



ELECTORAL OBSERVATION MISSION FINAL REPORT

Organization of
American States

GENERAL AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN BELIZE MARCH 7, 2012

Secretariat for Political Affairs
Department for Electoral Cooperation and Observation

Electoral Observation Missions (EOMs)
Organization of American States (OAS)



Organization of
American States

ELECTORAL OBSERVATION MISSION FINAL REPORT

GENERAL AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN BELIZE

MARCH 7, 2012

**General Secretariat
Organization of American States**

José Miguel Insulza
Secretary General

Albert R. Ramdin
Assistant Secretary General

Kevin Casas-Zamora
Secretary for Political Affairs

Pablo Gutiérrez
Director
Department for Electoral Cooperation and Observation



OAS Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Final report of the OAS Electoral Observation Mission to the General and Municipal Elections in Belize : March 7, 2012 / [Prepared by the Department for Electoral Cooperation and Observation].

p. ; cm. (Electoral Observations in the Americas series, no. 79) ; (OEA/Ser.D/XX SG/DCOE/II.79) ; (OEA/Ser.G CP/doc.4802/12)

ISBN 978-0-8270-5932-0

1. Elections--Belize. 2. Election monitoring--Belize. I. Organization of American States. Department for Electoral Cooperation and Observation. II. Series. III. Series: OEA/Ser.G CP/doc.4802/12.

OEA/Ser.D/XX SG/DCOE/II.79

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION	7
CHAPTER II. POLITICAL SYSTEM AND ELECTORAL ORGANIZATION	9
A. POLITICAL SYSTEM	9
B. ELECTORAL LEGISLATION	12
C. ELECTORAL AUTHORITIES	12
D. POLITICAL FINANCING	15
CHAPTER III. THE MISSION: ACTIVITIES AND OBSERVATIONS	17
A. PRE-ELECTORAL PHASE	17
B. ELECTION DAY	20
C. POST-ELECTORAL PHASE	24
CHAPTER IV. CONCLUSIONS	25
CHAPTER V. RECOMMENDATIONS	27
APPENDICES	29

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On March 7, 2012, Belize underwent a process to elect a Prime Minister, members of the National Assembly, Mayors and members of nine town councils. A total of 244 candidates, including representatives of four political parties as well as independent candidates, ran for 96 posts. Over 73% of Belize's 178,054 registered voters went to the polls for the General and Municipal Elections.

In response to a February 7, 2012 invitation extended by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Belize to observe the electoral process, the Organization of American States deployed an Electoral Observation Mission composed of 22 international observers from 13 countries. This was the first such invitation from the government of Belize and thus the first election observed by the OAS in the country.

The Mission arrived in the country on March 1, 2012 to begin its observation of the electoral preparations and to meet with government authorities, party leaders, candidates, members of the resident diplomatic community and civic organizations. On Election Day, observers were deployed to all six of the country's political districts, covering all of its municipalities and more than 83% of the country's voting centers. This presence in the country was made possible by financial contributions from the governments of Bolivia, Chile, Mexico, Switzerland, the United States and the United Kingdom.

At stake in the General and Municipal Elections were all 31 seats in the National Assembly as well as 65 seats in nine town councils. This occasion marked only the second time in Belizean history that elections for members of municipal and representative governments were held simultaneously. 74 candidates contested the 2012 General Elections in Belize. The ruling United Democratic Party (UDP) and the principal opposition People's United Party (PUP) each fielded candidates in all 31 national assembly constituencies. There were also seven candidates from the People's National Party (PNP), two from Vision Inspired by the People (VIP) and three independents. In the municipal elections, 170 candidates competed for the posts of mayors and municipal councilors.

Final results in the General Elections gave 17 seats in parliament to the UDP and the remaining 14 seats to the PUP. Dean Barrow of the UDP was sworn in for his second consecutive term as Prime Minister of Belize. Of the 65 contested municipal seats, the UDP won 42 and the PUP won 23.

The OAS Electoral Observation Mission wishes to express its gratitude to the Government of Belize for its invitation to observe the electoral process and to thank the political parties and candidates for their collaboration with the Mission throughout its time in the country.

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

OAS Electoral Observation Missions (OAS/EOMs) constitute a key instrument in the defense and promotion of democracy in the continent. They help guarantee the integrity, impartiality, and accountability of numerous electoral processes and strengthen the credibility of democratic institutions in member states.

The presence of an OAS/EOM reflects the solidarity and support of the Inter-American community towards the efforts undertaken by democratic institutions in states that organize and administer their own electoral processes. OAS Missions promote the recognition of political rights, particularly the right to suffrage, as the legitimate expression of the opportunity of every citizen to elect representatives and to be elected in an inclusive and free manner.

Since 1962, the OAS has observed more than 190 electoral processes in the Hemisphere, although the greatest advance in these initiatives has taken place in the last 15 years. In that time span, the OAS has observed many different types of elections - general, presidential, parliamentary, and municipal elections, referenda, signature validation and collection processes, as well as primary elections within political parties – always at the request of the member state. The General and Municipal Elections of March 7, 2012 marked the first occasion that Belize had requested an OAS/EOM to observe an electoral process in the country.

The OAS responded positively to the invitation and set in motion preparations for an Electoral Observation Mission to observe the final days of campaigning, the conduct of the poll, the counting of ballots, and the immediate post-election process. The Secretary General designated Ambassador Frank Almaguer, former Ambassador of the United States to Honduras and former Secretary for Administration and Finance at the GS/OAS, to lead the OAS/EOM in Belize. He was assisted by Tyler Finn, Consultant in the OAS Department for Electoral Cooperation and Observation (DECO) as Deputy Chief of Mission, and by Rosa Serpa, a Specialist from the same department, as General Coordinator.

Although the 2012 General and Municipal Elections did not mark the first occasion in which an international mission had observed a Belizean electoral process, it represented the first electoral process observed by the OAS in the country. As a result, an important aspect of the EOM's work was the establishment of initial observations regarding the electoral system and electoral administration in light of its experiences within the hemisphere as well as international standards.

The EOM team comprised 22 international observers from 11 OAS member states (Antigua & Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Guyana, Jamaica, Mexico the United States of America and Venezuela) and two observer countries (France and Spain). The Mission initiated its activities in the country with the arrival of the Chief and Deputy Chief of Mission on March 1, 2012. At that point the Mission installed itself permanently, with the staggered arrival of the remainder of the core group specialists: the electoral analyst, electoral organization specialist, press officer, legal analyst and financial officer. On March 5, 2012, the first group of observers was deployed to the six district capitals as well as the national capital of Belmopan. On Election Day, the full complement of international observers was present in all six districts and all nine municipalities. The Mission concluded its activities on March 9, 2012.

This report is organized into four chapters. The next chapter presents a general overview of the political system and electoral organization in Belize. The third chapter details the activities of the EOM, focusing on its observations from the three key stages of the election: the pre-electoral period, Election Day, and the post-electoral phase. The final two chapters present the general conclusions of the Mission as well as recommendations to strengthen the electoral process in Belize.

CHAPTER II. POLITICAL SYSTEM AND ELECTORAL ORGANIZATION

A. POLITICAL SYSTEM

Belize operates with a parliamentary democracy modeled on the Westminster system. The Belize Constitution divides the government into three branches: executive, legislature, and judiciary.

1. Executive Branch

The constitutional head of the Belizean state is Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom, who is represented in the country by a Governor-General. The Governor-General, who must be a citizen of Belize, serves at the pleasure of the British monarch and is not subject to a fixed term of office. According to the constitution, the Governor-General is appointed on the recommendation of the Prime Minister and must "act in accordance with the advice of the Cabinet or a Minister acting under the general authority of the Cabinet" except in cases in which the constitution or law specifically states otherwise.

The executive branch is made up of a Prime Minister and Cabinet. The constitution states that "the Cabinet shall be the principal executive instrument of policy with general direction and control of the Government and shall be collectively responsible to the National Assembly for any advice given to the Governor General by or under the general authority of the Cabinet and for all things done by or under the authority of any Minister in the execution of his office." Both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance must be elected members of the House of Representatives, while the remainder of cabinet members may come from either the House or the Senate. Typically, cabinet ministers are members of the majority political party who concurrently hold seats in the assembly. Ministers are formally appointed and assigned portfolios within the cabinet by the Governor-General in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister.

2. Legislative Branch

The Belizean legislative branch is a bicameral National Assembly composed of a 31-member elected House of Representatives and a 12-member appointed Senate. As stipulated in chapter six of the Belize Constitution, the National Assembly is responsible for making "laws for the peace, order and good government of Belize." The National Assembly has a maximum life span of five years following general elections, and must meet for at least one session each year. The Prime Minister has the right to advise the Governor-General to dissolve the National Assembly at any time in this period and thus determine the date of the general elections.

The qualifications to hold office as a National Assembly representative and as a Senator are similar. To be eligible for either chamber, one must be a citizen of Belize, at least eighteen years old, and have resided in Belize for at least one year immediately prior to his or her nomination or appointment. Both chambers bar members of the armed forces and the police from serving as representatives.

All 31 members of the House of Representatives are popularly elected to terms that are not to exceed five years. The 12 members of the Senate are each appointed by the Governor-General: six in accordance with the advice of the prime minister and three with the advice of the leader of the opposition. Additionally, The Belize Council of Churches and the Evangelical Association of Churches; the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Belize Business Bureau; and the National Trade Union Congress and the Civil Society Steering Committee each advise the Governor-General on the appointment of one senator. The Senate is headed by a non-voting president who is appointed by the governing party.

3. Judiciary

The Belizean legal system establishes the judiciary as an independent branch of government. Each of the six districts (Belize, Cayo, Corozal, Orange Walk, Stann Creek and Toledo) has a Summary Jurisdiction Court that hears criminal cases as well as a District Court that hears civil cases. Both of these courts are referred to as magistrates' courts, and may impose fines and prison sentences of up to six months. These courts have jurisdiction in less serious civil and criminal cases, but must refer to the Supreme Court more serious criminal cases, as well as any substantive legal questions.

The Supreme Court has unlimited original jurisdiction in both civil and criminal proceedings, and hears appeals from magistrates courts. The Chief of Justice is appointed by the Governor-General, "in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister given after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition." The Governor-General is also responsible for appointing the other justices, called *puisne* judges, "in accordance with the advice of the judicial and legal services section of the Public Service Commission and with the concurrence of the Prime Minister given after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition."

Appeals of Supreme Court decisions are handled by the Court of Appeal, which is headed by a President. The President, along with the two other justices who serve on the court, is appointed by the Governor-General in "in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister given after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition." Though the Belize Constitution sets no fixed term of office for these justices, it stipulates that terms of office be fixed in their instruments of appointment.

4. Regional Authorities

The territory of Belize is divided into six administrative districts: Belize, Cayo, Corozal, Orange Walk, Stann Creek and Toledo. Each district is administered by a locally elected council from that district's capital city, called a "district town." Additionally San Pedro, in the Belize district, Benque Viejo del Carmen and the national capital of Belmopan, both geographically located within the Cayo district, operate with their own town councils. While the Belize City council is composed of nine members (a mayor and eight councilors), the remaining eight town councils are made up of seven members (a mayor and six councilors).

As per the Town Councils Act, the chief executive officer of every town council is the mayor, who is responsible for providing effective leadership and direction for the council. Their responsibilities include "developing sister-city or sister-town relations with other cities or towns within and outside Belize and supervising the town administrator and ensuring that the town administrator implements the decisions of the Council." The councils have jurisdiction over various areas of town affairs such as: environmental protection, revenue collection, town zoning, planning and urban infrastructure, town sanitation, public health and market management, tourist promotion and development, coordination of public utilities, crime and drug reduction and prevention, recreational planning and development, development of sports and culture, traffic control and management, and coordination of relations and activities between the town, the Government of Belize, non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations.

5. Administrative Boundaries

Belize's six administrative districts are further divided into 31 constituencies, or "electoral divisions," each represented in the House of Representatives by one elected member. Boundaries are summarized in the following chart:

Belize District

1. Albert
2. Belize Rural Central
3. Belize Rural North
4. Belize Rural South
5. Caribbean Shores
6. Collet
7. Fort George
8. Freetown
9. Lake Independence
10. Mesopotamia
11. Pickstock
12. Port Loyola
13. Queen Square

Corozal District

14. Corozal Bay
15. Corozal North
16. Corozal South East
17. Corozal South West

Cayo District

18. Belmopan
19. Cayo Central
20. Cayo North
21. Cayo North East
22. Cayo South
23. Cayo West

Orange Walk District

24. Orange Walk Central
25. Orange Walk East
26. Orange Walk North
27. Orange Walk South

Stann Creek District

28. Dangriga
29. Stann Creek West

Toledo District

30. Toledo East
31. Toledo West

B. ELECTORAL LEGISLATION

The provisions governing the conduct and procedure of national elections are principally found in the Belize Constitution and in the Representation of the People Act.

The Constitution contains general provisions regarding the conduct and timing of elections, the establishment and adjustment of electoral divisions, qualifications for election as a member of the House of Representatives, and the rules governing the Elections and Boundaries Commission.

The Representation of the People Act contains detailed provisions regarding the conduct of elections and the administration of the electoral system, including the franchise and registration of voters, offences relating to the electoral system, election-day procedures, the counting of votes and ascertainment of election results, and procedures for the petitioning of election results.

General Elections are held at intervals not longer than five years. The Prime Minister has the right to advise the Governor-General to dissolve the National Assembly at any time in this period. The Prime Minister then has the prerogative to set the date of the general elections. Municipal elections, on the other hand, are held every three years with fixed dates.

All citizens who have reached the age of eighteen are eligible to register on the official voters list and subsequently vote in elections. Commonwealth citizens may also vote provided that they have been residents in Belize for at least twelve months prior to registration and domiciled in that particular electoral division for not less than two months.

The Representation of the People Act also stipulates the realization of a complete re-registration of electors beginning on July 1997, and every ten years thereafter. The law provides a caveat that if the date of the re-registration exercise falls within six months of the general elections, the re-registration exercise can be postponed until such time after the elections as the minister responsible for elections considers appropriate. This article was amended in 2007, the year in which the second re-registration exercise was to be carried out, to extend the period for carrying out such an exercise from ten to fifteen years. As such, the next re-registration exercise is legally due by July 2012. The Mission encourages the Belizean authorities to comply with this deadline so as to ensure that the list of electors accurately reflects the eligible voting population in Belize.

C. ELECTORAL AUTHORITIES

Belize operates with two distinct electoral management bodies: the Elections and Boundaries Commission and the Elections and Boundaries Department. Each is a separate legal entity. The structure of electoral administration in Belize is unique in that it is comprised of an autonomous commission mandated by the constitution as well as an administrative department, which reports to a government ministry. The Mission considers that this framework of electoral administration leads to some confusion as to roles of each body and is a potential limitation on the neutrality of the electoral process.

1. The Elections and Boundaries Commission

Article 88 of the Belize Constitution establishes and sets out the general authority of the Elections and Boundaries Commission. The Commission operates as an independent body and is responsible for the direction and supervision of voter registration, the periodic review and determination of the boundaries of electoral divisions, and all matters related to the conduct of elections and referenda. According to Section 90 of the Belize Constitution, the Elections and Boundaries Commission is empowered to make proposals “for dividing Belize into electoral divisions,” which shall come into operation at the next general elections held after such re-division. The Elections and Boundaries Commission makes proposals regarding boundary de-limitation to the National Assembly, who may accept all or part of the submitted proposal. As per the constitution, electoral boundaries must meet certain criteria: each electoral division must encompass “as nearly as may be” an equal number of eligible voters; the total number of election divisions cannot be less than 28 and decisions must take into account transport, physical features and other facilities of the electoral division. Once the redistricting is ratified as law by the National Assembly, the Chief Elections Officer is responsible for adjusting the electoral registers of any affected electoral divisions, compiling new registers of electors if necessary, and publishing provisional registers within 30 days.

Pursuant to Article 88(1), the Commission consists of a Chairman and four additional members. The Chairman and two of the additional members are appointed by the Governor General, acting on advice from the Prime Minister after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition (Art. 88(2)). The two remaining members are similarly appointed by the Governor General, acting on advice from the Prime Minister but with the concurrence of the Leader of the Opposition (Art. 88(2)). The Chairman and the members of the Commission

hold their office for five year terms (Art. 88(5)). National Assembly members and others who hold public office are barred from appointment to the Commission. On the other hand, electoral commissioners are not prohibited from simultaneously serving in leadership positions within political parties. One of the members of the electoral commission which oversaw the 2012 electoral process was also the secretary general of a major political party. This framework exposes the Commission to criticism of politicization and has the potential to impinge upon the autonomy of the electoral process.

2. The Elections and Boundaries Department

The administrative provisions of the Representation of the People Act provide for a Chief Elections Officer. The Chief Elections Officer heads the Elections and Boundaries Department, an institution which was established in 1989. The Ministry of Public Service and Elections & Boundaries has jurisdiction over the Chief Elections Officer and the staffing of the Department. The Chief Elections Officer must report to both the Public Service Commission and to the Elections and Boundaries Commission on a regular basis. The Mission noted with concern that the current framework in which the department responsible for administering elections reports to a cabinet ministry, which is headed by a CEO directly appointed by the Prime Minister, has the potential to compromise the perception of independence of the electoral process.

According to the Representation of the People Act, the Elections and Boundaries Department has three areas of responsibility: electoral administration, the adjustments of electoral records at boundary redistricting and voter education. Electoral administration involves several tasks relating to the day-to-day administration of all phases of the electoral process, namely:

- Organizing and directing voter registration
- Compiling and maintaining divisional and central electoral registers
- Updating and maintaining electoral records
- Adjustments of electoral records at boundary redistricting
- Issuance of identification cards to electors

- Organizing the conduct of elections
- Transfers of electors

The Chief Elections Officer is a public officer appointed by the Governor-General, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister as provided in section 107 of the Belize Constitution. The Chief Election Officer is responsible for the preparation of elections as well as the management and conduct of elections before, during and after the polls. Additionally, the Public Services Commission may appoint one or more Assistant Chief Elections Officers to assist the Chief Elections Officer in the exercise of his or her powers and functions. For the purpose of the registration of electors and the issuance of identification cards, the Public Services Commission appoints a registering officer for each electoral division and may from time to time appoint one or more persons to be assistant registering officers.

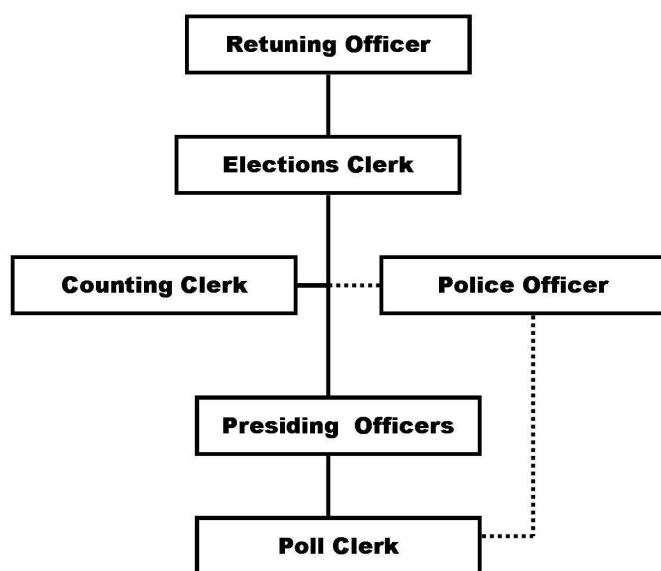
In addition to the central office in Belize City, the Department operates four additional branch offices in Belize City and a branch office in each district town as well as Belmopan. There are also three “sub-offices” located in Independence Village, Stann Creek District, Benque Viejo del Carmen, Cayo District and San Pedro Ambergris Caye, Belize District. Each branch office is staffed with registering and assistant registering officers.

3. Voting Procedure

According to the Representation of the People Act, all of the electoral officers responsible for directly administering the conduct of the elections must be appointed from within the public service. For the purposes of conducting the election, the Elections and Boundaries Commission appoints a returning officer for each electoral division, and may appoint one or more persons to assist this returning officer.

The returning officer is the chief administrator of elections in that division and is responsible for supervising all other electoral officials including election clerks, presiding officers, poll clerks and counting clerks. Election clerks, appointed by the Chief Elections Officer with the approval of the Commission, serve as the direct assistants to the returning officer in each division. The election clerk can be called upon, should the need arise, to perform the duties of the returning officer. Although returning officers do not directly supervise police officers, they may request the assistance of the police

to maintain law and order if necessary. The hierarchy of functions among election officers is summarized below:



Source: Elections and Boundaries Department

Each electoral division is partitioned into a certain number of polling areas by the Chief Elections Officer with the approval of the Electoral Commission. Polling areas correspond to voting locations that are housed in public buildings, typically schools. Each voting location is further subdivided into a number of polling stations, which are typically broken down alphabetically. For the 2012 dual elections, in which municipal and general elections were held simultaneously, each electoral process operates with its own designated polling stations. In other words, the municipal elections and general elections each operate with separate polling stations, though each may be housed in the same polling location. All polling stations are manned by a presiding officer and a poll clerk. Presiding officers are responsible for the general management of the polling station, ensuring that all rules and procedures related to the conduct of the poll are understood and followed. The role of the poll clerk is to assist the presiding officer by inspecting the identification card of every elector entering the polling station to ensure that his/her name is on the voter's list or in the electoral binder.

Polling stations are open for voting from 7:00 am to 6:00 pm. Polling officials are to report for duty no later than 6:00 am, at which point the presiding officer is responsible for ensuring that all the necessary electoral materials have been supplied and that the ballot boxes are empty. At 7:00 am, the presiding officer declares the polling station open and opens the ballot box in the presence of the candidates and/or candidate agents. The ballot box is then locked and placed on a table in plain view where it must remain until the close of the poll. Each ballot paper must be initialed by the presiding officer before it is issued to a voter.

When applicable¹, polling stations for municipal and general elections are placed in the same classroom. All voters wait in one line. Electors first complete voting procedures in the general election and then immediately move to the adjacent municipal polling station to cast their vote for mayors and town/city councilors. Upon entering the polling station, the elector gives his/her name and produces identification, which the election clerk checks against either the official list of electors for that polling station or in the electoral binder, which contains pictures and facsimiles of the voter's original registration documentation. The presiding officer then checks the voter's identification and inspects the elector's finger to verify that there are no traces of indelible ink that would indicate that the voter had previously voted.

