

**Remarks by the Prime Minister of Belize, Mister Dean Barrow, during
the International Conference in Support of the Central America
Security Strategy**

Guatemala City, June 22nd 2011

Distinguished Host President, Alvaro Colom Caballeros,

Colleague Heads, the Presidents of SICA Member countries,

Our friend and neighbour, President Felipe Calderon Hinojosa of Mexico,

Distinguished President Manuel Santos of Colombia

Foreign Ministers and Secretaries of State

The Group of Friends,

Representatives of International Organizations,

Ministers, Heads of Delegations, Officials, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be back in Guatemala City, for this historic occasion. I thank President Colom for his usual, justly famed hospitality; and I thank fortune for Belize's alphabetic location within SICA, which has accorded me the honour of being first to speak at this seminal event. I shall always count it a small triumph even though it has nothing to do with merit and everything to do with luck. And even though it perhaps explains the term dumb luck.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

When one contemplates what is happening here today, one is overtaken by a welter of emotions. Some sense of accomplishment must first be allowed. After all, since the decision last year to upgrade the Central American Security Strategy, unrelenting hard work and unsinkable commitment have gone into producing this outcome. Ministers and officials especially, need to be congratulated on what has been a satisfactory trajectory. And the SICA Secretariat has been outstanding in its dedication.

Then there is the feeling of gratitude to be recorded. The outreach to the Group of Friends and to the larger international community has been met with a generous response. Their presence in such big numbers now is testament to that. And we thank the largeness of spirit, the acceptance of co-responsibility, and the urge to action that have produced the empowering solidarity that is so palpably evident now.

But the most predominant sentiment today has to be how terribly daunting is the task ahead of us; how many sacrifices of blood and resources are still to be made; how much more we will have to weep at this tragedy of consuming violence and international crime that has overtaken our societies; how indescribably cruel is the fate that has juxtaposed this phenomenon of nihilism and man-made devastation on a region that is so physically beautiful, so culturally precious, so environmentally rich.

But overlaid with this grim acknowledgement of the reality that the struggle against the abyss will probably get worse before it gets better, is the unquenchable nature of our drive to defeat this scourge of narco-trafficking and gun violence and youth pathology and social malfunction. In saying this I pay tribute to the imperishability of spirit that is so much a part of the patrimony of this region. But I also pay tribute to the hard-nosed plan of action that has already been produced and that has underpinned and buttressed this meeting. And I pay even more tribute to the concrete markers, as to the way forward, that have been laid down in the draft Declaration that I have seen.

Mr Chairman, Colleague Heads, Ministers:

As with all of you, we in Belize have seen an exponential increase especially in crimes against the person-most particularly murder-in the last few years. We are the least populated country in the region. And with just over 300 thousand inhabitants, we are traumatized as a society that we should have recorded 129 homicides last year; and that with not even six months of this year gone, we are already at 69.

Also like the rest of you, then, citizen security has become the number one preoccupation, the number one priority of my government. I read in the background documents that the regional norm is for 2% of national budgets to be spent on the legal, judicial and crime-fighting infrastructure. In Belize it is more like 6%. Still, the intractability of the problem continues. And the need to scale up the investments in crime prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration is as acute in Belize as anywhere else. Of course, our strategies for addressing the crisis going forward mirror precisely the segmentation to be found in the Central American Action Plan.

Mr President, the transnational nature of crime in our region, the cross-border collaboration of the criminal elements, the fact that they are resource rich, the sophistication of their organizations, all these are well known verities that have been evidenced in the most graphic and brutal of ways. The obvious need, therefore, for the regionalization of the efforts to stem this awful, region-destroying tide, was properly recognized from 2007. And while our efforts might have languished just a little at the start, there is no denying the progress that we have latterly made. We have signed agreements to protect the witnesses that come forward to testify; we have established protocols for the reintegration of youth that have fallen foul of the law but that want a second chance; we have agreed the common arrest warrant regime; and our security forces are working the cooperation processes that lead to information sharing and quick responses. So today marks both a culmination and a restart. We now have a greater appreciation of our individual and regional capacities as well as shortcomings. The pledges are being made for the large additional resources and efforts necessary to

prevent our fall into the void. The embrace of our inter-dependence, both regionally and globally, is paramount.

And so we have come to this moment. This time when in an open, solemn, deliberate proceeding, we all place our public imprimatur on the new commitment; the new campaign; the new mandate that has been forged in the crucible of an experience that has left no doubt as to the need to revivify our struggle, hold our regional banner higher, reassure our citizens that hope and help are on the way.

Mr President, Colleagues:

Our partners are here; our resources are gathered; our will is renewed.

Let no one doubt that this region, heir to some of the proudest traditions in history, inheritors of a fighting nationalism second to none, will succeed.

I say again, therefore, that I am proud to be associated with an event that I believe will mark the turning point in the crusade to reclaim our societies, reclaim ourselves.

Mr President, Colleagues,

I thank you.