

Tackle poverty in compliance with environment! That's the way forward, P. M. Musa tells Audubon

Back from his Central American meeting with President Bill Clinton and other Central American leaders, Prime Minister Said Musa took the opportunity last Saturday at the anniversary celebrations of the Belize Audubon Society to deliver a major address on poverty and the environment.

He praised the Belize Audubon Society for its environmental record, for "opening our eyes to the wondrous mystery, fragility and beauty of God's gifts to Belize."

Development and environmental protection go hand in hand, the Prime Minister said, and improving one enhances the other.

"All we need is more dialogue and communication, in order to arrive at policies and activities that simultaneously raise economic productivity, decrease government deficits, and ameliorate poverty while promoting resource conservation and reducing environmental damage.

"This is a challenge my government has taken up, and is committed to accomplish," Musa said.

But, he noted, there is strong and compelling evidence linking poverty and environmental degradation and the need for greater support for poverty-reducing programmes and for a sound population policy.

The scourges of unemployment and poverty are inextricably bound with the problems of deforestation, soil depletion, and im-

energy policy aimed at promoting the development and well-being of all Belizeans. We do not rule out other alternative sources of energy, including the co-generation of electricity from sugarcane bagasse, citrus peel and others."

Spelling out his government's policy to use environmental enhancements to raise economic productivity, the Prime Minister said that because of environmental considerations, Government had decided not to proceed with the Rubber Camp site for the building of a holding reservoir for the second

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stage of the Macal River hydro project, and instead, decided to complete the study for the lower Chalillo area.

"We know there have been voices raised in protest at the very idea of Government considering the development of this new hydro-power facility at Chalillo. Some of the views expressed are quite rational; some totally emotional."

Government also decided to complete a major review of for-

estry licenses to enforce proper forest management. Timber extraction for export will be completely phased out, Musa said, and wood-based industries such as furniture and souvenirs as well as the development of medicinal plants would take its place.

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seeking partnerships to help us solve our problems.

"We are convinced that people want to work; want an opportunity to earn a decent living for themselves and for their families, and that given the proper work environment and training, they will deliver for wages.

"Based on this conviction, we are working hard to create 15,000 jobs with just conditions and wages promised in our Manifesto. Our pledge to build 10,000 new

homes is being honored, with some houses already delivered, and more in different stages of construction throughout the country.

"A satellite town is about to take off in La Democracia in the Belize District. We project some 4,000 new jobs in the construction industry alone. Our infrastructure development scheme will employ 5,000 more men and women while our agriculture, tourism and industry programmes should create 6,000 new jobs."

"The evidence is now overwhelming that increasing the human and material capital of the poor is one of the keys to reducing poverty. The capacity to earn income and access to income-earning activities is clearly a major factor in helping people get out of the poverty cycle. In order to earn income, however, people need health, strength and education. . .

"If our people are employed, well-educated and healthy, if we take care of those with special needs and work in partnership with our friends at home and abroad, if we work in communion and in harmony with nature and ensure that local communities benefit from our economic and eco-cultural plans and projects, then the debate between growth and development and the environment will end in victory - for both sides," Prime Minister Musa said.

Tourism stakeholders meet in Dangriga