

BELIZE SIGNS DEBT-FOR-NATURE-SWAP DEAL WITH UNCLE SAM

06 August, 2001 - Belmopan

The Government of Belize and the Government of the United States of America on the 2nd August, 2001 signed a Debt For Nature Swap Agreement during an official ceremony held at the United States Department of Treasury in Washington DC.

Under the Agreement, the US Government has undertaken to cancel approximately one-half of Belize outstanding debt to the United States Government amounting to approximately US\$8.5 million.

For its part, the Government of Belize has agreed to contribute approximately BZ\$ 14.4 million dollars together with interest over a period of 26 years to a Belizean Environmental NGO Endowment Fund. The Fund would be used to promote activities designed to conserve, maintain, or restore

tropical forests in Belize under a soon-to-be finalized Forest Conservation Agreement.

NGOs participating under the Forest Conservation Agreement will be the Belize Audubon Society, the Programme for Belize, the PACT Foundation, and the Toledo Institute for Development and Environment and the US based environmental NGO, The Nature Conservancy.

The Government of Belize has also agreed to set aside some 11,600 acres of tropical forest land in the Toledo District to be held in trust and conserved and managed by the Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE) for the people of Belize.

The Debt for Nature Swap Agreement was made under the provisions of the US Tropical Conservation Act of 1998. This

Act allows for the US Government to support and protect tropical forests and acknowledges that the alleviation and restructuring of debt can also include the benefit of making more resources available for conservation activities. Under debt restructuring mechanisms, Tropical Forest Funds can be used to preserve, restore or maintain forests through a variety of specified activities which include purchasing and management parks, protected areas and reserves, natural resource management, training programs and restoration; and protection or sustainable use of animal and plant species.

Signing on behalf of the Government of the United States was Mr. Paul Taylor, Undersecretary of the United States Department of the Treasury, while Her Excel-

lency, Ambassador Lisa Shoman signed on behalf of the Government of Belize.

Speaking at the Ceremony was US Congressman Mr. Rob Portman, who was the prime architect and sponsor of the U.S. Tropical Forest Conservation Act of 1998 under which this Agreement was made possible.

Also present at the signing ceremony was Mr. Stephen Cox, Director of the International Program of the Nature Conservancy, Mr. Dan Campbell, Director of the Nature Conservancy's Belize Program and Mr. Wil Maheia and Ms. Leanne McCarthy of the Toledo Institute of Development and Environment.

It is anticipated that the companion Forest Conservation Agreement will be finalized in six to eight week's time.