criminal Organizations,” and priority actions in the Western Hemisphere; the U.S. Strategy for Central America “Enhancing Security” pillar; and three of the strategic objectives under the Department of State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan’s goal to “Protect America’s Security at Home and Abroad.” It also supports the State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan strategic objectives to “Protect American values and leadership by preventing the spread of disease and providing humanitarian relief” and “Transition nations from assistance recipient's to enduring diplomatic, economic, and security partners.” By focusing on border security as it impacts transnational illicit movements to and from the United States, Belize’s ability to respond to disrupting transnational criminal and gang activity, greater professionalization and accountability in the security forces, and natural disasters, we will strengthen Belize’s internal citizen security – including for U.S. citizens – and its resilience against external threats.

Mission Objective 1.1: Border security is improved through strengthened immigration systems and increased control over land and maritime borders.

Justification: Belize borders Mexico to the north and Guatemala to the west and south. The only two official border points of entry are located in the north to Mexico and in the west to Guatemala. Border and other security cooperation issues with Guatemala are stymied by the ongoing territorial dispute between the two countries. Police, customs, immigration, the Belize Defence Enterprise (BDE) (comprised of the Belize Defence Staff, Belize Defence Force (BDF), and Belize Coast Guard (BCG)), the Departments of Forestry and Fisheries, and (in the case of protected areas) NGOs co-manage border areas. Belize must develop standard operating procedures and strategic plans for this multi-agency approach to be effective. Significant challenges include the sheer isolation of the border areas, combativeness of local communities who depend on illegal trade, personnel safety for enforcement agencies operating in these areas, and limited data collection and dissemination capacity.

Mission Objective 1.2: The sphere of influence of transnational criminal organizations (TCO) and gangs is reduced.

Justification: The influence of Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) and TCOs continues to rise in the region and Belize is heavily susceptible to violence flowing over its borders. Belize is used as a trans-shipment point for narcotics, arms, and other illicit goods, as well as human trafficking and smuggling. The security apparatus in Belize is not forward leaning and proactive in its approach to aggressively target the movement of these groups across its porous borders.

Mission Objective 1.3: Support improvements to the quality and professionalization of Belize's police and military forces.

Justification: Given Belize's human and capital resource constraints, a focus on improving the professionalization, accountability, and transparency of the existing forces has the greatest potential to improve citizen security. Police officers accused of misconduct are often shuffled around and reinstated into leadership positions. The Professional Standards Branch (similar to Internal Affairs) does not have the authority to challenge high-level officials for inappropriate conduct. Failure to delivery basic services, such as a police reports, leads to a common perception that the police will not or cannot protect them. Requiring accountability for implementing training principles prior to U.S. funded training will ensure a return on investment. Targeted training for key skills and follow up is important to ensure counterparts keep skills updated and can follow through with materials in which they are trained.

Mission Objective 1.4: Strengthened Belizean institutions and capacity for responding to natural and man-made disasters

Justification: Belize faces many challenges to preparing for and responding to natural and man-made disasters. While the National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO) has the lead for disaster preparedness and response, it has limited staff and resources to respond to wide-scale emergencies. Belize needs to increase the network of response volunteers who can monitor potential flood areas and surge as first responders when a disaster strikes. Belize lacks hospital beds even for routine medical care, and its facilities would be quickly overrun even with a small disaster such as a bus crash. There is no centralized emergency number and the few ambulances lack the ability to communicate with hospitals when they are bringing patients. Strengthened institutions and capacity will help not only Belizeans but U.S citizens as over one million U.S. citizens visit Belize each year and approximately 30,000 U.S. citizens reside in Belize.

Mission Goal 2: *Prosperity*—Increase Belize's economic prosperity through improved educational outcomes and sustainable development to attract investment

Description and Linkages: Greater prosperity in Belize will strengthen economic ties with the United States and enable Belizean society to resist the trap of illicit activities and recover quickly from disasters. This goal supports the National Security Strategy's goals to "Promote free, fair, and reciprocal economic relationships" and priority actions in the Western Hemisphere; the U.S. Strategy for Central America's "Promoting Prosperity" pillar; and all three of the strategic objectives under the Department of State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan's goal to "Renew America's Competitive Advantage for Sustained Economic Growth and Job Creation." It also supports the State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan's strategic objective to "Transition nations from assistance recipients to enduring diplomatic, economic, and security partners." The Plan also emphasizes the importance of quality education's importance to ensuring the economic future and security. Given Belize's high crime and violence, access to education and employment skills is essential to providing positive incentives for at-risk youth. In addition, strong education, research, and workforce development institutions help ensure economic development and prosperity.

Mission Objective 2.1: Support for a more stable and transparent business climate that attracts greater investment, allows for inclusive growth, and builds on existing resources.

Justification: Belize has experienced minimal growth over the last few years in part because of destabilizing issues related to threatened correspondent banking relationships, troubled agricultural markets, difficulties diversifying energy supplies, and complicated investment and taxation systems. Sustainable economic growth in Belize depends on strong agriculture and tourism sectors, and the development of alternative energy possibilities. Growth in these fields is an opportunity for U.S. investors and would necessarily rely on U.S. exports, expertise, and materials. Environmental management is one of the Government of Belize's highest priorities and a strong commitment to waste-management solutions, renewable energy, and energy diversification is the next step in promoting long term economic development and an excellent opportunity for U.S. investment. Concurrently, Belize has to attract foreign investment in order to make the expenditures in sustainable growth that it needs. To create a strong business and investment climate, Belize needs to continue efforts to comply with Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF) regulations and enhance its Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) regime.

