



President's Message



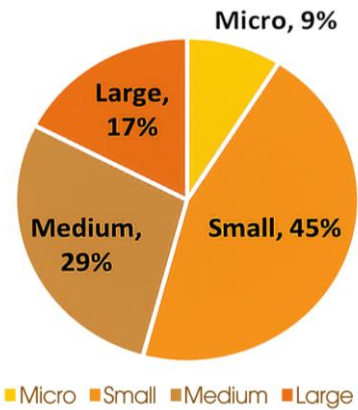
Good evening members, thank you for being present this evening at what is our 101st Annual General Meeting and our second virtual version of the AGM. Though I have been in this position as President for the last 9 months, it is my duty to take you through the last year of activities and highlights delivered on your behalf through this Chamber. Let me say this about the last year: “it neva normal!”, and let me say this about where we are now: “we still nuh back to normal!”. There is a quote that says “The first step toward change is awareness. The second step is acceptance”. There is no doubt in my mind that the events of the last year have made us all **starkly aware** of some harsh realities facing us, personally and professionally. But, let us turn around that mental anxiety from the information overload of harsh realities, even just for tonight, and congratulate ourselves for ruminating all of this information and boldly taking necessary steps with awareness towards change.

It is possible that for some of us, we have doubted the steps we took during this unprecedented time of difficulty. If no one else has said it to you yet, though, KUDOS to each of you for swimming and not sinking. KUDOS for making your business that much more customer friendly to keep generating income and to keep as many of your staff as you could. KUDOS for using technology to keep better records and to serve your customers and clients better. KUDOS for identifying innovative and creative business ideas, and making them a reality during a time of extreme doubt. KUDOS for lowering prices, where you could, to make it more affordable for customers and clients facing their own financial issues. To you all, we at the BCCI say “job well done” and “thank you for your efforts”. This Chamber is as strong as our

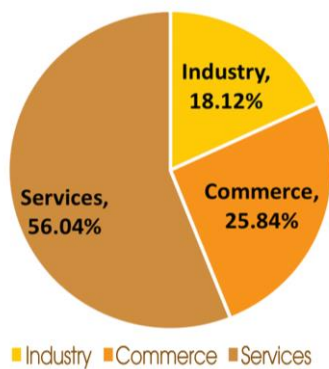
members, and what muscle you have shown and grown under the weight and pressure of several issues.

From our last data analysis in January, the BCCI's membership is 9% micro, 45% small, 29% medium and 17% large businesses. Our members are categorized by sector as 56% in the Services, 18% in Industry, and almost 26% in Commerce. We are truly representative of the Belize business environment, with various perspectives and ideas coming from our members who speak with experience and passion. We were so pleased to hold our Member Mix and Mingle in January as step one in our strategic planning process to serve you better. To continue

MEMBER SIZE



MEMBER BY SECTOR



building our membership, we offered free trial membership and we connected with you on as many occasions as we could to gather thoughts on several issues from [what we termed] the Business Pantry recommendations, to the COVID-19 business confidence building measures and the transition to a new Government administration. These efforts have resulted in, and continue to result in, not only a growth in membership when compared to 2020, but also an increase in membership fees as well as proof that in many ways we

have had success with influencing the Government's implementation of some (though not all) of our recommendations.

On the shoulders of our strong and formidable membership, we continued to seek collaborations and opportunities to advocate on issues of national importance. I wish to make special mention of two very impactful partnerships forged during what could have otherwise been isolating and divisive times:

- First, the Joint Social Partners of Belize grouping, which has begun with the BCCI, NTUCB and Belize Network of NGOs. We signed a joint declaration for the implementation of good governance mechanisms in September 2020. We have discussed an action plan for sustainable goals which, with consensus of all in that group, we will continue to implement together. We have all placed on the table the realization that we may not agree on everything, but when we agree on something, there is no stronger way to move than arm-in-arm and shoulder-to-shoulder.



