

***Submission to the Global COVID-19 Summit:  
Ending the Pandemic and Building Back Better  
By Hon. John Briceno, Prime Minister of Belize***

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to participate in the Global COVID-19 Summit: Ending the Pandemic and Building Back Better.

Belize is committed to defeating the pandemic and re-building our world for more green, inclusive and resilient societies.

Belize recognizes that no country can battle this virus alone. Summits like these therefore are an essential catalyst for international collaboration. We are pleased to be part of this global coalition.

This important summit asks two questions: How do we end the pandemic? And, how do we build back better?

The declaration of a pandemic by the World Health Organization on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020 should have been a clarion call for collective action. Instead, it ushered in a period of unprecedented hoarding, nationalism, and unilateralism.

Vaccine roll out began in January 2021. Only in the developed world. The COVAX facility was designed to ensure equitable distribution of vaccines. This facility should have performed better but it could not. Not because of flawed design, not because of underfunding, but because of contracts that precluded delivery and production challenges.

Instead, many developing countries like Belize had to depend on the generosity of friendly countries for vaccines.

Science dictates that we can only end the pandemic by vaccinating the world's citizens against the vicious virus. Are we doing this, or are we failing humanity?

As we meet we must be concerned by the facts. Whilst 43% of the world population has received at least one dose of a vaccine, this hides the fact that less than 2% of persons in the poorest countries have received a vaccine.

It is clear, we will only succeed by ensuring that vaccines are universally available. We call for a strengthening of the COVAX facility to ensure vaccine equity and fair distribution so as to save lives and livelihood.

The fact is that hundreds of billions have been spent as a result of the COVID pandemic. First, new social programmes were designed and existing ones re-purposed to meet the massive needs of those who became unemployed. Second, billions more were spent to stimulate economies around the world to generate economic activity and reduced unemployment. But, most of this was borrowed.

The world now faces a crushing debt burden. For example, Belize's debt to GDP rose from 90% to 130% largely as result of COVID related expenditure.

So that we can build back better, we must take collective action together. First, we repeat our call for urgent debt relief. Second, we require a universally agreed multi-dimensional vulnerability Index. Third, there is urgent need for access to new affordable financing.

To recover sustainably and with resilience, we propose the creation of a COVID RECOVERY FUND of at least \$50 billion to be made available over three years, and managed by existing international financial institutions that will enable countries that qualify, using the agreed multi-dimensional vulnerability Index, to access grants and loans to fund our recovery.

Belize, is pleased to endorse the Targets of this Global COVID-19 Summit. Belize commits to accelerate its campaign to vaccinate at least 70% of its population by UNGA 2022.

I thank you.