



# Ministry of Rural Transformation

Community Development, Labour and Local Government

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**Keynote Address by Hon. Oscar Requena (Virtual)**  
Minister of Rural Transformation, Community Development,  
Labour & Local Government  
Urban Economy Forum 4 (UEF4)  
*October 3, 2022*

Protocols having been established, a pleasant and good day to one and all. Kindly allow me to extend warm greetings from the Prime Minister of Belize, the Rt. Hon. John Briceno, the Government, and people of Belize and from my Ministry of Rural Transformation, Community Development, Labour and Local Government. For those of you who have not yet visited Belize, let me use this opportunity to extend an invitation for you to visit and to those who have, let me urge you to return real soon. Our Belizean hospitality is second to none...just like the abundance in the beauty in our fauna and flora, our ridges and reefs, so too is the warmth and welcoming enthusiasm of our people.

To my fellow panellists, thank you for your interventions today and thank you to our moderators for enabling this space to dialogue on this critical matter of ‘Sustainable Urban Finance’. I wish also to thank the Urban Economy Forum for extending this invitation to us in Belize and particularly to my Ministry that has this huge responsibility and mandate to create and establish a robust and enabling legal, regulatory, policy and



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strategic environment to localize advancing actions to foster SDG 11; that of creating Sustainable Cities and Communities.

Ladies and gentlemen, Belize is a small, fledging, but emerging economy when compared to most of our sister nations in Latin America and Caribbean. A few weeks ago, we celebrated our 41<sup>st</sup> year of Independence; a proud achievement for us and a time for us to have celebrated our accomplishments as a nation since 1981. But it was also a time for us to have reflected and embrace the challenges we have come to face as a growing nation. The sudden emergence of the pandemic over the past two years, coupled with the growing concern of the impacts of climate change, the impacts of the ongoing conflict in Europe, the resulting influences of rising costs and the challenges of our own regional and domestic circumstances have really made us begin to re-think the way we do the things.

In my estimation, and in our thinking, sustainability and resiliency are two of most significant considerations that are to be the basis of our decisions and actions, as they are critical to our immediate and future development.

In Belize, while it is utterly important that we build urban sustainability and resiliency, our efforts are equally focused on strengthening our rural and peri-urban sectors to reduce urbanization. We



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want our people to work, grow, play and develop in the places where they live. Our population estimates show that there's almost an even split between our urban and rural population; notwithstanding, we do demonstrate a pattern of urbanization, which is a characteristic of our Caribbean small island states.

Consequentially, the vulnerability in the urban space continues to be worsened by the challenges associated to our inherent low coastal zones that continue to be subjected to sea level rise, informal settlements arising out of urbanization, heat stress and heavy precipitation resulting from global warming, economic conditions, and the general characteristics of most of these sites.

To adapt and to mitigate these vulnerabilities, municipal governments are called to deliver improved services with the aim of enhancing all elements of the urban space. However, the limits of the financial position and fiscal space of and for urban governments to address these increasing challenges are significant deterrents for advancing this aim.

Therefore, it is necessary that the approaches to achieving sustainability and resiliency must be all inclusive, participatory, collaborative, evidence-based, data driven and innovative. So, the question is, how do we get there and how do we do it?



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An *'all hands aboard'* approach must be the answer...the engagement of the public sector, private sector and civil society, with the support of the bilateral and multi-lateral development partners is a must, including that of climate financing institutions, commercial and development financing institutions, and other like regional and international organizations like the Urban Economy Forum. Today, the UEF is demonstrating this possibility and necessity.

The themes of this Forum speak to these critical elements of building this sustainability and resiliency for our urban sectors. In Belize, we are advancing strategic efforts at the national level to support the desired levels of sustainability for the urban and rural sector. At the national level, we have updated our Nationally Determined Contributions aimed at supporting the national and global efforts to reduce our carbon footprint, we have forged a National Climate Change Policy that outlines our collective and synergized strategies to mitigate and adapt, we have launched our National Investment Policy aimed at enhancing investor confidence in our nation and support the ease of doing business in Belize, we have enhanced the business registration legislation and established online business registration facilities, provided collaborative space for government and private sector to support Micro, Small and Medium size businesses, and established a government unit to support digitization



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efforts and e-governance initiatives, to name a few. Our Government of Belize recognize the role it plays in creating an enabling environment for our local and urban economies to thrive.

At the local level, with the support of the Caribbean Community Climate Change Center (5Cs), we recently took on an initiative to develop a concept paper for advancing a project to build municipal climate resiliency; an initiative that we will advance for support from climate financing windows. In an addition, we have increased the level of collaboration and synergies between and among local and national actors to support service delivery, infrastructure improvements, eco-friendly public transportation and poverty and flood mitigation projects, including improving the housing conditions for the neediest. From a strategic standpoint, our Ministry is forging strategic objectives for municipalities to build sustainable financing mechanisms through enhanced own sources of revenue and prudence in expense management; climate resiliency, enhancement of the legal and regulatory framework, and the digitization of administrative and permitting processes.

These national and local efforts are intended to build a sound footing for, particularly the urban governments, to improve their institutional capacity to leverage opportunities to attract funding and financing to



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continue building urban economies whilst adapting to and mitigating climate change impacts.

However, despite these national and local efforts, sustainable urban financing remains a critical challenge. While there is some legal scope for municipal governments to access financing mechanisms, a greater enabling environment is to be derived for cities and towns to access and establish financing relations with the national government, private sector funding institutions, development banks, corporations and from public private partnerships. At the national level, considerations for equalization grant funding for municipal governments, conditional transfers and the creation of enabling legislations for private lending institutions to provide opportunities for low interest and long-term funding to support urban sustainability and resiliency initiatives are essential options to be explored.

As articulated by the UN-Habitat and DiMSUR, the application of the City Resilience Action Planning Tool (CityRAP), is an important toolkit that is to be explored and utilized by municipal governments and national governments for the assessment of gaps and challenges facing the urban sector. We have recognized, as the CityRAP would have assessed, our challenges in the urban sector that ranges from the limitations in the scope of the legal framework to support strong governance, planning



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limitations from a legal and human capacity standpoint, inability to deliver enhanced services as result of limited access to sustainable financing, the state of the urban economy and society, and the limitations in competencies to support disaster risk management.

This forum, over the next two days, will demonstrate to us in Belize and the wider region, what are some of the additional considerations that we are to explore if we are to build sustainability and resiliency in the urban sector that is so necessary for our future. For this I'm grateful.

Ladies and gentlemen, our time is not indefinite, our obligation to our people, our region, our world is NOW. We must be and we are prepared to take bold steps to make our future better. There are generations to come that will scrutinize the work that we will do now; my fervent hope, my fervent desire is that they would have said yes, we did a good job to secure their existence...and so, they too will be inspired to take up the mantle to ensure that all our cities and urban spaces and communities are sustainable, resilient and strong.

This is the pledge of our Government of Belize as our commitment to our people, our region and our world.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you!



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