

ROME PRESENTATION

16 to 18 November 2009

**AT THE WORLD SUMIT CONFERENCE ON
FOOD SECURITY**

**MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND
FISHERIES**

Distinguished Members of the

It is a great honor and an opportunity for me to be able to address this distinguished forum to share with you a brief overview of my country, Belize, with regards to food and Nutrition Security.

Belize is the youngest Central American Country in Central America, in the heart of the Caribbean basin. It is bounded on the north by Mexico, on the west and south by Guatemala and on the east by the Caribbean Sea. It is a multi-ethnic country with a population of approximately 322.000 persons. We have a relatively young population with 60% being within the 18 to 45 years age group.

The destiny of Belize is intimately interlaced with that of the other 192 states, parties to the United Nations and the global

economy; as such, we are each, part of the global village, suffering the impact of global crisis visited on us by the world economic collapse, the impact of climate change, poverty and malnutrition, are source of the challenges we face. The natural phenomena we can only learn to adapt and manage to the best that science and technology can offer. However, it is my firm belief and my government's strong conviction, that the "human caused crisis" can be eradicated through an effective policy focusing on Rural Development which will allow for the farm family to have gainful employment year round and minimize the migration of our youth to urban areas.

Therefore I present to you an overview of the Food and Nutrition Situation in my country, Belize:

According to our latest statistical appraisal, Belize produces enough food to supply its population except when impacted by a hurricane, floods or unusual droughts. Unfortunately, however, a significant sector of the population, both rural and urban, remains at risk of food insecurity due to lack of purchasing power to access basic foods. It is reported that 33-54% of our

population is food insecure due to lack of purchasing power. This situation is exacerbated by:

- The global economic collapse which drastically reduced foreign exchange remissions
- Trade liberalization and the dismantling of the preferential markets for traditional exports
- The shift from food production to bio-fuels by food producing and exporting countries; and
- The impact of climate change.

Current nutrition data for Belize show that under-nutrition (especially among the Mayan population), micro-nutrient deficiencies (especially among pregnant and lactating women), and nutrition-related chronic diseases (such as diabetes, hypertension, stroke, some forms of cancers and heart diseases), are our main public health problems. Moreover, a recent evaluation of the four components of the food and nutrition security gave a passing grade for food availability in Belize but very low grades for accessibility, consumption/utilization and stability.

So we do have challenges in food and nutrition security. But I want to emphasize that my government, and especially my Ministry and collaborating Ministries, has crafted policies to face these challenges to ensure Food and Nutrition Security to our people and proposed to extend a helping hand to our sister countries in the Caribbean and Central America. I will relate to this eminent forum how we have decided to address the situation.

1. First, we have for the first time in a decade re-vitalized the National Food and Nutrition Security Commission by employing a fulltime coordinator for the commission. This person is responsible of coordinating the work of the commission to ensure accomplishment of the mission, goals and objectives in pursuit of food and nutrition security. Presently the commission is reviewing the National food and Nutrition Policy, the Action Plan for the next 10 years, and the 5-year Strategic Plan, with the collaboration of the Caribbean Food And Nutrition Institute and PAHO.

2. Second, my Ministry has undertaken a multi-pronged approach to food security, rescuing the concept of diversified integrated farming systems and the adaptation of technologies that will enhance the transformation of the agriculture sector from the labor intensive underproductive methods to a more productive sector. The technologies and good practices being promoted are all in consonance with sustainable consumption and production for cleaner and healthier agriculture sector.

3. Thirdly, continue to rely on research and development programs that are market driven. Belize is geographical located to markets, to the north – Mexico, to the west – Guatemala and the Caricom countries. Our policy is to become an exporting base economy to reduce our import bill and to create employment and foreign exchange earnings.

With the assistance from various friendly nations and international donors we are promoting and implementing

some programs and projects designed to make positive changes in our manifest situation. Some of these are:

1. Environmentally Friendly Agriculture

- ❖ Organic agriculture
- ❖ Minimum use of chemical pesticides
- ❖ Integrated farming Systems
- ❖ Use of renewable energy in agriculture production and processing
- ❖ Agro processing using renewable clean energy sources (solar, hydro, wind...)
- ❖ Innovated technology (small machinery for minimum CO2 emission)
- ❖ Use and recycling of organic bi products / solid waste (composting, biogas, etc.)
- ❖ Production of seeds of time-tested varieties and the rescue of indigenous varieties known for their hardiness and resistance to critical environments
- ❖ Design and installation of a seed Bank

2. Food-Agriculture-Nutrition Oriented Agriculture

- ❖ Diversification of protein sources for nutrition
- ❖ Development of an effective public information system to sensitize the public at large regarding the culture of good food, good living and good health.
- ❖ Promotion of Women-in-agriculture programs and organizing women for backyard gardening
- ❖ Promotion of “Farm Family” agriculture system to create year round employment for the family and minimize the migration of youths to urban areas.

- ❖ To continue to develop of an intimate coordination mechanism between the ministries spearheading food and nutrition security, to effectively benefit from the synergies there from and achieve more with less.

3. Institutional and Resource Strengthening in Agriculture

- ❖ Transforming the National Agriculture Marketing institution to allow for economic growth

- ❖ Design and installation of food banks at district and rural areas to focus on the farm family approach to farming in the rural areas.

- ❖ Extensive Training and capacity building at farm, rural, and technical levels

So we have a very clear idea of the problems and the solutions and have taken the necessary steps to ameliorate the situation; yet we are conscious of the fact that we are going to meet challenges on the way forward. In this regard, I am putting it on the table unabashedly, that we, the developing countries in the Caribbean and Central America are more vulnerable to the global crisis and climate change impacts and will need urgent

and substantial assistance in pursuing our ambitious but achievable goal of food security through Rural Development.

I THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY.