



Report from the
Office of the Speaker
**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES
OF BELIZE**

13TH PARLIAMENTARY SESSION

2021

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Acknowledgements

Sincere appreciation is given to the Office of the Clerk and the staff of the National Assembly for their support, assistance, and willingness to embrace changes in order to improve the administration, efficiency and efficacy of the parliament and its obligations to members and the public. The staff operating with limited resources and number of personnel, attending to both chambers of the National Assembly, has worked tirelessly in meeting the commitments required of the parliament.

The work of the Office of the Speaker would not be possible without the support of the parliamentarians (both government and opposition) for the initiatives of the Speaker, attending various seminars and meetings on behalf of parliament. The overall support of parliamentarians, despite disagreements occasionally, has assisted in responsible oversight of house meetings.

The presiding officers of the House of Representatives and the Senate both share the same administrative staff and similar aspirations for a more open, modernized parliament with improved public engagement. In this regard, a special thanks to the collaborative effort and support of the President of the Senate, Hon. Carolyn Trench-Sandiford on the initiatives accomplished for the mutual benefit of both chambers and ultimately for the wider public outreach on the work of parliament.

Gratitude is extended to Prime Minister, Hon. John Briceno and his Cabinet for nominating me to serve as Belize's 12th Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Introduction



The 13th Parliament of Belize was inaugurated on December 11th 2020.

To the Speaker falls the responsibility of maintaining order in a fair and balanced manner, being neither too lax nor excessively strict or sensitive, but rather carefully navigating the boundary between, on the one hand, freedom of expression and on the other hand, indecorous descent into indignity. We want to encourage Belizeans, at home and in the diaspora, to be engaged in the business of the House, their business, and to tune in and not be turned off. We want our young Belizeans to not only visit the House but to be inspired to become parliamentarians. It is also recognized that the media plays an indispensable role in the democratic process, and it is my objective to ensure the House is an open and welcoming environment for them to carry out their obligation to the public.

What the public sees, whether on television or social media, is not the half of it. There is an engine room, which is not seen, that enables the National Assembly to operate at full tilt. This would not be possible without the dedicated staff of the National Assembly. There is much work to be done in collaboration with the President of the Senate whose chamber uses the same administrative staff to ensure the management of parliament is improved, modernized and that the parliament is made more accessible to the public. This report lays out a few of the initiatives aimed in beginning to address this.

There is no denying a significant effort and thrust with bi-partisan support are needed to embrace the ethos of open parliament for the modern era. The intent of this annual Speaker's report is to provide a summary of activities of the House of Representatives for the 1st year of this 13th parliament covering the calendar year of 2021. The purpose is to foster the principle of open parliament by providing an end of year summary report to the members and to the public on the House's accomplishments, challenges and the recommendations from the Office of the Speaker to allow for greater public engagement and enhanced legislative openness.

The report is available on the National Assembly's website (www.nationalassembly.gov.bz) and it is the intention that the report will be an annual exercise.

Valerie Woods
Speaker
House of Representatives

House Meetings

The inaugural meeting of the House of Representatives was held on Friday, December 11th, 2020, in front of the National Assembly Building in Belmopan. This meeting was the ceremonial opening of parliament with parliamentarians sworn in and the election of the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Between January 1st 2021 through December 31st 2021 there was a total of 10 working meetings. Of these meetings, four were regular (ordinary) meetings occurring on Fridays as provided for in the Standing Orders. The other six were special meetings occurring either during the prescribed recess periods of the House or on a day other than Fridays. With this few numbers of meetings in a year, the standing orders of the House as it relates to Absence of Members (Standing Order 84) warrants serious consideration for revision.

The first year of this parliament presented the challenge of operating in the grips of the COVID-19 pandemic. After consultations with senior public health officials, adjustments were made to the primary chamber meeting room in the National Assembly as well as implementation of standard protocols on mask wearing, hand sanitizing and physical distancing. With these adjustments, the first official meeting inside the chambers was held in January 2021. Galleries remained closed to the public for all house meetings held in 2021. A virtual meeting was also held with the media to implement the adoption of official media passes and safety protocols.

