

BELIZE



Belize U.S. foreign assistance will focus on sustaining the U.S.-Belize partnership that discourages criminal activities and works to promote health. To accomplish these goals, U.S.-supplied equipment, training, and technical assistance will remain crucial to supporting our mission goals of preserving peace and security in Belize and to prevent the country from becoming a transit point for terrorists and illegal drugs to enter the United States. The United States will also conduct programs to improve child survival and health, and fight HIV/AIDS.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Belize's principal external concern has been the dispute involving the Guatemalan claim to Belizean territory. This dispute originated in Imperial Spain's claim to all "New World" territories west of the line established in the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494. Nineteenth-century efforts to resolve the problems led to later differences over interpretation and implementation of an 1859 treaty intended to establish the boundaries between Guatemala and Belize, then named British Honduras. Guatemala contends that the 1859 treaty is void because the British failed to comply with all its economic assistance clauses. Neither Spain nor Guatemala ever exercised effective sovereignty over the area.

Negotiations have been underway for many years, including one period in the 1960s in which the U.S. Government sought unsuccessfully to mediate. A 1981 trilateral (Belize, Guatemala, and the United Kingdom) "Heads of Agreement" was not implemented due to continued contentions. Belize became independent on September 21, 1981, with the territorial dispute unresolved. Significant negotiations between Belize and Guatemala, with the United Kingdom as an observer, resumed in 1988. Guatemala recognized Belize's independence in 1991, and diplomatic relations were established.

Eventually, on November 8, 2000, the two parties agreed to respect an "adjacency zone" extending one kilometer east and west from the border. Around this time, the Government of Guatemala insisted that the territorial claim was a legal one and that the only possibility for a resolution was to submit the case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). However, the Government of Belize felt that taking the case to the ICJ or to arbitration represented an unnecessary expenditure of time and money. So the Belizean Government proposed an alternate process, one under the auspices of the Organization of American States (OAS).

Since then, despite efforts by the OAS to jumpstart the process, movement has been limited to confidence-building measures between the parties. In November 2007, the Secretary General of the OAS recommended that the dispute be referred to the International Court of Justice. Currently Belize and Guatemala are preparing for a referendum, to be held simultaneously in both countries, on whether this dispute will move forward to the ICJ. No date for the referendum has been set.

In order to strengthen its potential for economic and political development, Belize has sought to build closer ties with the Spanish-speaking countries of Central America to complement its historical ties to the English-speaking Caribbean states. In 2005 Belize joined other Central American countries participating in the Cooperating Nations Information Exchange System (CNIES), which assists in locating, identifying, tracking, and intercepting civil aircraft in Belize's airspace. Belize and other Central American countries signed the Conjunta Centroamerica-USA (CONCAUSA) agreement on regional sustainable development.

Belize held the presidency of the Central American Integration System (SICA) for a 6-month period in 2007. Belize is a member of CARICOM, which was founded in 1973, and held the chairmanship of CARICOM for a 6-month period in 2008. Belize became a member of the OAS in 1990.

U.S.-BELIZEAN RELATIONS

The United States and Belize traditionally have had close and cordial relations. The United States is Belize's principal trading partner and major source of investment funds. It is also home to the largest Belizean community outside Belize, estimated to be 70,000 strong. Because Belize's economic growth and accompanying democratic political stability are important U.S. objectives, Belize benefits from the U.S. Caribbean Basin Initiative.

International crime issues dominate the agenda of bilateral relations between the United States and Belize. The United States is working closely with the Government of Belize to fight illicit narcotics trafficking, and in 2008 Belize began to receive funding under the Merida Initiative. Both governments also seek to control the flow of illegal migrants to the United States through Belize. Belize and the United States brought into force a Stolen Vehicle Treaty, an Extradition Treaty, and a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty between 2001 and 2003.

The United States is one of the largest providers of economic assistance to Belize, contributing \$3.5 million in various bilateral economic and military aid programs to Belize in FY 2008. Of this amount, nearly one million dollars was provided by the U.S. Military Liaison Office (MLO). The MLO, in conjunction with the Belize Defense Force, also worked to establish the Belize National Coast Guard. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) closed its Belize office in August 1996 after a 13-year program during which USAID provided \$110 million worth of development assistance to Belize. Belize still benefits from USAID regional programs. In addition, during the past 42 years, almost 2,000 Peace Corps volunteers have served in Belize. As of September 2009, the Peace Corps had 76 volunteers working in Belize. The U.S. military has a diverse and growing assistance program in Belize that has included the construction and renovation of several schools and youth hostels, medical assistance programs, and drug reduction programs. Private North American investors continue to play a key role in Belize's economy, particularly in the tourism sector.

Peace and Security: The United States will fund training programs for members of the Belize Defense Force (BDF) and the recently-established Belize National Coast Guard that are essential to enhancing Belize's security of its national territory. Training will also further develop Coast Guard operation and interdiction capabilities, improve maritime safety and search-and-rescue missions, help to protect the rich marine environment, and discourage criminal activities. Assistance will also be used to modernize the BDF in order to protect its territory and resources, participate in peacekeeping operations, and respond to natural disasters through focus on improving logistical support, weapons, ammunition, spare parts, maintenance, and training needs. Assistance will also provide spare parts and communications equipment to the Coast Guard. Providing equipment and training to Belize's BDF and Coast Guard are critical to the stability and security of the country.

Investing in People: With the highest reported prevalence rate in Central America, Belize is an important focal point for HIV/AIDS activities in the region. Efforts to contain the epidemic focus on activities to increase HIV/AIDS prevention practices and services directed mainly at those most at-risk, improve the HIV/AIDS policy environment, and improve the delivery of comprehensive care and treatment for people living with HIV/AIDS. The U.S. long term goal is to contain the epidemic and promote behaviors which decrease transmission of the disease.