Electors may vote with or without their voter identification card. Every person whose name appears on the official list of electors or in a record card in the electoral binder is permitted to vote at the corresponding polling station as long as the presiding officer is satisfied with the identity of the elector. If the identity of an elector is questioned, the presiding officer has the right to quiz the elector on pertinent information such as their date of birth or place of residence. This information is contained in the electoral binder.

Once satisfied with the identification of the elector, the presiding officer initials the ballot paper and issues it to the elector. The voter's thumb is dipped in indelible ink and the poll clerk marks the elector's name on the list. The voter is then directed to the voting booth and instructed to mark an "X" next to the name or symbol of his/her preferred candidate. After the voter has marked and folded his/her ballot in such a way that the initial of the presiding officer but not that mark of the voter can be seen, the voter deposits the paper ballot in the ballot box. According to Act No. 67 of 2004, any voter that is incapacitated by blindness or another physical cause can direct a person of his/her choice, in the presence of the presiding officer and party agents, to cast a vote according to his/her instructions.

Furthermore, persons employed as elections officers or as members of the police and armed forces may cast their ballots through an appointed proxy voter, an elector appointed to vote for another elector. A person may only serve as a proxy voter once in a given electoral process. As the current legal framework makes no provisions for overseas voting, Belizean citizens that are resident abroad are not permitted to vote.

1. While voters in the entire Belizean territory are eligible to vote in the national elections, only those who live within town limits are eligible to vote in municipal elections. Therefore voters who live in more rural areas that do not fall within town constituencies will only vote in the national elections. Those voters elected their rural council representatives in village elections in 2010.

Nonetheless, current law does permit overseas voters employed in a Belizean embassy, high commission, diplomatic mission or consulate, as well as their spouses and dependents, to designate a proxy.

Polls officially close at 6:00 pm, though those still waiting in line at that time are permitted to vote. At 6:00 pm, a police officer steps behind the last elector in line to mark the end of the line and to deter other persons from joining the line. In contrast to the practice in most OAS Member States, the Belizean electoral process does not involve a preliminary count at the polling station. Following the close of the polls, the ballot boxes are sealed at polling stations and then transported to a designated counting station where all of the polling stations from a given electoral division are counted together in the presence of the returning officer. In order to expedite the counting process for the 2012 elections, the Elections and Boundaries Department implemented a policy in which the polling location with the largest number of polling stations in a given division was designated as the counting station for said division.

Once the last voter has deposited his or her ballot, the ballot box is opened, the ballot papers are removed, and the quantity of ballots are counted. The presiding officer fills out a reconciliation form and seals the unused and spoilt ballot papers and the marked copies of the voter's list as well as other election materials in the box. Once the presiding officer seals the slot on the top of the ballot box, he/she escorts the ballot boxes to the counting station designated for that electoral division.

At the counting station, the returning officer for that electoral division receives all the ballot boxes from the various presiding officers. Once all the ballot boxes have arrived, presiding officers are dismissed and the returning officer reads the rules of conduct and counting procedures to those present: counting officers, observers and party agents. The returning officer first inspects the reconciliation forms presented by the presiding officers to ensure that they are mathematically consistent. Although previous electoral processes operated with a policy in which only one box could be counted at any one time in the counting station, the Elections and Boundaries Department changed the guidelines ahead of the 2012 elections to allow multiple boxes to be counted simultaneously. Each box is counted by specific counting agents and monitored by party agents while the returning officer supervises the whole process.

The ballot boxes are unsealed and the ballots are placed in batches of twenty-five by party candidate, with questionable votes placed in a separate pile. Once the questionable votes are separated into rejected and valid votes in the presence of party agents, the latter are added to the corresponding party/candidate batches. Though the tally

of all the votes of each ballot box is recorded on multiple forms, the tally sheets issued by the Elections and Boundaries Department are the only official documents used to record the final count. Party agents are eligible to request a recount of an individual box following the preliminary count. The law grants returning officers significant discretion in determining when recounts will be granted. The returning officer publicly announces the final results for that electoral division after consulting with the Chief Elections Officer. Each returning officer submits a written report to the Chief Election Officer showing the number of persons who voted at each polling station, the number of spoilt ballot papers, and number of persons supplied with ballot papers. In the case of locations outside of Belize City, these statements of polls are faxed in from the local offices of the Elections and Boundaries Department.

D. POLITICAL FINANCING

As is the case with many other Caribbean states, Belize does not have specific legislation that governs campaign contributions or expenditures. There are no provisions for public funding for political parties or candidates. While political parties are internally well-organized and self-regulated, they are not required to register as legal entities or to adhere to any regulations regarding political financing. With the exception of a provision in the Representation of the People Act prohibiting bribery, defined as the act of providing money or employment in order to induce any voter to vote or refrain from voting, electoral legislation does not govern the money coming in and out of campaigns. There are no prohibitions on anonymous or foreign donations, as is common in the region, nor are parties or candidates required to disclose the sources or amounts of their campaign donations and expenditures.

The lack of legislation to regulate and monitor campaign contributions means that there are no hard data to verify the origin of monies used to finance campaigns in Belize, or the real cost of carrying out a national campaign in the country. No public information is available on the amounts spent by candidates, parties or any other actors involved in an electoral campaign. It is likewise impossible to determine the amount and relative proportion of contributions received in cash or in kind. Political parties are under no legal obligation to release any information regarding their internal financial operations. Nonetheless, it is widely acknowledged among political actors that the already high costs of campaigning in Belize are rising and that the base of significant contributors is comparatively small and concentrated among the economic elite. The issue of campaign finance regulation, despite appearing in some campaign manifestoes over the past decade, has not been a political priority in Belize.

CHAPTER III. THE MISSION: ACTIVITIES AND OBSERVATIONS

A. PRE-ELECTORAL PHASE

As general elections in Belize are constitutionally due five years after the previous electoral process, Prime Minister Dean Barrow had the right to wait until February 2013 to call elections. However, on February 1, 2012, a year before the constitutional deadline, the Prime Minister dissolved the National Assembly and set March 7, 2012 as the date for the General Elections. This date coincided with the previously scheduled municipal elections. As such, the 2012 electoral competition encompassed all 31 seats in the National Assembly as well as 65 seats in nine town councils. The dual elections marked the second time in Belize's history that Belizeans went to the polls and voted for members of the municipal and representative governments together.

Nomination day was held on February 15th for municipal elections and on February 17th for general elections. On that occasion, 74 National Assembly candidates were nominated: 31 from each of the major parties, nine from either the VIP or PNP (some of whom pledged allegiance to a loose coalition known as the Belizean Unity Alliance) and three independents.

Regarding the technical preparations for the elections, the OAS mission noted the significant efforts made by the Elections and Boundaries Commission and the Election and Boundaries Department to produce a clean and inclusive process that generated voter confidence. The majority of the electoral officials selected to administer the elections had prior experience and were senior public officers. Although training was conducted in a decentralized fashion in which a small number of trainers who were trained directly by the Election and Boundaries Department conducted more localized sessions, all poll officials were able to be trained prior to the March 7th electoral date. As for voter education, the Elections and Boundaries Department distributed sample ballots to the major political parties and used the newspaper and radio to inform the public on voting procedures. Several news articles were published in the weeks before the election detailing the procedure for voting in two simultaneous elections.

The Mission observed that there were several changes to polling station locations in the days leading up to the election. The Elections and Boundaries Department, responsible for the design of polling areas and the location of polling stations, informed the Mission that polling stations were moved following complaints from different political parties that the locations were too close to areas known to be frequented by supporters of a particular party or candidate. In one instance, the Mission received an official communiqué

from the opposition party expressing concern that the two polling stations traditionally used in the Pickstock constituency had been merged into one for the 2012 electoral process. The release accused the Elections and Boundaries Department of collusion with the governing party candidate from that division. Following these complaints, the polling station was changed to a mutually agreeable location.

The Mission commends the open lines of communication maintained between the electoral authorities and political parties throughout the pre-electoral period, exemplified by the resolution of these disputes and the fact that sample ballots were submitted to party secretariats for their approval prior to printing. Furthermore, the Elections and Boundaries Department provides supplementary lists of electors to the political parties on a monthly basis. Such transparency between stakeholders and the electoral management body should be applauded as an exemplary practice for the region. While the collaborative relationship between the two main parties and the electoral authorities deserves praise, the Mission noted with concern that such transparency initiatives are filtered almost exclusively through the structures of the two main political parties. This practice has the potential to marginalize the growing amount of third parties and independent candidates that are competing in Belizean elections.

1. Political-Electoral Context

Two parties have traditionally dominated politics in Belize, the United Democratic Party (UDP) and the People's United Party (PUP). The PUP had won 10 of the 13 elections held since Belize first elected a legislative assembly under British rule in 1954. Though third-party alternatives to the two-party system such as the National Reform Party and Vision Inspired by the People have arisen in recent years, these parties have not achieved much success at the polls. Neither has garnered more than 2% of the vote in any of the most recent general elections, including the March 7th poll.

In the previous General Elections in February 2008, the UDP won 25 of the 31 seats in the House of Representatives. The remaining six were won by the PUP, which was unseated after 10 years in power under Prime Minister Said Musa. The UDP, under Prime Minister Dean Barrow, won those elections campaigning against alleged graft and promoting increased spending on infrastructure. Mr. Barrow is Belize's first black prime minister.

The opposition PUP underwent several leadership changes in the lead-up to the 2012 poll, as the party was divided into several rival camps. On October 7th 2011, Parliamentary Leader of the Opposition Johnny Briceño resigned his position as party leader for health reasons. The post was then designated on an interim basis to Mark Espot, who days later formally declined to take up the position on a permanent basis. Francis Fonseca was endorsed as party leader by the National Party Council on October 29, 2011 and led the party for the 2012 elections. In addition to the internal squabbles within the party, the PUP was also stricken with debt. Within thirty days prior to the election, three prominent PUP standard bearers retracted their candidacies.

The pre-electoral period was characterized by a competitive and robust political atmosphere. Both the UPD and the PUP covered the entire territory of Belize with political advertising and campaign material. A multitude of party activists were actively involved in the campaign, canvassing support for their respective candidates through house to house campaigns in their various constituencies. Belize's parliamentary system combined with the small constituencies, many of which comprise less than 4,000 voters, ensures that Belizean politics is highly localized. Campaign advertisements generally focused on local rather than national candidates and the majority of campaigning was conducted within communities rather than through national media.

In terms of the issues and tone of the campaign, the parties did not appear to be debating policy issues relating to the country's economic development that would have differentiated one party from the other. Though there was much discussion of economic performance, increasing debt payments and the alleged rise in violence under the UDP administration, the Mission did not discern a serious attempt by the parties to show that their policy prescriptions for dealing with issues were better than the others. The campaign was driven largely by personalities, which was reflected in the tone of the campaign among all candidates.

2. The Voters List

During its meetings with stakeholders in the pre-electoral period, the EOM heard a number of concerns with regards to the voters list, stemming from the extension of the registration period and alleged irregularities in the registration of newly naturalized citizens.

