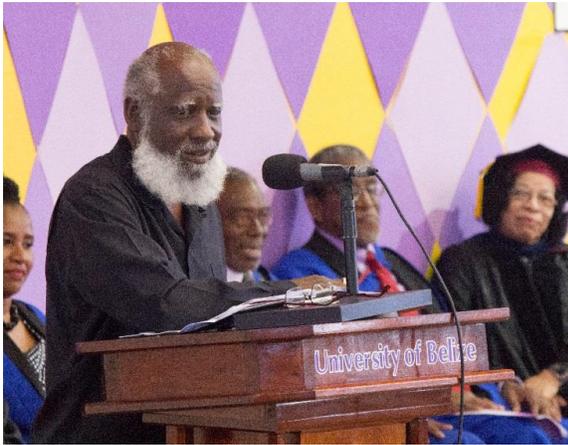




Keynote Address for the University of Belize's Commencement Exercises
By Hon. Wilfred Elrington
Saturday, 11th February, 2017



“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven”. I am sure you all recognize those timeless words from Ecclesiastes, the preacher, chapter 3 verse 1.

Today is your time! A time for celebrating the successful completion of another leg of your educational marathon. A time for rejoicing by graduates, family members, loved ones and friends. You all have done well! You justly deserve praise and compliments. I congratulate you all!

I thank you sincerely for giving me the honour and privilege of addressing you on this special day. While I appreciate fully that your invitation was extended to me in my public capacity, I crave your indulgence to permit me to address you as well in my capacity as a graduate, as the parent of four graduates and as the husband to a graduate. I know only too well the pride, joy and happiness you are experiencing at this time.

I also know that even in the midst of your celebrations, memories of the sacrifices, toils, hopes and fears which were your constant companion throughout your course of studies keep flashing through your minds. I can assure you that flash backs in time are natural and normal. Those and other similar thoughts will accompany you all the days of your life. You will live and thrive with them in the world of work in like manner in which you lived and thrived with them throughout your student days.

I am also pleased to be able to tell you that because of your advanced education, you are now better placed than the vast majority of your fellow Belizeans to make a success of your lives in the future. Never before, in the history of our fledgling nation, have there been more opportunities for educational advancement and for obtaining gainful employment by university graduates than there is today.

Without going into details I can tell you that currently numerous scholarships are being offered to qualified Belizeans by Belize's co-operation partners foremost among which are Mexico, Cuba, Taiwan, The United Kingdom, Australia, South Korea, India, Malaysia, The Organization of American States and El Salvador.

I can also tell you, without fear of contradiction, that not only do qualified Belizean now have the right to obtain employment in every one of the 15 CARICOM countries, but in addition, thanks to the internet, telecommunication and globalization, skilled and computer literate Belizeans are now able to obtain employment with companies the world over without having to leave our shores. Indeed, the market for white collar workers, especially in the services sector, is expanding greatly at home and abroad.

Because our country is so young and still in the early stages of its development, it will have an increasing need for professional, technical, managerial, entrepreneurial and marketing knowhow. And the graduates of our Universities will be greatly sought after to fill those needs. While the employment prospects of our graduates seem regrettably secure, the same cannot now be said about our territorial integrity and security.

You are all aware that, since 1939 our country has been dogged by a territorial claim by our neighbor Guatemala. You also know that there are great differences in the size of our territories, economies, populations and military capacities. Fortunately for us however, because of the courage, wisdom and foresight past leaders and our ancestors we were able to gain our independence on 21st September, 1981 with all territory intact despite the Guatemalan claim.

Today we are a sovereign independent nation. But our borders are still not internationally recognized. The only way they will be internationally recognized is when the Guatemalan claim comes to an end.

In his book entitled "*With Malice toward None*" our former Prime Minister Said Musa stated and I quote,... the governments of both countries have agreed that legal adjudication by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at the Hague would provide the only definitive resolution of this century old dispute. All the legal research carried out by distinguished international law experts during our administration indicate that Belize has an "iron-clad" impregnable cost to secure a decision of the ICJ that would confirm and ratify the long established existing borders of Belize with Guatemala. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea would also protect what is rightfully Belize's territorial maritime boundary.

Whether or not the case will go to the International Court of Justice will however depend on whether the Guatemalan Congress approve the decision of their Cabinet to go to Court, and if so, whether the majority of people in both Belize and Guatemala vote in a referendum to support the decision to go to the Court.

The Guatemala Congress has in fact approved the decision of their Cabinet to go to the ICJ. And the latest information coming out of Guatemala suggests that they are planning to hold their referendum next September. Our National Assembly and Senate have also approved the decision of our Cabinet to go to the ICJ subject to the consent of the Belizean electorate given in referendum, thus paving the way for us to go to referendum on a date to be appointed by our Prime Minister, which date will not according to our Prime Minister will not be before the date on which the Guatemalans hold their referendum.

Thankfully, unlike in 1798 at the battle of St. George's Caye when our ancestors had to defend our country with guns this time we will be deciding the fate of our country through the ballot box.

Most Belizeans I know are Christians. We are guided in our daily lives by the teachings of the scriptures. And we are all acquainted with Jesus' famous sermon on the mount my own favorite verse in that sermon can be found in St. Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5 verse 9, which states "blessed are the peace makers, they shall be called children of God."

Bringing an end to the Guatemalan Claim would be the greatest blessing that could befall our nation. It would be the security to our country that we all long for. The greatest beneficiaries of that blessing will be you our young graduates though all Belizeans will benefit from it as well. To that end, it is incumbent upon you to do all in your power to ensure that you are fully

informed of the pros and cons of the claim and of the wisdom of voting yes to taking the issue to the ICJ when the referendum is held.