Table 1: Dates of House Meetings

1. Friday, January 8th (Special Meeting)	6. Friday, May 28th
2. Friday, February 5th	7. Friday, July 2nd
3. Friday, April 9th (Special Meeting)	8. Friday, September 3rd (Special Meeting)
4. Thursday, April 22nd (Special Meeting)	9. Tuesday, October 26th (Special Meeting)
5. Friday, April 23rd (Special Meeting)	10. Friday, December 3rd



BILLS

In 2021, there were 62 bills introduced in the House of Representatives:

- 55 of the bills introduced became law or Acts of Parliament passed by both the House of Representatives and the Senate. (See Table 2).
- 7 bills remain outstanding in various stages of the legislative process.

88.7 %

11.3 %

Table 2: Acts of Parliament 2021

Act No.1/2021 General Revenue Supplementary Appropriation (2020/2021) (No. 5)

Act No. 2/2021 Public Health (Amendment)

Act No. 3/2021 Central Bank of Belize (Amendment)

Act No. 4/2021 General Revenue Appropriation (2021/2022)

Act No. 5/2021 Time Limit for Judicial Decisions

Act No. 6/2021 Belize Constitution (Ninth Amendment)

Act No. 7/2021 Land Utilization (Amendment)

Act No. 8/2021 Supreme Court of Judicature (Amendment)

Act No. 9/2021 Court of Appeal (Amendment)

Act No. 10/2021 Court of Appeal Decisions (Validation)

Act No. 11/2021 Public Health (Amendment) (No.2)

Act No. 12/2021 Income and Business Tax (Amendment)

Act No. 13/2021 Court of Appeal Act (Amendment) (No.2)

Act No. 14/2021 Public Sector Emoluments and Allowances Reduction

Act No. 15/2021 Governor General (Conditions of Service) (Amendment)

Act No. 16/2021 Court of Appeal (Amendment) (No.3)

Act No. 17/2021 Companies (Amendment)

Act No. 18/2021 Stamp Duties (Amendment)

Act No. 19/2021 Tax Administration and Procedure (Amendment)

House Meetings | Bills

Act No. 20/2021 Immigration (Amendment)

Act No. 21/2021 Electronic Evidence

Act No. 22/2021 Money Laundering and Terrorism (Prevention) (Amendment)

Act No. 23/2021 Stamp Duties (Amendment) (No.2)

Act No. 24/2021 Finance and Audit (Reform) (Amendment)

Act No. 25/2021 Electronic Transaction

Act No. 26/2021 Electronic Transfer of Funds Crimes

Act No.27/2021 Public Sector Data Sharing

Act No. 28/2021 Blue Bonds Loan

Act No. 29/2021 General Revenue Supplementary Appropriation (2020/2021) (No. 6)

Act No 30/2021 General Revenue Supplementary Appropriation (2021/2022) (No.1)

Act No. 31/2021 Public Health (Amendment) (No. 3)

Act No. 32/2021 Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital Authority (Amendment)

Act No. 33/2021 Medical Services and Institutions (Amendment)

Act No. 34/2021 Medical Practice (Amendment)

Act No. 35/2021 Antibiotics (Amendment)

Act No. 36/2021 Quarantine (Amendment)

Act No. 37/2021 Social Security Board (Amendment)

Act No. 38/2021 Shops (Amendment)

Act No. 39/2021 Chemists and Druggists (Amendment)

Act No. 40/2021 Dentists (Amendment)

Act No. 41/2021 Opticians (Amendment)

Act No. 42/2021 Registration of Nursing Homes (Amendment)

Act No. 43/2021 Summary Jurisdiction (Offences) (Amendment)

House Meetings | Bills

Act No. 44/2021 National Liquefied Petroleum Gas Project (Amendment)