Mission Objective 2.2: Support for an improved education system that prioritizes literacy, raises the compulsory education age, expands educational opportunities, and matches education to the needs of the economy.

Justification: Belize's population is the third youngest in the Western Hemisphere; over 65% of Belizeans are under the age of 30. Although the country spends approximately 25% of its overall budget on education, the quality of education and the capacity of teachers remain remarkably low. Many high school children stop attending school at or around the mandatory school age of 14. High drop-out rates and poor education contribute to high crime rates and high rates of unemployment among youth. Vocational schools are limited and often too expensive for those in poverty. Higher education institutions offer limited programs and often do not match the needs of the economy. This lack of opportunities for youth in part leads to Belize's high crime rate. The Embassy will seek to increase our collaboration with local partners to promote economic opportunity and marketable skills for all Belizeans, especially youth, and to address the root causes of violence, such as shortcomings in education.

Mission Goal 3: *Governance*—Promote more effective and accountable government institutions that promote and protect civil and human rights

Description and Linkages: This goal supports the National Security Strategy's goals to "Promote free, fair, and reciprocal economic relationships" and priority actions in the Western Hemisphere; the U.S. Strategy for Central America's "Improving Governance" pillar; and the Department of State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan's strategic objectives to "Counter instability, transnational crime, and violence that threaten U.S. interests by strengthening citizen-responsive government, security, democracy, human rights, and rule of law;" "Increase partnerships with the private sector and civil society organizations to mobilize support and resources and shape foreign public opinion;" and "Transition nations from assistance recipients to enduring diplomatic, economic, and security partners."

Mission Objective 3.1: Support improved efficiency and transparency of security, judicial, and public service delivery institutions.

Justification: Belize suffers from a notoriously low conviction rate, vigilante justice, and widely reported human rights violations by law enforcement entities such as the police Gang Suppression Unit (GSU). Mistrust of the police by the population is a huge factor in their lack of success. Education, accuracy in report writing, availability of crime reporting mechanisms to the general public, and standard operating procedures between the police and prosecutors will improve transparency. The failure to sentence and resolve cases in a reasonable amount of time results in many violent crimes being adjourned for extended periods of time or dismissed. Bail proceedings are not consistent and even violent offenders and traffickers are released for bail on cases adjourned for months or years. Belize's challenges in closing "normal" criminal cases are exponentially worse when dealing with complicated cases like trafficking or money laundering. While civil rights norms are generally accepted, protections and services for victims of crimes like gender-based violence, hate-crimes, or human trafficking are woefully inadequate.

Mission Objective 3.2: Improve the transparency and efficacy of public financial management and adherence to anti-money laundering and countering financing of terrorism norms

Justification: In response to the correspondent banking crises in Belize over the previous three years, Belize must ensure that its public financial system is stable and well-regulated enough to encourage robust economic activity and ensure compliance with Caribbean Financial Action Task Force regulations for AML/CFT. This is vital to stopping money flows associated with the narcotics trade and other illicit activities, supporting enhanced economic prosperity for Belize and ensuring U.S. and other companies and investors are able to conduct business in Belize.

Mission Objective 3.3: Support to citizens of Belize to hold the government accountable for increased adherence to democratic values and protection of human rights, especially for vulnerable populations including women, at-risk youth, and the LGBTI community

Justification: Many demographic groups find themselves in the shadows in Belize. These disenfranchised groups should be active participants in building a stronger and safer Belize. Violence against women and children is an ongoing concern and only two domestic violence shelters exist in country. The LGBTI community, in particular, has very few protections and faces discrimination and harassment. The discrimination against the LGBTI community has also hurt elements of the economy, such as tourism, because LGBTI individuals are concerned about their safety and choose to travel elsewhere. The traditions and livelihoods of certain ethnic groups, such as the small Mayan communities, are also threatened by authorities. In general, Belize needs to improve its respect for human rights and the opportunities it offers to those outside the demographic mainstream.

4. Management Objectives

Management Objective 1: Embassy Belmopan utilizes innovative programs and policies to improve morale at post for U.S. Direct Hire employees, family members, and locally employed staff to enhance recruitment and retention of the best talent and to create a safe and harmonious work/life environment for employees to be fully productive. Management and CLO will work to implement new services that improve the quality of life for embassy employees and eligible family members, utilizing Family Liaison Office (FLO) resources and consulting with FLO for guidance and best practices.

Justification: Embassy Belmopan is a small post in a town which does not provide many amenities that other posts offer. Belmopan is a hardship post with education and medical challenges for direct hires and their family members. In order to attract well qualified bidders, post will need to improve quality of life issues to raise the level of satisfaction with the work/life balance for employees and family members alike. Many locally employed staff members still live in Belize City and commute to work via bus which is over an hour away. Others live in towns which are even more distant, some renting apartments in Belmopan during the week and returning home for the weekends. These valued employees need incentives to continue to work at Embassy Belmopan.

Management Objective 2: Embassy Belmopan reinvigorates existing management controls and institutes additional performance management tools to improve accountability across all areas of activity, including formal performance management and evaluation, property management and fiscal accountability.

Justification: Embassy Belmopan has taken steps in the past few years to improve accountability both of property and staff performance. However, post needs to take additional measures to better reach Department standards for accountability property, including effective utilization of motor vehicles. Post also would like to have more rigorous application of incentives for better staff performance, and for supervisors to initiate corrective measures when necessary.