The Belizean national electoral registry is updated and published continuously. As required by the Representation of the People Act, the registration process is closed on the 10th day of every month in order to ensure that the temporary or supplementary list is prepared by the 15th day of the month. The monthly supplementary list should be posted for public scrutiny in each district office of the Electoral and Boundaries Department and other public

places from the 15th to the 25th day of the month. Deceased and disqualified electors are struck off at revision court during the months of February, May, June, July, August and at an annual revision in November of each year. Upon the approval of the revision court, the sole entity with the authority to decide which new applicants make the list of electors, a revised list is posted in all registration offices on or before the 5th of the month. Lists are also shared with every political party that is represented in the House of Representatives.

In the months preceding the election, the number of registered voters grew by 4%: well over 8,000 individuals were added to the electoral registry between September 2011 and the January 2012 registration deadline. Additionally, on January 6th, Statutory Instrument No. 17 of 2012 was passed, which extended the registration deadline from January 10th to January 20th. This measure shortened from the normal 15 days to only five days the time available to political groups for claims and objections. Under the Second Schedule to the Representation of the People Act, Rule 6 (6), each political party is entitled to appoint a scrutineer to accompany those persons tasked by a registering officer of the Elections and Boundaries Department to do house to house inquiry to determine if prospective electors reside at the place stated on the voter registration application. The Mission noted with concern that this change to the electoral calendar in the weeks before the election reduced the ability of political parties to investigate alleged voters list irregularities and to present formal objections to the additional registrations.

The growth in the electoral register is especially problematic given the large amount of newly naturalized Belizeans reportedly registered as electors in the months leading up to the election. Belize is a country with a proportionally large immigrant population. All parties candidly admitted to the Mission that the naturalization of new citizens prior to election time has been a common practice in the country for some time. Political party actors attested that in the course of their vote canvassing activities they typically become aware of people living within their constituencies who are eligible for Belizean citizenship but, for one reason or another, have not gone through with the naturalization procedure. The Belize constitution states that "any person who has been resident continuously in Belize for a period of five years immediately before the date of his application" is eligible for Belizean citizenship. In these elections, accusations that members of parliament were paying registration fees or that citizens were being registered without establishing residence in their constituencies for the required two months were widespread. Though the Mission received no indication that legal procedures were not followed, the abbreviated claims and objections period prevented both the political parties and the electoral

authorities from exerting the required oversight to ensure the accuracy of the list and the eligibility of all voters registered therein.

According to the final list of voters for the general elections, 178,054 voters were eligible to vote in Belize's 31 electoral divisions, 131 polling areas and 320 polling stations. Each polling area comprised a number of polling stations, ranging from 117 to 925 registered voters. On the other hand, the municipal elections had 97,979 register voters eligible to vote in 55 polling areas and 168 polling stations. The growth in registered voters is presented by district in the chart below:

Electors by District September 2011/January 2012

District	September 2011	January 2012	Difference	% Growth
Corozal	23,460	24,764	1,304	5.6%
Orange Walk	26,082	27,509	1,427	5.5%
Belize	57,196	59,238	2,042	3.6%
Cayo	38,531	39,977	1,446	3.8%
Stann Creek	13,009	13,792	783	6.0%
Toledo	12,342	12,774	432	3.5%
Total	170,620	178,054	7,434	4.4%

Source: Elections and Boundaries Department

3. Electoral Boundaries

The redistricting of electoral boundaries was last carried out before the 2008 General Elections. That process resulted in the creation of two additional constituencies, bringing the total number of seats to its current level of 31. Reflecting the significant segment of the population that lives in and around Belize City, representing nearly one-third of all registered voters, the Belize district comprises 13 of the 31 constituencies. Nonetheless, the current boundary delimitation leads to an overrepresentation of Belize City in the National Assembly. The smallest electoral division, Fort George (located in Belize City) covers 3,133 total electors

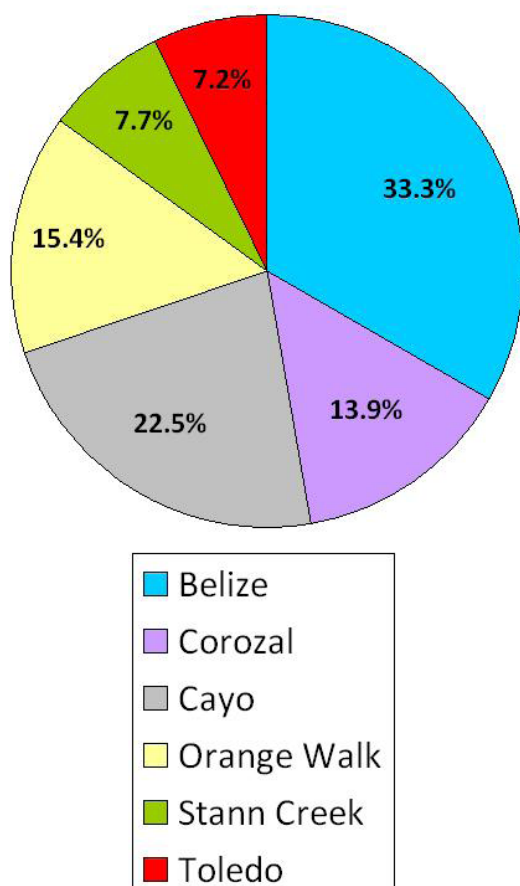
while the largest, Stann Creek West, comprises more than double the number of registered votes, 7,888. The Mission recommends that boundaries be re-drawn before the next electoral process to address these discrepancies and ensure compliance with the constitutional requirement that all divisions have an equal number of persons eligible to vote.

Electors by Division as of January 2012

Division	Total Electors
1 Freetown	4,230
2 Caribbean Shores	5,117
3 Pickstock	3,243
4 Fort George	3,133
5 Albert	3,180
6 Queen's Square	3,960
7 Mesopotamia	3,710
8 Lake Independence	5,145
9 Collet	4,627
10 Port Loyola	4,469
11 Belize Rural North	5,404
12 Belize Rural Central	5,920
13 Belize Rural South	7,100
14 Corozal Bay	6,237
15 Corozal North	6,233
16 Corozal South East	6,549
17 Corozal South West	5,745
18 Orange Walk Central	6,694
19 Orange Walk North	7,061
20 Orange Walk East	6,917
21 Orange Walk South	6,837
22 Cayo North	6,213
23 Cayo Central	7,180
24 Cayo West	6,351
25 Cayo South	6,905
26 Cayo North East	5,548
27 Belmopan	7,780
28 Dangriga	5,904
29 Stann Creek West	7,888
30 Toledo East	6,640
31 Toledo West	6,134
TOTAL	178,054

Source: Elections and Boundaries Department

Electors by District as of January 2012



Source: Elections and Boundaries Department

4. Campaign Finance

The Mission observed that the current campaign finance framework, which does not recognize political parties as legal entities or regulate their financing, contributed to a campaign period characterized by a lack of clarity about the distinction between the state and governing party in terms of resources. A paradigmatic example of the limited differentiation between the government and the governing party was the \$90,000 per constituency that was made available in the months leading up to the elections to governing party incumbents and candidates (i.e., standard bearers) for community projects. Although these funds were distributed to every constituency, opposition members of parliament did not receive them. The fact that candidates from the governing party who lacked legal ties to their community were provided with funding tended to blur the lines between state funds and campaign resources.

Given the absence of limits on private donations in Belize, the Mission notes the importance of requiring parties to disclose contributions and expenditures as a mechanism to enhance the transparency of the process and allow voters to make more informed decisions. The Belizean government previously operated with an integrity commission which registered the assets of all public officers and exercised oversight over the financial activity of elected officials. This institution has not been active for several years, however, and elected officials reported to the Mission that they were not required to disclose financial information.

5. Participation of Women

The Mission observed that women play a significant role in the Belizean political process. They occupy high-level positions in public service, including electoral administration, and also serve as appointed senators. Both major political parties have women as secretaries-general. However, the Mission observed an exceptionally low number of women in electoral competition. Of the 170 candidates for municipal posts, only 31 were female or 18.2%. In the mayoral race, only two women stood for the post in a field of 27. Levels of female participation in national electoral competition were even lower. Only three out of 74 candidates were women, or 4%. These numbers reflect a historical trend of low participation of Belizean women in electoral competition: there were no women serving in parliament prior to this electoral process and at no time have more than two women served at any one time in elected assembly. The Mission notes with concern this gender imbalance in the electoral process, unfortunately common in the Hemisphere, in which women participate actively in both grassroots politics and the administration of elections but are significantly under-represented as candidates and elected officials.

B. ELECTION DAY

On Election Day, the Mission maintained a presence in all six of Belize's administrative regions, visiting all nine municipalities, all six district towns and the national capital of Belmopan. OAS observers arrived at polling stations an hour prior to the scheduled 7:00 am opening time to witness firsthand the preparations for the elections and the installation of voting centers. Throughout the day, observers visited 318 polling stations located in 109 polling centers, covering 83% of the nation's polling areas. In addition to witnessing the voting process, observers were also present at the closing of the polls, and followed the ballot boxes to the counting stations where they observed the counting of the ballots.

Observers reported that on Election Day, all polling stations opened on time at 7:00 am. All observed polling stations were equipped with the necessary electoral materials, and 100% were staffed with the full complement of designated poll workers. The Mission noted that the facilities and space at polling centers was almost universally suited for purpose and that security forces were present at all polling centers for the opening of the polls. The Mission was pleased to see that all observed polling stations were placed on ground level to accommodate the elderly and voters with disabilities, and that such voters were invariably given priority access.

The voting process was organized in a so called “dual election” format, where voters first cast ballots in the general elections and then proceeded immediately to the next polling station to vote in the municipal elections. Following the identification process, a registered voter was given a ballot paper and the necessary instructions on how to properly mark and fold the ballot. Consequently, the election official dipped the voter’s thumb in indelible ink to indicate that the person had voted. Voters were asked to mark their choice with an “X” next to their candidate’s name/symbol. After the voter had marked and folded the ballot in such a way that his/her mark was not seen but showing the initials of the Presiding Officer, ballots were deposited in the box.

E. R. 15 (3) & 16 (4)

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT
CHAPTER 9
Form No. 24

SAMPLE BALLOT PAPER

LAKE INDEPENDENCE ELECTORAL DIVISION

	<i>Surname</i>	<i>Other Names</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Colour</i>	
1.	DIAZ	Carlos A.	104 Patridge St. Belize City		
2.	GALVEZ	Martin	46 Vernon St. Belize City		
3.	KING	Mark Anthony	17R Aloe Vera St. Belize City		

Sample Ballot, General Election

Source: Elections and Boundaries Department

Polling officials were well-trained and worked diligently to ensure an efficient voting process. The great majority of voters found the correct polling station without difficulty. Voters were able to cast their ballots in less than two minutes and long lines of voters were only observed in 31% of the polling stations visited by the EOM. The Mission would like to emphasize the strong presence of women in administering the election on Election Day.

Women constituted 53% of the designated poll workers and 40% of presiding officers. In terms of agents from the political parties, the Mission observed that 60% of party delegates were women at the opening of the polls and 49% at 1:00 pm. At the close of the polls, 52% of observed party agents were women.

The OAS mission observed that political parties were actively engaged with the electorate, orienting voters and educating them about voting procedures. Agents from the two major parties maintained a presence at all of the polling stations observed by the mission. Nonetheless, the active role played by party activists, who congregated in significant numbers outside of many voting centers, could produce an environment that would make it uncomfortable for some voters to express their preferences without feeling outside pressure. In one instance, an OAS observer witnessed a party activist distributing money outside of the voting center to a group of four voters immediately after they had exited the polling place.

The issue of campaigning in and around polling stations constituted a concern for the Mission. The electoral propaganda observed in the vicinity of polling stations and the prevalence of t-shirts bearing candidate names and symbols could be construed as electioneering. Belizean law permits canvassing and the distribution of pre-marked sample ballots within voting centers and allows campaign advertising in the vicinity of polling stations. Though the Representation of the People act prohibits loudspeakers, banners and party flags from being worn or used as political propaganda on polling day, it specifically exempts banners or other paraphernalia that bear "only the name of any candidate or any political party or only such name preceded by the words 'Vote for.'" As a result of such permissive legislation, observers noted large numbers of voters clad in shirts and hats that clearly identified their preferred candidates.

The Mission was pleased to note that on election day the Elections and Boundaries Department provided periodic updates on voter turnout through their website. This election information management system consisted of a central computerized tracking center, to which general and municipal election attendance rates were periodically transmitted via phone from the various districts across the country. Its design consisted of computer system at a national level to gather, process, and display attendance rate totals, percentages and charts broken down by country, districts, cities, divisions and polling areas.

**BELIZE CITY COUNCIL ELECTIONS, 7th MARCH 2012
FORM 13**

SAMPLE BALLOT PAPER

**ELECTION OF ONE MAYOR
AND
TEN OTHER COUNCILLORS**

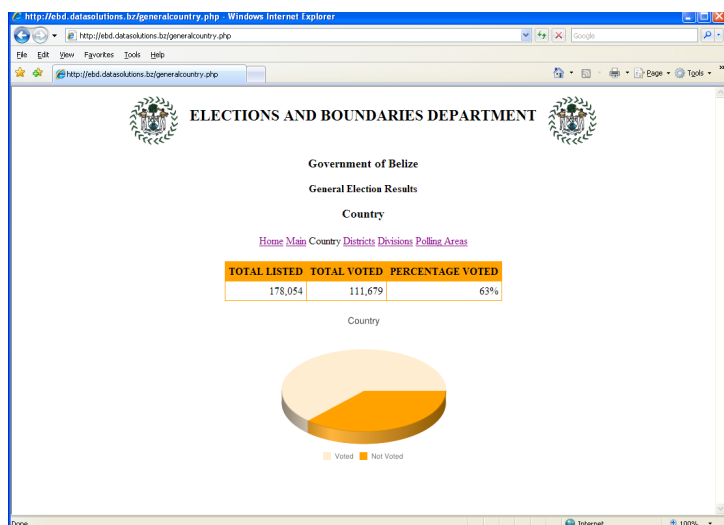
Surname	Other Names	Address	Office Sought	Colour
BRADLEY	Darrell	26 Juliet Soberanis St.	Mayor	
CHANG	Eric	5771 Meighan Ave.	Councillor	
ELRINGTON-HYDE	Alifa	7 2nd St.	Councillor	
ESPEJO	Roger	8 Cor. 16 & D. St.	Councillor	
GONZALEZ	Alain	15 Wood St.	Councillor	
LESLIE	Dion	392 Bella Vista	Councillor	
PITTS JR.	Bernard Q. A.	8162 Palmdale	Councillor	
SAMUELS	Dean Trevor Collins	6662 Western Ave.	Councillor	
SINGH	Kevin Vincent	29 Orange St.	Councillor	
THEUS	Michael	8 St. Luke St.	Councillor	
WILLOUGHBY	Philip	142 East Collect Canal	Councillor	
BODDEN	Karen	311 Belama Ext. Phase II	Mayor	
AYUSO	Gary Marcus	84 Cemetery Rd.	Councillor	
BABANI	Swamy	16 Albert St.	Councillor	
	Erwin X	11 Meighan Ave.	Councillor	
CADLE	Robert Phillip	9 Sixth St.	Councillor	
LACEY	Peter Anthony Jr.	122 University Heights	Councillor	
THOMPSON	Patrick Gilroy	7504 Mangrove St.	Councillor	
VAUGHAN	Dorla Marie	43 Dean St.	Councillor	
VELLOS	Alberto Antonio	1256 Albert Hoy Ave.	Councillor	
YOUNG	DJ-Tambran Lennox	6610 Police St.	Councillor	
YOUNG	Edward Desmond	9 Hibiscus Lane	Councillor	
SMITH	Paco	2156 Starfish Crescent	Mayor	
FERGUSON	Robert "Faggy"	14 Partridge Street	Councillor	
FERGUSON	Shan Ewart	6512 Perrinville Street	Councillor	
LOPEZ	Jude J.T.	7203 Kraal Rd.	Councillor	
MARTINEZ	Felipe	99 Antelope St. Extension	Councillor	
MARTINEZ	Leslie Dean	19 Cemetery Lane	Councillor	
REYNOLDS	Myrnamae Lorraine	1440 Hyde Street	Councillor	
OKEKE	Stephen	3.5 Miles Northern Highway	Mayor	
TORRES	Ernesto/Eustaquio	5658 Gentle Ave.	Mayor	
HENRY	Philip	17 Fabers Rd. Ext.	Councillor	

Directions To Voters:

- N.B. (1) Mark a cross on the right-hand side of the ballot paper opposite the name of each candidate for whom you wish to vote.
(2) Do not vote for more than one (1) Mayor and ten (10) other Councillors.
(3) When you have marked your vote fold up your ballot paper so as to conceal your vote, but so as to show the official mark on the back, show the presiding officer the official mark, then put your ballot paper in the ballot box and leave the room.

Sample Ballot, Municipal Election

Source: Elections and Boundaries Department



*General and Municipal Electoral Tracking System,
Elections & Boundaries Department*

By 11:00 am on Elections Day, the Election & Boundaries Department delivered a progress report of the General Elections, which indicated that 108,315 voters had cast their vote, corresponding to 60% of registered electors. In addition, a progress report on the municipal elections indicated that 62,331 voters had cast their vote corresponding to a 64% of the registered voters. However, after 11:00 am no other reports were distributed as a result of numerous problems with the web application as well as processing delays. Final numbers released after Election Day put voter turnout at 73%. A summary of voter turnout in both electoral processes is summarized in the following charts:

Table I 2012 General Elections	
Total Population	~333,200
General Elections Register Voters	178,054
Number of Candidates	74
Total Votes General Elections	130,303
Voters Turnout General Elections	73.18 %
Districts	6
Electoral Constituencies	31
Polling Areas	131
Polling Stations	320

Table II 2012 Municipal Elections	
Total Population	~333,200
Municipal Elections Register Voters	97,979
Number of Candidates	170
Total Votes Municipal Elections	66,136
Voters Turnout Municipal Elections	67.50 %
Districts	6
Electoral Constituencies	18
Polling Areas	55
Polling Stations	168

Counting & Transmission of Results

On the night of the elections, OAS observers reported that the closing of the polls was carried out according to legal procedures and generally without incident. Observers were able to follow the ballot boxes from the polling centers to the counting stations, when applicable. In most cases, party agents were able to travel in the vehicle along with the ballot boxes to the counting centers. The incorporation of new procedures to have large polling areas serve as counting stations and to simultaneously count multiple ballot boxes led to a more efficient counting process and prevented excessive delays. Nonetheless, observers noted that the process by which presiding officers reconciled ballots and packed up election materials after the close of poll was laborious and time-consuming. The fact that both the presiding officer in the polling station and the returning officer in the counting station must reconcile ballot papers constitutes a duplication of work and an avoidable delay in the process.

The OAS/EOM considers that the centralized counting of ballots in each constituency makes for a long and tedious process, particularly considering that most other countries in the region carry out preliminary counts at each polling station. In the municipal elections, due to the fact that the larger number of candidates complicated the ballot as well as the counting process, the vote count lasted until the early hours of the following morning.

Election results were transmitted by phone from each of the 31 counting centers to the receiving center located in Belize City. However, the result receiving center, which had been installed in the Elections and Boundaries Department, did not release periodic updates of the information to the press or general public. Elections results were publicly announced, often in front of television cameras, outside of each counting center by the respective returning officer after

telephonic consultation with the Chief Elections Officer. As a result, Belizean citizens tended to rely on the electoral results released by the media.

By midnight on election day, no official results had been disseminated by the Elections and Boundaries Department. Belize has no system in place for the publication of preliminary results. According to the electoral code, the Chief Elections Officer is not to publish the results of the elections until he or she has received written returns from all returning officers, which detail the particulars of the candidates, the number of votes polled by each of the candidates, and which candidates were elected. Outside of Belize City, these reports were typically faxed by returning officers to the Chief Elections Officer from the local branch of the Elections and Boundaries Department. In accordance with the law, the failure to receive two statements of polls from returning officers prevented the Chief Elections Officer from announcing any results until mid-day on the day after the election. Because voters had received continually updated information through various media outlets, failure to release official results did not result in any tension among the electorate and the actual announcement of results was a non-event.

C. POST-ELECTORAL PHASE

When official results were announced the following morning by the Elections and Boundaries Department, a calm and peaceful ambiance prevailed throughout the country. Of the 65 contested municipal seats, the UDP won 42 and the PUP won 23. Ten of the 65 municipal positions were won by women, 15.4%. The UDP won the mayoral office and the majority in six town councils: Belize City, San Pedro Town, Benque Viejo del Carmen, Corozal Town, San Ignacio & Santa Elena Town and Belmopan City. Orange Walk Town, Dangriga Town and Punta Gorda town were captured by the PUP. Final results in the General Elections gave 17 seats in the National Assembly to the incumbent United Democratic Party (UDP) and the remaining 14 seats to the People's United Party (PUP). Only one woman, Dolores Balderamos from the PUP, will serve as a representative in parliament. The election was highly competitive and one of the closest in Belize's post-independence history. On March 9, the Honorable Dean Barrow, leader of the UDP, was sworn in for his second term as Prime Minister of Belize.

The popular vote reflected an even closer race. The winning candidate won by less than a 500 vote margin in 18 of 31 constituencies. In four of these constituencies, the margin of victory was less than 100 votes. A total of 130,303 electors out of 178,054 eligible voters cast ballots in the general elections, a turnout of 73.2%. There were 1,463 rejected ballots. In terms of the popular vote, the UDP received 64,837 votes (49.8%) while the PUP received 61,971 (47.6%). The difference between the

two major parties was a mere 2,866 votes, or 2.2%. Neither third-party candidates nor independents were able to win enough votes to secure a seat in Parliament, or in any of the municipal bodies.

Official Results by Party			
Party	Total Votes	Total Percentage	Seats
UDP	64,837	49.8 %	17
PUP	61,071	47.6 %	14
PNP	828	0.6 %	0
VIP	382	0.3 %	0
INDEPENDENT	822	0.6 %	0
Rejected Votes	1463	1.1 %	-
Totals	130,303	100 %	31

On the morning following the election, the opposition party PUP informed the Mission of their intention to file election petitions in two closely contested seats: Cayo Central and Cayo North East. In both instances, the margin of victory was less than 50 votes and the number of rejected ballots exceeded the margin of victory. The PUP informed the Mission that in each case, the returning officer had refused a recount demanded by the candidate in that particular constituency. The Representation of the People Act stipulates that any candidate or agent may request a recount at any time during the counting of the votes, though the returning officer has complete discretion to refuse to do so if in his or her opinion the request is unreasonable. In accordance with legal procedures, the PUP presented formal petitions to the Supreme Court to overturn the election results. As of the writing of this report, the cases were still being adjudicated. The Mission emphasizes the importance of adherence to established due process for the resolution of challenges, and calls on all parties to continue to air their claims through the appropriate legal channels.