Act No. 45/2022 Data Protection Act

Act No. 46/2021 Securities Industry Act

Act No. 47/2021 General Revenue Supplementary Appropriation (2021/2022) (No. 2)

Act No. 48/2021 Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment)

Act No. 49/2021 Law Revision (Amendment)

Act No. 50/2021 Patents (Amendment)

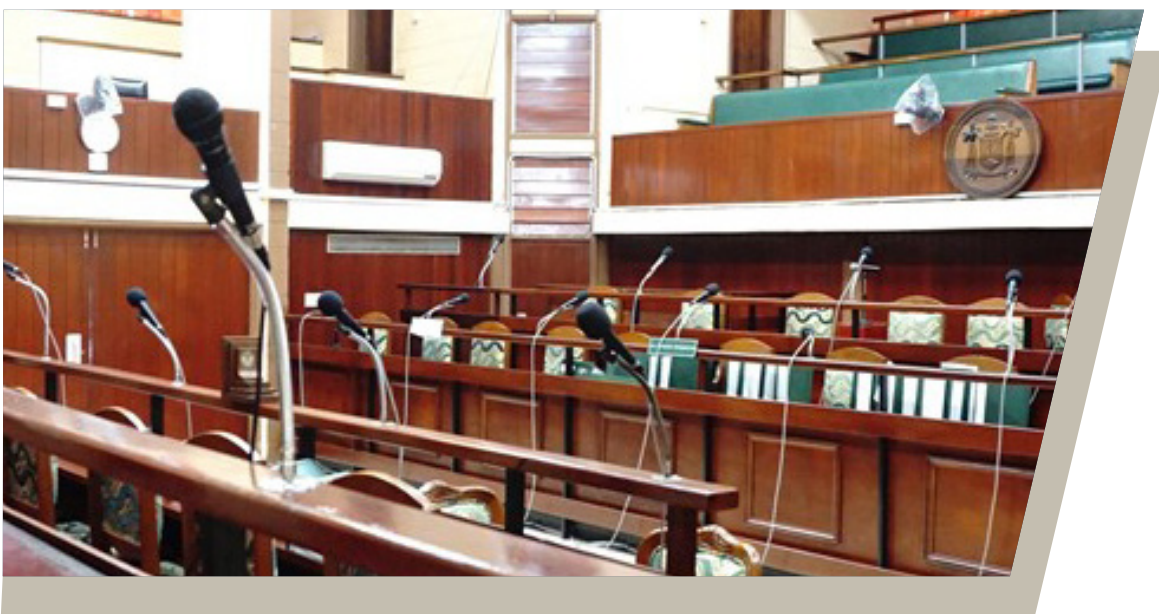
Act No. 51/2021 Trade Marks (Amendment)

Act No. 52/2021 Families and Children (Amendment)

Act No. 53/2021 The Belize Bank Limited Undertaking
(Belize Bank Corporation Limited Operations) Vesting

Act No. 54/2021 Certified Institutions (Children's Reformation) (Repeal)

Act No. 55/2021 Juvenile Offenders (Amendment)



House Meetings | Motions

MOTIONS

A total of 32 Motions and/or Resolutions were introduced and ratified in the House of Representatives.

1	Good Governance in Belize Motion
2	Designation of New Holidays and Special Days Motion
3	Adoption of the Report from the Committee of Selection Motion
4	Amendment of Standing Orders of the House of Representatives Motion
5	Establishment of the National Assembly Staff Committee Motion
6	Official Charities Fund Motion
7	Adoption of the Report from the Ombudsman Reports Committee on The Twentieth Annual Report of the Ombudsman of Belize for the Year Ending 2020
8	Caribbean Development Bank – Philip Goldson Highway and Remate Bypass Upgrading Project (US\$34, 300,000.00) Loan Motion
9	Inter-American Development Bank - Program to Support the Health Sector to Contain and Control Coronavirus and to Mitigate its effect on Service Provision (US\$5.0 Million) Loan Motion
10	Adoption of the Second Report from the Committee of Selection Motion
11	Adoption of the Third Report from the Committee of Selection Motion
12	City and Town Councils Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Fiscal Year 2021/2022 Motion
13	Resolution Approving the Appointment of Members of the Mines and Minerals Dispute Board Motion
14	Motion to Consider the Approval/or Disapproval by the National Assembly of the Disposition of the Commerce Bight Port to Recological Systems Limited Motion
15	Resolution to amend the Schedule to the Governor-General (Conditions of Service) Act, Chapter 7 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011
16	Resolution Authorizing the Transfer of Carbon Rights and Credits to the Belize Maya Forest Trust Motion

House Meetings | Motions

17	Resolution Authorizing the Transfer of Carbon Rights and Credits to the Maya Forest Corridor Trust Motion
18	Government of The Republic of China (Taiwan) - Amendment No. 1 to Loan Agreement No. 025-106001 Loan Amendment Motion
19	Government of The Republic of China (Taiwan) - Amendment No. 2 to Loan Agreement No. 6020236004 Loan Amendment Motion
20	Government of The Republic of China (Taiwan) - Amendment No. 1 to Loan Agreement No. 6020236005 Loan Amendment Motion
21	Government of The Republic of China (Taiwan) - Amendment No. 1 to Loan Agreement No. 6020236006 Loan Amendment Motion
22	Government of The Republic of China (Taiwan) - Amendment No. 1 to Amended and Restated Loan Agreement No. 6020236007 Loan Amendment Motion
23	Government of The Republic of China (Taiwan) - Amendment No. 1 to Loan Agreement No. 6020236008 Loan Amendment Motion
24	Government of The Republic of China (Taiwan) - Amendment No. 1 to Loan Agreement No. 6020236009 Loan Amendment Motion
25	Government of The Republic of China (Taiwan) - Amendment No. 1 To Loan Agreement No. 6020236010 Loan Amendment Motion
26	Government of The Republic of China (Taiwan) - Amendment No. 1 To Loan Agreement No. 6020236011 Loan Amendment Motion
27	Government of The Republic of China (Taiwan) - Amendment No. 1 To Loan Agreement No. 6020236012 Loan Amendment Motion
28	Inter-American Development Bank – Global Credit Program for Safeguarding the Productive Sectors and Employment US\$15.0 Million Loan and Guarantee Motion
29	Resolution Authorising the Purchase and Redemption of the GOB U.S. Dollar Bonds Due 2034, The Blue Loan Agreement, The Conservation Funding Agreement and The Ancillary Agreements Motion
30	Reparatory Justice for the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery in British Honduras Motion
31	Belize House of Representatives Resolution on Palestine Motion
32	Caribbean Development Bank - Natural Disaster Management - Immediate Response Loan - Hurricanes Eta and Iota – US\$2.5 million Loan Motion

Committee

COMMITTEE

There are a total of 13 Standing Committees of the House of Representatives, as provided for in the Standing Orders. At the first official meeting, a Committee of Selection is constituted to appoint the members of these Standing Committees. Each committee (except the Joint Public Accounts Committee) is comprised of 6 members (4 from the Government and 2 from the Opposition).

The Joint Public Accounts Committee (JPAC) is the first joint standing committee of both chambers of parliament. It was created in 2021 and replaces the former Public Accounts Committee (PAC). It is comprised of 4 members of government, 2 members from the Opposition and 3 senators selected from among the non-government and non-opposition senators (“the social partners”). The JPAC is chaired by the Opposition and the meetings are to be held publicly.

There were no meetings of the following committees:

- Education, Sports and Housing
- Works
- Tourism, Archaeology, and Information
- Agriculture and Fisheries
- Joint Public Accounts Committee - there were a few planning meetings of the Joint Public Accounts Committee but no publicly held meetings to review reports

NAME OF COMMITTEE	# OF 2021 MEETINGS
Constitution & Foreign Affairs (includes Privileges, Standing Orders & Regulations)	12
Finance and Economic Development	9
Public Service, Labour, Industry & Trade	6
Committee of Selection	3
Health & Human Development	3
Natural Resources & Environment	2
National Security and Immigration	1
Ombudsman Reports Committee	1
Public Utilities, Transport & Communications	1

ADMINISTRATION

ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT

The National Assembly has a staff complement of nine (9) persons. The team is led by the Office of the Clerk and a Deputy Clerk. The Office of the Clerk serves as the principal accounting officer for the National Assembly as well as for the three (3) offices of the Ombudsman, the Integrity Commission, and the Contractor General.

With a House of Representatives which has 31 members and a Senate with 13 members along with the presiding officers (the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate) and the House with 13 Standing Committees and the Senate with 5 Standing Committees, a review of the administration of the parliament is timely. This review was one of the activities under the 2019 Memorandum of Understanding with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). This administrative review was conducted in November 2021. Recommendations from that exercise will be presented in 2022 for consideration.

On the nomination of the Speaker of the House, with the support of the President of the Senate, the Deputy Clerk was awarded the CPA Small Branches Scholarship for the online Professional Development Certificate in Parliamentary Management at McGill University (Canada).

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY STAFF COMMITTEE (NASC)

All matters pertaining to the working environment/terms and conditions of employment for the staff of the National Assembly are considered through the National Assembly Staff Committee provided for in the National Assembly Staff Act. The NASC, which is comprised of 7 members, is established by a Motion ratified in the House and in the Senate. The Committee is chaired by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and is comprised of the President of the Senate, 2 House Government Members, 1 Opposition House Member, 1 Senator and 1 Staff Representative who can be a member of the staff or a non-staff member selected by the staff to represent them.

In 2021, the NASC met 5 times and is committed to ensuring a regular schedule of meetings during this parliament to address the concerns of the staff. Oversight of the staff of the National Assembly is guided by the National Assembly Staff (Conditions of Service) Regulations, 2003.



Diplomatic Relations and Inter-parliamentary Exchanges

The Speaker plays a key role in leading the parliamentary diplomacy ensuring that the Belize parliament makes full use of its subscription to various associations of parliaments. Subscriptions to these associations is helpful to the members of parliament and staff in the ongoing development of parliamentary procedures, networking and sharing of experiences as well as developing the parliamentary relationship with other countries.

Membership subscriptions that were in arrears from previous years were updated to facilitate the effective participation in various meetings and parliamentary exchanges. There were several opportunities afforded to members of both chambers of parliament for training, meeting, and networking virtually in 2021.

A few of the highlights of these key exchanges in 2021 are listed below.

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION (UK) – CPA

- A post-election seminar with members of the House and the Senate
- Orientation meetings for the newly established Joint Public Accounts Committee and for the roles of the political whips in the House of Representatives
- Webinar for Caribbean clerks of parliament
- Lecture series: McGill University School of Continuing Studies “The Role of Parliaments in Curbing Corruption”
- Working group on developing a Code of Conduct for Parliamentarians
- Working group on reviewing the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives
- CPA UK Virtual Roadshow Women’s Workshop
- CPA Roundtable with Women in Leadership and Civil Society



Diplomatic Relations and Inter-parliamentary Exchanges

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION-THE CARIBBEAN, AMERICAS AND THE ATLANTIC REGION (CPA CAA)

- The Speaker and the Deputy Clerk visited the Secretariat for the CPA for the CAA region in December, which is held in the Office of the Clerk of Parliament in Barbados. During this visit, courtesy calls were made on President, H.E. Sandra Mason, Prime Minister Hon. Mia Mottley and Speaker Arthur Holder and Senate President Reginald Farley of Barbados.
- The Secretariat provides various webinars and meeting information of the CPA for the region and also assists with services for the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians.

COMMONWEALTH WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS (CWP)

- Belize chairs the CWP for the Caribbean, Atlantic, Americas Region for the 2021-2024 term. The Speaker of the House of Representatives is the chairperson as of September 2021, and it is the first time Belize holds this designation.
- There was a virtual meeting of the Caribbean Women Presiding Officers.
- The Speaker and the Deputy Clerk attended the CWP's Regional Workshop in St. Lucia in December 2021.
- A courtesy visit was also made with Prime Minister Phillip Pierre of St. Lucia, the Speaker, Deputy Speaker and President of the Senate for St. Lucia as well as the Clerk and staff of the St. Lucia parliament which provided an opportunity to share experiences and procedures in the administration of parliament.



Diplomatic Relations and Inter-parliamentary Exchanges

FOPREL

(FORUM OF PRESIDING OFFICERS OF NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS/CONGRESSES OF CENTRAL AMERICA, THE CARIBBEAN BASIN AND MEXICO)

- The Speaker is the lead representative for FOPREL for the Parliament of Belize.
- Several virtual meetings of FOPREL were held in 2021, and members of parliament (House and Senate) attended a few of these.

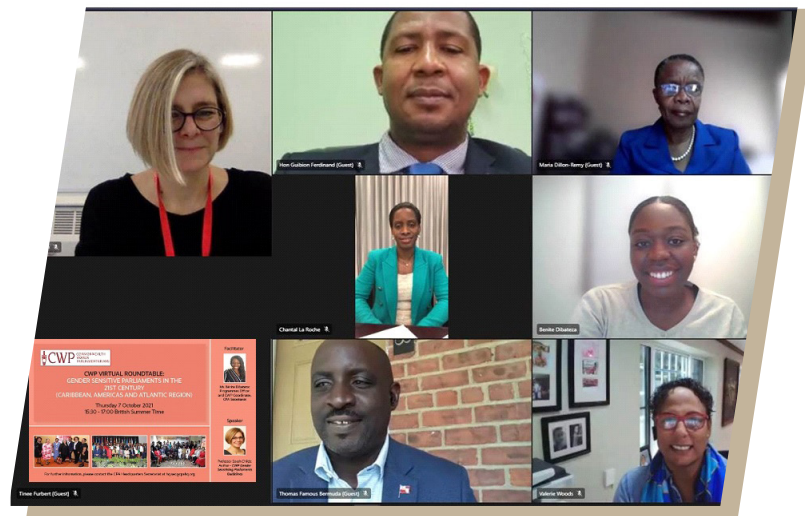
Belize chairs the Health and Education Parliamentary Committee of FOPREL; on November 11th, a virtual meeting was jointly held with FOPREL's Special Parliamentary Committee for Municipal Affairs, a committee that is chaired by Honduras. A Resolution on strengthening regulatory frameworks to ensure the full exercise of the Right to Education was adopted

PARLAMERICAS

ParlAmericas is an independent network composed of national legislatures of 35 states from North, Central, and South America, and the Caribbean. It should be noted that Belize now has a seat on the board of ParlAmericas with the Senate President elected at ParlAmericas 18th Plenary Assembly on December 10th 2021 for a two-year term.

Some of the 2021 ParlAmericas activities are listed below:

- The 5th Gathering of the ParlAmericas Open Parliament Network Countering Dis-information to Promote Responsible Public Discourse, which was held virtually
- The Belize parliament co-hosted the virtual gathering of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality
- ParlAmericas Open Parliament Working Meetings
- 13th Gathering of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality (PNGE) Bolstering Social Protection beyond COVID-19



Diplomatic Relations and Inter-parliamentary Exchanges

OTHER OFFICIAL EXCHANGES

- The Speaker and the Deputy Clerk, on the invitation of the Legislative Yuan of the Republic of China (Taiwan), attended the 1st Open Parliament workshop in Taipei, Taiwan where the Speaker delivered keynote remarks.
- The National Committee for Families and Children (NCFC) with support from UNICEF and the Parliament held the 2nd National Youth Parliament on November 20th
- The Caribbean Development Bank's Webinar Series on Public Expenditure Scrutiny for Members of Parliament (MPs) Project - Knowledge Products