- Secondly, the partnership between the BCCI, Galen University and Love FM to hold the Prime Ministerial Debate in anticipation of the General Election. This was a professionally planned and



executed event, organized with the guidance of the Jamaica Debates Commission. Though some may have found the banners stating “Prime Ministerial Debate” as ironic when viewing the empty podiums on the stage, the irony was not lost on us. A call to leadership may be heard by many and answered by few, and what an



important sight for Belizeans to see. The partners of the group expressed no contrition for showing a live, direct and uncensored version of events to the public.

Through these collaborations, we not only increased our general social media popularity, but we also distinguished ourselves as reliable sources information in a period of excessive amounts of misinformation.

So, we have been aware, we have accepted the realities and as a result we have been able to adapt to changes as they come while still remaining true to the principles on which this Chamber has been built. Fundamental principles generally won't change much, but our approach to upholding those fundamental principles will.

Despite the complexities of the various factors working against Belize at this time, several of the recommendations that remain unheard by the Government after years and years of lobbying actually still remain the same today. How would your life doing business in Belize change for the better if we were listened to on matters of comprehensive and equitable tax and trade license reform? On matters of formalization of informal businesses who unfairly compete against you every day? On matters of being able access and track Government services online, including payment? On a serious approach to cracking down on corruption? When we talk about “ease of doing business”, are these not the components of making this a reality? The veterans of this Chamber can tell you that these issues go through one ear and out the other of too many Government ministers and public servants. At this point, we can lobby on these issues almost by muscle memory. But, we continue to appeal to fresh ears and we continue to adjust our approach to delivering this information to policy-makers and decision-makers.

The truth is, though, that until the Government places as much thought and energy into these issues as we have in the private sector, we can count on lackluster results from piecemeal implementations. Until then, there is no “ease” of doing business. There is extreme difficulty, there are constant obstacles, there is additional expenditure of money and time for weeks and months on processes that should not last longer than a few days. How, then, can this ‘engine of the economy’, as the private sector is often called, run without the parts and servicing it needs to keep running smoothly?

And that brings us to where we are today as a country... facing an overflow of frustration for not having been listened to for many years. Facing an oversupply of mistrust and doubt when once again faced with commitments and undertakings for actions to be done at a later date. And facing an overcompensation for past omissions and past inadequacies. We cannot, however, allow ourselves to be so discouraged to the point of putting off our pursuit of growth and recovery. In fact, it is our duty to face the challenges head on and to see the solutions become a reality.

In light of the current breakdown in good faith negotiations between the Government of Belize and the unions over matters of good governance and fiscal management, we have offered our

assistance to sit at the table and work with all parties involved to encourage resolution and, where necessary, compromise. Other organizations have reached out to us to offer support to us in this regard, for which we thank them. There is an urgent need to forge partnerships in a way which not only get us through the issues of the day, but for the issues to come since new issues maybe just as unprecedented as these could be right around the corner.

And it is only with collaboration, respect and understanding that we can together steer this boat to safe harbour. The BCCI will not jump ship, no matter how rough the waters get or how miscalculated our ship's path may seem. So, we commit to continuing the lobbying on your behalf and continuing the hours of work per week put in by our Secretariat and EC to make a difference. Remember, though, that you our members and your colleagues in the private sector⁴ who may not be members of the Chamber are who contribute most directly to the core needs of this country, that is: through employment, tax and other payments to the Government, and direct investment into the economy. It is within your right to, on your own, and through this Chamber, demand better from all other stakeholders that play a part in the proper operation of this economy. We encourage all to increase their consciousness of how individual actions, no matter how seemingly small, have national impact. This colossal impact emanates from negative actions such as tax evasion and bribery of public officers, but also emanates from positive actions such as investing in the capacity building of our staff and running our businesses with ethical principles. KUDOS to those of us who can proudly declare that we have adopted positive actions in a time where other options may have seemed easier and more rewarding.

In closing, we thank you, our members, for your continued support and involvement. We continue to move full speed ahead with our strategic planning to ensure that this Chamber's lifetime spans another solid and progressive 101 years and more. We look forward to communicating with you and hearing your suggestions on several more occasions throughout this year. Thank you.