CHAPTER IV. CONCLUSIONS

The OAS Electoral Observation Mission congratulates the people of Belize for their high voter turnout and for the peaceful manner in which they carried out one of the principal responsibilities of citizens in all democracies. Observers were impressed by the ethnic diversity maintained within all political parties, which reflects the multi-ethnic nature of Belizean society. Political parties in Belize should be commended for the diversity within their leadership and in the candidates they put forth in the national and municipal elections. The Mission considers the inclusive nature of Belizean politics a best practice example for the region.

The Mission also congratulates Belize's public servants for the dedication and professionalism with which they carried out these elections. Regarding the technical preparations for the elections, the Mission's overall assessment of the voting process was positive. Both the Elections and Boundaries Commission and Elections and Boundaries Department deserve praise for their significant efforts to produce a clean and efficient electoral process. Their ability to organize a smooth election day is especially impressive in the light of the fact that this was only the second occasion that municipal and general elections were held simultaneously.

Voter Registration

The controversy regarding the electoral registry in the months before polling day, particularly the decision to modify the electoral calendar prior to the close of the registration process, raised concerns about the veracity of the voter's list. Various stakeholders expressed unease regarding the 4% growth in registered voters between September 2011 and January 2012 and the influx of newly naturalized citizens in the electoral register. The decision to reduce the claims and objections period and thus the ability of parties to investigate and correct irregularities only served to exacerbate the atmosphere of unease. The Mission considers it imperative that such last-minute changes are not repeated in the future, so as to guarantee all actors the ability to effectively carry out their legal rights to oversee the registration process.

Electoral Administration

The structure of the Belizean electoral management body is unique. Elections in Belize are managed by two separate legal bodies, each of whom has a distinct reporting structure. The Elections and Boundaries Commission

is mandated by the constitution and autonomous while the Elections and Boundaries Department falls under the purview of both the Commission and a Cabinet Ministry. Neither body prohibits their members from simultaneously serving in party leadership positions. In the recent past, the positions of both Chief Elections Officer and Electoral Commissioner have been occupied by high-level members of the major political parties. The Mission considers that this framework of electoral administration is a potential limitation on the neutrality of the electoral process.

Participation of Women

In many ways, women play an active role in the Belizean electoral and political process. They occupy high-level positions in both electoral management bodies, as Electoral Commissioners and the Chief Elections Officer. Both major political parties have women as secretaries-general. Women constituted the majority of polling officials and party agents. Unfortunately, such high levels of female participation were not reflected in the electoral race, where the Mission observed an exceptionally low number of female candidates. A mere 4% of candidates in the general election were women, of which only one was elected. In the municipal elections, the percentage of female candidates was slightly higher, 18.2%. The Mission notes with concern this gender imbalance in the political sphere, particularly the fact that only a handful of women have ever occupied elected office in Belize.

Election Day Operations

The Mission noted that voting procedures were generally well organized and well administered, guaranteeing that electors could exercise their right to a secret ballot and ensuring a smooth flow of voters throughout the day. While the active role of political parties on election day should be commended, the presence of party activists congregating in significant numbers outside of many voting centers produced a less than conducive environment for the voting process. The process of counting ballots in centralized locations within each constituency rather than at the polling station, led to avoidable delays in the transmission of results, particularly in the municipal elections.

CHAPTER V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the information gathered by the OAS Electoral Observation Mission during its time in Belize, the Mission would like to offer the following recommendations to further strengthen the well-established and generally well-managed Belizean electoral process:

1) Review of the Electoral Framework

In order to strengthen the autonomy of electoral management and to ensure adequate oversight over the process, the Mission recommends that the elected authorities, political parties and other stakeholders review the current electoral legal framework for the purpose of strengthening the process. The ultimate objective is to further enhance voter trust in the government and political process in Belize. The areas that merit review include:

- The incorporation of mechanisms to enhance the neutrality of electoral administration, such as a prohibition on Elections and Boundary Commissioners and members of the Elections and Boundaries Department from serving simultaneously in leadership positions within political parties.
- The potential introduction of technical criteria in the selection of Commissioners and the inclusion of representatives from third parties and/or civil society groups.
- The development of mechanisms to reduce the influence of political parties at polling centers to protect the ability of voters to exercise their franchise without outside pressure, particularly stricter and more uniform enforcement of the law that prohibits political activity within a 100-yard boundary around polling stations.

2) The Promotion of Female Participation Throughout the Electoral Process

The OAS Electoral Observation Mission recommends that the following efforts be made by the political parties and the government to promote the participation of women in electoral competition:

- Continued support for the “Women in Politics Project” training program being carried out by the National Women’s Commission.
- The promotion of additional programs to train women to stand as candidates for elections.
- The development of legal mechanisms to guarantee the participation of female candidates in party conventions and to incorporate women leaders into key decision-making positions within political parties.

- The consideration of a program of public financing designated specifically for the training of women and the promotion of female candidates.

3) Regulation of Campaign Finance

In order to allow voters to make a more informed decision and to ensure more equity in electoral competition, the OAS Electoral Observation Mission recommends the development of the following measures to regulate campaign finance:

- The approval of campaign finance legislation; specifically rules that regulate campaign spending and require parties to disclose funding sources and expenditures.
- The re-constitution of the dormant Integrity Commission, or the establishment of another mechanism to oversee and supervise the money coming in and out of campaigns.

4) Strengthening Procedures for the Conformation of the Voters List

In order to ensure that the electoral register accurately reflects the current voting population and to guarantee due process in the supervision of the voting population, the OAS Electoral Observation Mission recommends the following measures:

- Strengthening the ability of political parties to observe and comment on the voter registration process, as well as ensuring sufficient time prior to the elections for raising claims and objections.
- The establishment of a guarantee of a specific time period prior to the day of the election for any disputes over the voters’ lists to be adjudicated.
- In light of the fact that a re-registration exercise has not been conducted for 15 years, the prompt realization of a complete re-registration process in 2012, as required by law.

5) Decentralization of the Counting Process

As is common practice in most of the region and in order to expedite the counting process and enhance the security of electoral materials, each ballot box should be counted by the presiding officer at each polling station immediately following the poll. This preliminary count can be supplemented by a secondary count that is conducted the following day by the returning officer in each constituency.

6) Establishment of a Preliminary Results Program

In order to increase the speed in which official results are released to the public and to prevent situations in which citizens rely on unofficial and potentially inaccurate media sources for electoral results, the OAS Mission recommends the implementation of preliminary results transmission. The same tallying technology and transmitting techniques employed to publish voter turnout data could be applied for the counting process.

7) Redrawing of Electoral Divisions

In order to address the discrepancies in electoral divisions, particularly the over-representation of Belize City in the National Assembly, the OAS Electoral Observation Mission encourages the Elections and Boundaries Commission to carry out a boundary redistricting process. Such a process should strive to draw electoral divisions that, in so far as is practicable, represent an equal number of voters so as to comply with the Belize constitution and to ensure the composition of the National Assembly accurately reflects the country's demographics.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX I. LETTER OF INVITATION



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND FOREIGN TRADE

P.O. Box 174
NEMO Building
Belmopan, BELIZE C.A.
Tel: (501) 822-2322 / 2167
Fax: (501) 822-2854
E-mail: belizemfa@btl.net

Our Reference: FA/I/4/12(19)

NOTE NO. 84

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Belize presents its compliments to the Organization of American States and has the honor to refer to the dissolution of the National Assembly of Belize on 3rd February, 2012 and the announcement of General and Municipal Elections to be held on 7th March, 2012.

In keeping with Belize's tradition of holding free and fair elections, the Government of Belize is committed to making every effort to ensure that good practices and international standards are maintained in the conduct of elections. In this regard the Government of Belize wishes to invite the Organization of American States to send an electoral observer mission to Belize to monitor the upcoming elections.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Belize avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Organization of American States the assurances of its highest consideration.

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
WASHINGTON



BELMOPAN, February 7th, 2012

APPENDIX II: LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
WASHINGTON, D. C.

THE SECRETARY GENERAL

February 10, 2012

Honourable Minister,

I have the pleasure to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated February 7, 2012 in which the Government of Belize requests the Organization of American States (OAS) to observe the General and Municipal Elections to be held on March 7, 2012.

Through its observation and technical assistance efforts, the OAS remains committed to strengthening the electoral processes in the Americas and I am pleased to respond positively to this request.

I have instructed the Department for Electoral Cooperation and Observation (DECO) of the OAS Secretariat of Political Affairs to prepare a proposal and budget that contemplates the observation of the different facets of this important exercise and maximizes coverage of the polling stations on the date of the elections. As is customary, the size and scope of this mission will ultimately depend on the voluntary contributions received from the OAS members and Observers States.

Should you have any questions regarding the preparation of this mission, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Charlotte McDowell, Chief of DECO's Electoral Observation Section, who has been tasked with preparation of this mission.

Please accept, Honourable Minister, the assurances of my highest consideration.



José Miguel Insulza

The Honourable
Wilfred Elrington
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade
Belmopan, Belize

APPENDIX III: AGREEMENT ON PRIVILEGES AND IMMUNITIES

**AGREEMENT BETWEEN
THE GOVERNMENT OF BELIZE
AND
THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE
ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
REGARDING
THE PRIVILEGES AND IMMUNITIES OF THE OAS
ELECTORAL OBSERVATION MISSION
FOR THE 2012 GENERAL AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS**

The Parties to this Agreement, the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (hereinafter referred to as the “GS/OAS” or the “Organization”) and the Government of Belize (hereinafter referred to as the “Government”),

WHEREAS:

On February 7th, 2012 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Belize (hereinafter referred to as the “Ministry”) invited GS/OAS to observe the General and Municipal Elections to be held in March 7th, 2012.

The Secretary General of the OAS, in a letter dated February 13th, 2012, informed the Ministry that he accepted the invitation to establish an Observer Mission (hereinafter referred to as the “OAS Mission” or the “Mission”) for the General and Municipal Elections in Belize subject to obtaining the necessary resources to finance the establishment of the OAS Observer Mission in Belize;

The OAS Observer Mission will be comprised of officials of the GS/OAS and other persons contracted at GS/OAS headquarters, as well as any other international observers specifically under contract to the GS/OAS for the OAS Observer Mission (hereinafter referred to as the “Members of the OAS Observer Mission” or the “Members”); and

The basic privileges and immunities enjoyed by the OAS, the GS/OAS, and its staff in Belize are set out in the Charter of the Organization of American States, and in the Diplomatic Privileges (Organization of American States) Order, 1995. Statutory Instrument No. 63 of 1995, made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belize on May 29th, 1995.

NOW, THEREFORE THE PARTIES HAVE AGREED AS FOLLOWS:

CHAPTER I

PRIVILEGES AND IMMUNITIES OF THE OAS OBSERVER MISSION

ARTICLE I

The privileges and immunities of the OAS Observer Mission shall be those accorded to the OAS, to its organs, and to its Staff pursuant to this agreement, which shall be interpreted in accordance with Articles 133, 134, 135 and 136 of the Charter of the Organization of American States, which was signed and ratified by the Government of Belize on January 8th, 1991; the Diplomatic Privileges (Organization of American States) Order, 1995. Statutory Instrument No. 63 of 1995, made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belize on May 29th, 1995; and in accordance with concepts of international law.