Speaker's Initiatives

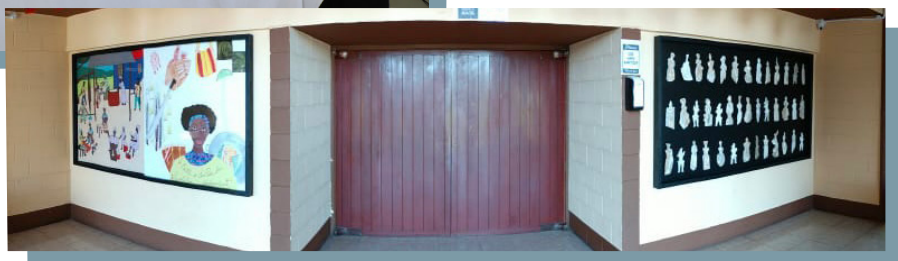
The Belize Parliamentary Alliance against Hunger & Malnutrition (BPAHM) was re-established with the new parliament. Several meetings and activities were undertaken in the year with the 14 parliamentary champions. The Speaker chairs BPAHM and the year culminated with the distribution of vegetable seedlings to the parliamentarians for onward distribution in their respective communities in an effort to promote healthy eating and backyard gardens.

As a collaborative effort with the President of the Senate, a virtual presentation by the United Nations (UN) Agencies in Belize was held with the members of the National Assembly on the work of the UN in Belize and to provide key highlights on the country programme for Belize.

A video on "Reflections of 1981" was produced to commemorate the 40th Anniversary of Belize's Independence. It included reflections from six of the leading parliamentarians in 1981, who were involved in the debates of 1981 in the House and Senate on the Belize Constitution. The video and the digitized copies of the debates of 1981 are available on the parliament's website at www.nationalassembly.gov.bz and was another collaborative effort of both presiding officers of the National Assembly.

The parliament also collaborated with the National Celebrations Committee through the National Institute of Culture and History (NICH) in partnership with the imagiNATION factory to commission two (2) works of visual art for the 40th anniversary of Belize's Independence—a multi-media art entitled "Independence da EVERYDAY People" and a flintstone sculpture entitled "Flint Humans". These are now prominently displayed at the entrance to the main chamber room of the National Assembly building.

In an effort to further improve on the principles of open parliament, the Orders of the Day for House Meetings are now uploaded on the website prior to House Meetings. Previously, this was only available online after House meetings were held.



Recommendations

Based on the first year of the 13th session of the House of Representatives and with support of parliamentarians, much more can be improved for the benefit of the staff, parliamentarians, and the general public. This would contribute significantly to better serve the people of Belize with accountability, transparency and accessibility to the legislative process.

While the effort will require time, bi-partisan support resources, commitment of parliamentarians and the staff, there is technical assistance available to commence the necessary work through the various regional associations that the parliament has subscribed to.

The following are a few recommended actions:

- A redesign of the parliament's website to ensure it is more user friendly and accessible to the public including improvement on the mnemonics it currently uses to bring it more in line with best practices.
- As a separate branch of government and in keeping with best practices of other parliamentary jurisdictions, the parliament should have its own distinct insignia which is not the same symbol used by the Executive of the government. This would further promote the importance of separation of powers.
- Improving the work of the National Assembly Staff Committee as well as working with the staff to address critical needs of the work environment.
- Collaboration with the President of the Senate on proposals for the improvement of the National Assembly building and space, public engagement, modernization of procedures and systems for a more efficient administration of parliamentary work and services.
- Continuous work on open parliament with the President of the Senate and parliamentarians.
- Establishment of the Code of Conduct for parliamentarians.
- Revision of the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives.
- Establishment of a Gender Affairs and Human Rights Committee.
- Subscription to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).
- Improved participation in international and regional parliamentary associations.
- Development and implementation of the CWP programme for the region working with the CPA CAA Secretariat.
- Revision of legislation that are specific to the parliament for improved governance of the assembly.

Report from the Office of the Speaker House of Representatives of Belize

13th Parliamentary Session 2021

