



**STATEMENT BY
THE ALTERNATE GOVERNOR FOR BELIZE
DR. OSMOND MARTINEZ
ON BEHALF OF THE REGIONAL BORROWING MEMBER COUNTRIES**

I would like to acknowledge the presence of Acting Governor General of Saint. Lucia, His Excellency Cyril Errol Charles, and Her Excellency Mrs. Anysia Charles, Prime Minister of Saint Lucia, The Honourable Philip J. Pierre, Governors, Directors, the President of the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB/the Bank), government representatives, development partners, and other distinguished guests.

Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning

Firstly, I want to thank our host country, Saint Lucia, for the warmth of its people and their generous hospitality – a beautiful and fitting backdrop for the conversations to come. In this same vein, I wish to recognise the hard work of the management and staff of the Bank. Many times, their hard work and sacrifice goes unnoticed and unrecognised. The tremendous work being done across the Region and the work that went into ensuring that this annual meeting is a success is worthy of commendation.

I greet you all today on behalf of the Prime Minister of Belize, The Honourable John Briceno, the Government, and of course, the citizens of Belize. It is an honour to speak to you all today not only behalf my country, but also on behalf of all our Borrowing Member Countries (BMCs).

As we know, we have much more commonalities binding us than differences. We are stewards of some of the best natural resources that earth has to offer. We have rich histories that have bred unique cultures. On the other hand, we are also economically vulnerable with multiple significant constraints and we are highly exposed to the risks of the global arena – in many instances bystanders to phenomena beyond our control.

More than anything, though, the greatest thing we share in common is our resilience. Even in the face of a global pandemic, in the face of the giant and crude appetite of climate change, in the face of geopolitical tensions, in the face of suffocating global inflation – we continue to persevere.

Allow me to illustrate that resilience through the lens of Belize. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Briceno, the Government of Belize has accomplished many major milestones, thought to be impossible given persisting externalities. In the area of macro-level fiscal management, Belize achieved a 65-percentage point reduction in our debt-to-GDP ratio, down from 133% in 2020 to 64% as of December 2022. This was largely due to the historic Blue Bond debt-for-marine conservation transaction. It allowed us to successfully renegotiate our external commercial debt and resulted in an immediate 12% reduction in our total government debt. In the process, Belize earmarked \$4 million annually for marine conservation.

In the area of social protection, Belize has mainstreamed national efforts to develop a comprehensive social protection strategy and are steadily on track toward achieving multi-dimensional social protection with the unemployment rate at an all-time low of 5%.

Belize is among the fastest growing economies in the Region, giving international partners and investors restored confidence in our economic productivity.

And while I would share more about these notable feats and promise that Belize will continue to ascend on this course, the reality is that if another hurricane struck tomorrow, or a global pandemic rampaged once more – all of our progress would likely disappear.

The last few hurricanes that impacted Belize contributed to average annual losses of 4% of GDP, and considerable damage to infrastructure and public utilities. Even without a direct hit, flooding in our central districts reached unprecedented levels and left us with an estimated \$100 million worth of damage. Hurricane Lisa, a category one storm that hit last November, once again underscored our vulnerability. Though only a category 1 hurricane, thought to be a “best case scenario”, still required an emergency response and left us with considerable damage.

This story is not one that only Belize can tell. Every single BMC holds a similar fate. These scenarios have become the norm for our Region. We know that our progress is only as secure as we are in the face of external shocks. Individually, as countries, we have made great strides in reducing our debt burdens, prioritising climate action, building our disaster risk reduction facilities, and serving our people, but collective action remains crucial. This only underscores the urgency for more collaboration at a regional level.

We recognise the strategic role of the CDB in mobilising resources to support BMCs’ efforts to address the challenges they face. The Bank’s targeted and strategic financial support have enabled each of our countries to prepare customised development solutions paired with unparalleled technical expertise and more importantly, all aligned with our individual national development plans. Belize will continue to champion the Bank as it works arduously to meet its role, mandate and the expectations of its BMCs. We will also continue to advocate for the Bank among strategic partners and stakeholders.

We acknowledge the ongoing efforts of the Bank to mobilise climate finance. We need the Bank to advance its effort to provide affordable financing to our countries by pursuing blended finance. We wish to see the Bank provide direct support to BMCs to develop comprehensive climate adaptation projects, and advance the mobilisation of climate finance for loss and damage as negotiated at COP27.

Mr. Chairman, thank you once again, for convening us and leading these necessary conversations. And we thank the Bank for being such an essential partner to our BMCs.

I trust the conversations had will be borne of genuine regard for the countries we represent and the people we serve. Thank you for the opportunity to address this gathering and may we forge stronger partnerships to advance the development interest of our BMCs.

Thank you.