ARTICLE II

2.1. The property and effects of the OAS Observer Mission, located in any part of the territory of Belize and in possession of any person, shall enjoy immunity against any type of judicial proceeding; save in those specific cases for which said immunity is expressly waived in writing by the Secretary General of the OAS.

2.2 However, it is understood that said waiver of immunity by the Secretary General of the OAS shall not have the effect of subjecting any such property and effects to any type of measure of execution.

ARTICLE III

3.1 The premises occupied by the OAS Observer Mission shall be inviolable.

3.2 Moreover, the property and effects of the OAS Observer Mission, in any part of the territory of Belize and in possession of any person or entity, shall enjoy immunity against search and seizure, confiscation, expropriation and against any form of intervention, be it executive, administrative, judicial or legislative.

ARTICLE IV

The files of the OAS Observer Mission and all of the documents pertaining thereto or in the possession of any person or entity shall be inviolable wherever they are located.

ARTICLE V

5.1 The OAS Observer Mission shall be:

a) exempt from any internal taxation, it being understood, however, that it may not claim any type of tax exemption that is in fact remuneration for public services;

b) exempt from any type of customs duty, prohibition and restriction in respect of articles and publications that it may import or export for its official use. It is understood, however, that any articles imported duty-free may be sold within Belize only in accordance with conditions expressly agreed upon by the Parties; and

c) exempt from ordinances, regulations or moratoria of any kind. Moreover, it may have currency of any type, carry accounts in any foreign currency and transfer funds in foreign currency.

ARTICLE VI

The OAS Observer Mission may establish and operate in the territory of Belize an independent radio communication system to provide an on-going communications link between the Members and the vehicles used by the Members with Mission offices and regional headquarters, such as the central office in Belmopan and between the latter and the headquarters of the GS/OAS in Washington, D.C., United States of America. The Government shall provide all the technical and administrative support necessary for this to be achieved.

CHAPTER II

MEMBERS OF THE OAS OBSERVER MISSION

ARTICLE VII

The Members of the OAS Observer Mission shall be those persons who have been designated by the GS/OAS and accredited with the Belizean authorities.

ARTICLE VIII

8.1 For the period during which the Members of the OAS Observer Mission exercise their functions and during their trips to and from Belize, they shall enjoy the following privileges and immunities:

a) Immunity from personal detention or arrest as well as immunity from any type of legal proceeding in respect of their actions and statements be they oral or written, done in the performance of their functions;

- b) The inviolability of all papers and documents;
- c) The right to communicate with the GS/OAS via radio, telephone, telegraph, email, satellite or other means, and to receive documents and correspondence through messengers or in sealed pouches, enjoying for that purpose the same privileges and immunities accorded to diplomatic mail, messages, and pouches;
- d) The right to utilize for their movements throughout the national territory, any means of transportation, be it by air, by water or over land;
- e) Exemption in respect of their persons and that of their spouses and children, from any type of immigration restriction and registration of aliens and any type of national service in Belize.
- f) The same privileges accorded to the representatives of foreign governments on official mission in respect to foreign-currency restrictions;
- g) The same immunities and privileges in respect of their personal baggage as are accorded to diplomatic envoys; and
- h) Such other privileges, immunities and facilities as are compatible with the foregoing, and enjoyed by diplomatic envoys, with the exception that they shall not enjoy any exemption from customs duties on imported merchandise (that is not part of their personal effects) or sales taxes or consumer taxes.

ARTICLE IX

The provisions contained in the preceding Article do not apply to nationals of Belize working as local contract staff in the OAS Observer Mission, except in respect of official acts performed or statements issued in the exercise of their functions.

CHAPTER III COOPERATION WITH THE AUTHORITIES

ARTICLE X

The OAS Observer Mission shall cooperate with the relevant authorities of Belize to prevent any occurrence of abuse in respect of the specified privileges and immunities. Similarly, the relevant authorities shall do whatever is possible to provide the cooperation requested of them by the OAS Observer Mission.

ARTICLE XI

Without prejudice to the immunities and privileges accorded, the Members of the OAS Observer Mission shall respect the laws and regulations existing in Belize.

ARTICLE XII

12.1 The Parties shall take any measures necessary to procure an amicable arrangement in the proper settlement of:

- a) Any disputes that may arise in contracts or other questions of private law; and
- b) Any disputes to which the OAS Observer Mission and/or any of its Members may be parties with respect to matters in which they enjoy immunity.

CHAPTER IV

NATURE OF PRIVILEGES AND IMMUNITIES

ARTICLE XIII

13.1 The privileges and immunities are granted to the Members of the OAS Observer Mission in order to safeguard their independence in the exercise of their functions of observing the General and Municipal Elections of Belize, and not for personal gain or to perform activities of a political nature within the territory of Belize.

13.2 The Secretary General of the OAS may waive the privileges and immunities of any of the Members of the OAS Observer Mission in the event that he determines, in his sole discretion, that the exercise of those privileges and immunities may obstruct the course of justice and so long as the Secretary General determines that such waiver does not prejudice the interests of the OAS or of the GS/OAS.

CHAPTER V GENERAL PROVISIONS

ARTICLE XIV

14.1 The Government recognizes the "Official Travel Document" issued by the GS/OAS as a valid and sufficient document for purposes of travel by the Members of the OAS Observer Mission who possess this document.

14.2 The Government shall issue to each Member of the OAS Observer Mission a visa to enter the country and to remain therein until the end of the OAS Observer Mission.

ARTICLE XV

The Government agrees to extend the privileges and immunities of the present Agreement to Members of the OAS Observer Mission designated by the GS/OAS, who have been accredited by the Belizean authorities.

ARTICLE XVI

This Agreement may be amended by mutual consent in writing by the duly authorized representatives of the Parties.

ARTICLE XVII

This Agreement shall enter into force on the date of its signature and shall cease to have effect once the Members of the OAS Observer Mission have completed their mission, in accordance with the terms of the request made by the Government.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the undersigned, duly authorized, do hereby sign this Agreement, in duplicate, on the date and locations indicated below.

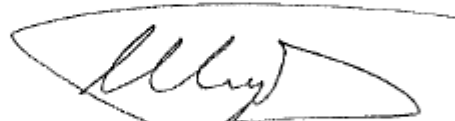
FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF
BELIZE:



Ambassador Nestor Mendez
Permanent Representative
Permanent Mission of Belize
to the Organization of American States
Place: Washington, D.C., U.S.A.

Date: Feb 21, 2012

FOR THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF
AMERICAN STATES:



Jose Miguel Insulza
Secretary General
General Secretariat of the
Organization of American States
Place: Washington, D.C., U.S.A.

Date: Feb 21, 2012

APPENDIX IV: AGREEMENT ON OBSERVATION PROCEDURES

**AGREEMENT
BETWEEN
THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE
ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
AND
THE ELECTION AND BOUNDARIES COMMISSION OF BELIZE
ON THE ELECTORAL OBSERVATION PROCESS OF THE
March 7, 2012 GENERAL AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS**

The Parties, the Election and Boundaries Commission of Belize (hereinafter referred to as the “Commission”) and the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (hereinafter referred to as the “General Secretariat”);

CONSIDERING:

THAT on the 7th day of February 2012, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Belize invited the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (hereinafter referred to as the “Secretary General”) to send an Electoral Observation Mission (hereinafter referred to as “the Mission”) to Belize for the purpose of witnessing the General and Municipal Elections to be held on March 7th, 2012 (hereinafter referred to as the “Dual Elections”);

THAT in Resolution AG/RES. 991 (XIX-O/89), the General Assembly of the OAS recommended to the Secretary General that “when a member state so requests in the exercise of its sovereignty, missions should be organized and sent to said state to monitor the development, if possible at all stages, of each of its electoral processes;”

THAT Article 24 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter states in pertinent part as follows:

The electoral observation missions shall be carried out at the request of the member state concerned. To that end, the government of that state and the Secretary General shall enter into an agreement establishing the scope and coverage of the electoral observation mission in question. The

member state shall guarantee conditions of security, free access to information, and full cooperation with the electoral observation mission.

Electoral observation missions shall be carried out in accordance with the principles and norms of the OAS. The Organization shall ensure that these missions are effective and independent and shall provide them with the necessary resources for that purpose. They shall be conducted in an objective, impartial, and transparent manner and with the appropriate technical expertise; and

THAT the Secretary General responded affirmatively to the Government of Belize's request to send the Mission with the objective of observing the Dual Elections of 2012;

WHEREFORE, THE PARTIES AGREE AS FOLLOWS:

First: Guarantees

a) The Commission guarantees the Mission access to all facilities for the adequate fulfillment of the observation of the elections on March 7th, 2012 until conclusion of the electoral process in Belize, in conformity with the laws and standards of Belize and the terms of this Agreement.

b) The Commission, on the day of and after the day of the elections, shall guarantee the Mission access to all polling stations and other locations and facilities related to the election until the official count is tabulated nationally and the Dual Elections process is concluded.

c) The Commission shall guarantee the Mission complete access to the locations in which the process of counting and tabulating votes will take place both before and during this process.

d) The Commission shall guarantee the Mission access to all electoral bodies responsible for vote counting and tabulation. Similarly, the Commission shall permit the Mission to conduct any evaluations deemed necessary by the Mission of the voting system and of the communications utilized to transmit electoral results. At the same time, the Commission shall guarantee the Mission complete access to the complaints process

and quality controls that occur before and after the electoral process that are of interest to the Mission.

e) Commission further guarantees the Mission access to all polling stations and other bodies throughout the territory of Belize. Upon request of the Mission, the Commission guarantees to make available by the end of the voting process and, before the closing of the polling stations, copies of all documents printed electronically.

Second: Information

a) The Commission will furnish the Mission with all information referring to the organization, direction and supervision of the electoral process. The Mission may request of the Commission such additional information as is necessary for the exercise of the Mission's functions, and the Commission shall promptly furnish all such information.

b) The Mission may inform the Commission about any irregularities and/or interference, which the Mission might observe or of which the Mission might learn. Similarly, the Mission may request that the Commission provide any information regarding the measures which the Commission will take in relation to such irregularities, and the Commission shall promptly furnish all such information.

c) The Commission shall provide the Mission with information related to the electoral list and other electoral data referring to the same. Similarly, the Commission shall provide all other information relative to the computer systems used on Election Day, and shall offer demonstrations of the systems' operation to the Mission.

Third: General Provisions

a) The Secretary General will designate a Chief of Mission, to represent the Mission and its members before the Commission and before the Government of Belize.

b) The General Secretariat will communicate to the Chair of the Commission the names of the persons who will comprise the Mission, who will be duly identified.

c) The Mission will act impartially, objectively and independently in the fulfillment of its mandate.

d) The General Secretariat will send to the Chair of the Commission a copy of the final report of the Electoral Observation Mission following the Dual Elections.

e) The Commission will make known and disseminate the contents of this Agreement among all electoral bodies and among all personnel involved in the electoral process.

Fourth: Privileges and Immunities

Nothing in this Agreement shall be construed as an express or implied waiver of the privileges and immunities of the OAS, its Organs, its personnel and its assets under the Charter of the Organization; the Diplomatic Privileges (Organization of American States) Order, 1995. Statutory Instrument No. 63 of 1995, made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belize on May 29th, 1995; and under the Agreement between the Government of Belize and the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States Regarding the Privileges and Immunities of the OAS Electoral Observation Mission for the 2012 General and Municipal Elections, signed by the Parties on February 21, 2012; or under international law.

Fifth: Resolution of controversies

The Parties shall attempt to resolve through direct negotiations any disputes arising in relation to the interpretation and/or implementation of this Agreement. If the negotiations do not result in the resolution of the dispute, the matter shall be submitted to a dispute resolution procedure mutually agreed to by the duly authorized representatives of the Parties.

Sixth: Amendments


Amendments to this Agreement shall be made in writing and signed by the duly authorized representatives of the Parties and attached hereto.


Seventh: Entry into Force and Termination

This Agreement shall enter into force on the date and upon the signature of then duly authorized representatives of the Parties. This Agreement shall remain in force until the Mission has concluded its observation mission of the Dual Elections.

This Agreement may be terminated by either Party with or without cause. Termination must be effected by means of no less than five days' written notice to the other Party.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the undersigned, being duly authorized, have signed this Agreement in duplicate on the date and locations indicated below.


FOR THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF
AMERICAN STATES:
Frank Almaguer
Chief of Mission
OAS General Secretariat
Date: *March 1, 2012*


FOR THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION:
OF BELIZE:
Alberto August
Chairman
Elections and Boundaries Commission of Belize
Date: *March 1, 2012*

APPENDIX V: LIST OF OBSERVERS



Organization of
American States

Electoral Observation Mission - Belize

General and Municipal Elections - March 7, 2012

#	Name	Nationality	Title	Gender
Core Group				
1	Frank Almaguer	USA	Chief of Mission	M
2	Tyler Finn	USA	Deputy Chief of Mission	M
3	Rosa Serpa	Colombia	General Coordinator	F
4	Paul Spencer	Antigua & Barbuda	Political Advisor	M
5	Sarah Davidson	Canada	Legal Specialist	F
6	Alejandro Bravo	Chile	Electoral Organization Specialist	M
7	Claudia Montecinos	Chile	Press Officer	F
8	Adriana Rojas	Colombia	Financial Officer	F
Observers				
9	Juliette Maughan	Barbados	International Observer	F
10	Kelly Fay	USA	International Observer	F
11	Lynda Francisque	Martinique	International Observer	F
12	Monique Nardi	Venezuela	International Observer	F
13	Gonzalo Paz	Argentina	International Observer	M
14	Gustavo de Unanue	Mexico	International Observer	M
15	Ulrike Puccio	Chile	International Observer	F
16	Timothy Wood	Canada	International Observer	F
17	Adam Siegel	USA	International Observer	M
18	Fernanda Massaccessi	Argentina	International Observer	F
19	Liesl Harewood	Guyana	International Observer	F
20	Pauline Welsh	Jamaica	International Observer	F
21	Constance Almquist	USA	International Observer	F
22	Paloma Temiño	Spain	International Observer	F

APPENDIX VI: PRESS RELEASES

Press Release



Organization of
American States

Department of Press | 17th & Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20006 | Ph. (202) 458-3379 | Fax. (202) 458-6421 | www.oas.org

Washington DC, Tuesday 21st of February 2012

OAS AND BELIZE SIGNED AGREEMENT FOR MISSION TO OBSERVE GENERAL AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

The Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), José Miguel Insulza, and the Permanent Representative of Belize to the hemispheric organization, Ambassador Nestor Mendez, today signed an agreement that establishes the conditions for the Electoral Observation Mission (EOM) that will accompany the general and municipal elections in the Central-American country on March 7.

The Secretary General stressed that this is the first EOM the OAS will deploy in Belize, which "follows the trend of the Caribbean countries to strengthen their electoral systems through electoral observation." He further recalled that 2012 is the fiftieth anniversary of the OAS Electoral Observation Missions and was pleased to "celebrate this important anniversary serving a democracy in the young and vibrant republic that is Belize."

At the ceremony, held at OAS headquarters in Washington, DC, Ambassador Mendez explained that the signing of the agreement on the privileges and immunities "is an important step in the formalization of the process for the observation mission to take place," and added that it is also "a clear demonstration of Belize's commitment to full participation in the Inter-American System, and to the values that anchor such a system."

"Throughout the Americas, indeed throughout the world, it is widely known that the election observer missions of the OAS are a hallmark of this institution, and that the presence of the missions has evolved into an acceptable imprimatur of a free, fair, and transparent exercise of democracy in the countries of the Americas," Ambassador Mendez affirmed.

The Secretary General has appointed as Head of Mission in Belize Ambassador Frank Almaguer, former U.S. Ambassador to Honduras, and former OAS Secretary for Administration and Finance, and he will lead the observer group arriving in the country a week before the elections.

The signing ceremony also was attended by the OAS Assistant Secretary General, Albert Ramdin, and by officials from the Permanent Mission of Belize to the OAS.

Press Release



Organization of
American States

Department of Press | 17th & Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20006 | Ph. [202] 458-3379 | Fax. [202] 458-6421 | www.oas.org

Belize City, Monday 5th of March 2012

OAS DEPLOYS ELECTORAL OBSERVATION MISSION IN BELIZE

The Organization of American States Electoral Observation Mission (OAS/EOM) headed by Chief of Mission Frank Almaguer will deploy throughout Belize to observe the voting process for the March 7, 2012 General and Municipal Elections.

At the Mission's headquarters at the Best Western Biltmore in Belize City, today 16 electoral observers received training from the Elections and Boundaries Department and were oriented in observation methodology as well as the political context of this electoral process. On Election Day, observers will maintain presence in all six departments of Belize from the opening of the polls through the counting process.

The OAS/EOM in Belize is represented by observers from Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Guyana, Martinique, Mexico, the United States, and Venezuela.

Since its arrival in Belize on March 1st, the OAS/EOM has conducted extensive interviews with electoral authorities, government officials, political party representatives, members of civil society and the media.

The Mission would like to encourage the citizens of Belize to go the polls to exercise their franchise by choosing their representatives, mayors and town and city councilors.

Press Release



Organization of
American States

Department of Press | 17th & Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20006 | Ph. [202] 458-3379 | Fax. [202] 458-6421 | www.oas.org

Belize City, Thursday 8th of March 2012

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON GENERAL AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN BELIZE

As part of its first ever Electoral Observation Mission (EOM) to Belize, the Organization of American States (OAS) fielded a team of 22 members from 13 countries to observe the March 7, 2012 General and Municipal Elections. On Election Day, observers were present in all six districts, visiting over 85% of the nation's polling areas.

The following preliminary observations are based on the direct observations of the OAS team, as well as meetings with electoral authorities, government officials, political parties, representatives of civil society organizations and the media.

Observations:

First of all, the mission wishes to congratulate the people of Belize for the peaceful exercise of their franchise during this electoral process, in what was a historically competitive and close election. The ability of Belizean political parties to incorporate all of the nation's diverse population should be commended as an exemplary practice for the region.

The mission also applauds the dedication and professionalism of the more than 3,000 polling officials that administered two simultaneous elections and ensured a smooth process throughout polling day.

Pre-electoral period

The OAS mission observed the significant preparations made by the Elections and Boundaries Commission and the Election and Boundaries Department. On the whole, this produced a clean and inclusive process. The mission would particularly like to emphasize efforts to provide voters with timely information through its website, which was periodically updated in the days before the election.

The OAS mission was pleased to observe the strong presence of women in the political process: at high levels of electoral administration, as senators and as secretaries general of political parties. Nonetheless, the mission noted with concern the extremely low numbers of female candidacies in both electoral processes. Only three out of the 74 candidates for the general election were women, a mere 4%.

During the pre-electoral period, the mission heard concerns with regards to the voters list, stemming from the extension of the registration period and alleged irregularities in the registration of newly naturalized citizens. The campaign period was also characterized by a perception of limited differentiation between the state and the governing party in terms of resources. The issue of campaign finance and other concerns surrounding the campaign process will be addressed in further detail in the mission's verbal report to the OAS Permanent Council.

Election day procedures

On Election Day, observers reported that 100% of observed polls opened on time at 7:00 am, that all were equipped with the necessary electoral materials and that the vast majority of polling stations were suitable for the purpose. Observers noted that polling officials were knowledgeable and well trained and worked diligently to orient voters and ensure an efficient voting process. The Mission would like to emphasize that women represented more than half of returning officers, polling clerks, counting clerks and party agents.

The OAS mission observed that political parties were actively engaged with the electorate, orienting voters and educating them about voting procedures. Agents from the two major parties maintained a presence at all of the polling stations observed by the mission. Nonetheless, the active role played by party activists, who congregated in significant numbers outside of many voting centers, produced a less than conducive environment for the voting process. The electoral propaganda observed in the vicinity of polling stations and the prevalence of t-shirts bearing candidate names and symbols could be construed as electioneering. At one polling station, an OAS observer witnessed a party activist distributing money immediately outside of the polling center to a group of people after they had voted.

Tabulation and processing of results

After the close of the polls, ballot boxes were transported to centralized counting offices, where results were tabulated and then relayed to the Elections and Boundaries Department. The incorporation of new procedures to have large polling areas serve as counting stations and to simultaneously count multiple ballot boxes led to a more efficient counting process and prevented excessive delays. However, the counting process still went late into the night. Official results had not yet been disseminated by midnight on election day.

Recommendations:

Based on the information gathered by the OAS Electoral Observation Mission during its time in Belize, the mission would like to offer the following recommendations to further strengthen the Belizean electoral process:

8) *The promotion of female participation throughout the electoral process*

The OAS electoral observation mission recommends that efforts be made by both political parties and the government to promote the participation of women in electoral competition. In particular, the mission recommends the development of legal mechanisms to ensure women are incorporated on the ballot and the promotion of training programs for female political leaders. In this light, the fact that a woman was elected to parliament represents a positive step.

9) *The Enactment of Campaign Finance Regulations*

The Mission notes that political financing is unregulated in Belize. The current framework places no limits on campaign spending and does not require disclosure of campaign contributions or expenditures. In order to allow voters to make a more informed decision and to ensure more equity in electoral competition, the OAS recommends the development of campaign finance legislation that addresses these gaps.

10) *Reduction of Electioneering in and around Polling Stations*

The Mission recommends that the government and political parties take positive steps towards reducing the role and influence of party activists at voting centers, through more uniform enforcement of the 100 yard boundary around polling stations and through the enactment of stronger mechanisms to protect the ability of voters to vote without outside pressure or fear of reprisal as they exercise their voting rights.

A more detailed verbal report on the observations and recommendations of the OAS Electoral Observation Mission will be presented to the OAS Permanent Council in Washington D.C. within the coming weeks. This report will be shared with all stakeholders in Belize and will be available through the OAS website at www.oas.org.

The OAS mission wishes to express its thanks to the Government of Belize for the invitation to observe this process and for the Belizean people for the warm welcome in which we were received throughout the country. In addition, the mission thanks the governments of Bolivia, Chile, Mexico, Switzerland, the United States and the United Kingdom for their contributions that made this mission possible.



Organization of American States

17th Street & Constitution Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006
USA