Check Against Delivery

Opening Remarks

Thirty-Fifth Anniversary of the International Merchant Marine Registry of Belize (IMMARBE)

August 14, 2026

Good evening, colleagues.

Financial Secretary, Mr. Joseph Waight; Managing Director, Ingeniero (Ing.) Abilio Domínguez; Directors; esteemed industry leaders; valued partners; honoured guests; ladies and gentlemen:

It is my privilege to welcome you as we commemorate the Thirty-Fifth Anniversary of the International Merchant Marine Registry of Belize, IMMARBE. I am very pleased that we can gather this evening not only to mark the passage of time, but to recognise the work, the choices, and the people that have sustained this institution over three and a half decades.

Thirty-five years is a significant milestone for any institution. For a maritime registry operating in an industry that is global, highly regulated, and constantly changing, it is especially meaningful. IMMARBE has had to adapt to new conventions, new technologies,

changing commercial realities, and increasing expectations of flag States. Through those changes, its central purpose has remained clear: to administer the Belize flag responsibly and to protect its integrity.

One of the most significant transformations over those years has been IMMARBE's development from a traditional ship-registration service into a modern flag State administration. Its evolution into a statutory body was more than an administrative change. It created a stronger foundation for accountability, operational independence, continuity, and long-term planning. That institutional strengthening is among the achievements of which I am most proud.

IMMARBE is one of Belize's most visible points of connection with the wider world. Through the Registry, our country engages with shipowners, seafarers, port State control authorities, recognised organisations, maritime professionals, and international institutions across many jurisdictions. The Belize flag may be carried far from our shores, but every vessel that carries it also carries our country's name and, with it, our reputation.

That is why the work of a registry can never be treated as a purely administrative exercise. As Registrar of Merchant Shipping, I remain acutely aware that we are custodians of public trust. Registration is a regulatory judgement. Oversight is a continuing responsibility. And the credibility of a flag is earned, vessel by vessel, inspection by inspection, and decision by decision.

For Belize, flag State performance is a matter of national interest. It affects how our country is regarded internationally, the confidence placed in our institutions, and the quality of the relationships we are able to build. Our aim must therefore be more than growth in numbers. It must be the development of a quality-focused registry—one that exercises real control, accepts scrutiny, responds decisively when standards are at risk, and provides service without compromising its regulatory obligations.

At the same time, we must preserve IMMARBE's defining character: being accessible, responsive, and stakeholder-focused while becoming an increasingly disciplined and respected maritime administration. That balance is what the phrase 'the Friendly Flag of Quality' should represent.

That approach is reflected in stronger vessel screening, flag State inspections, closer monitoring of recognised organisations, improved oversight of delegated functions, and better use of information and technology. Some of this work requires difficult choices, including sometimes declining business. But those choices reinforce an important principle: the quality of our fleet matters more than its size.

A recent defining moment was Belize's participation in the IMO Member State Audit Scheme, or IMSAS. It brought IMMARBE and our other national maritime authorities together around a shared responsibility for Belize's international obligations. Such an audit is not merely an examination of procedures; it tests the strength, coordination, and maturity of the entire maritime administration.

It demonstrated how far we have come, while reminding us that improvement must remain continuous.

Tonight, however, is also an occasion to appreciate how much has already been achieved. We acknowledge those whose vision established IMMARBE and those who guided it through different periods of its development. We recognise the public officers and maritime professionals who built its systems and represented Belize abroad. We thank our shipowners, managers, agents, surveyors, recognised organisations, legal and technical advisers, and international partners for the confidence they have placed in Belize and for the candid engagement that helps us to improve.

Most importantly, I wish to recognise the current IMMARBE team. Institutions do not endure because of a name or a statute alone. They endure because people show up, apply their judgement, solve problems, maintain standards, and take pride in the work entrusted to them. Much of that work is done quietly and without public recognition. This anniversary belongs to you as much as it belongs to anyone.

As we look ahead, the maritime sector will not stand still. Digitalisation, decarbonisation, cybersecurity, seafarer welfare, environmental protection, and ever-higher standards of transparency and accountability will continue to reshape the industry.

Continuous improvement is therefore not optional; it is an enduring obligation. IMMARBE must remain capable, alert, and

willing to adapt, while staying firmly anchored in safety, integrity, and responsible maritime governance.

Our task for the next chapter is clear: to preserve what has earned trust, to correct what needs strengthening, and to invest in the people, systems, and partnerships that will carry the Registry forward. Belize should not be satisfied merely to participate in the international maritime system. We should continue working to be recognised as a serious, responsive, and respected maritime State.

Ladies and gentlemen, anniversaries invite us to look back with gratitude, but they also ask something of us. The best way to honour the first thirty-five years is to approach the years ahead with the same sense of purpose, resilience, and shared responsibility.

To everyone who has contributed to IMMARBE's journey, past and present, I extend my sincere appreciation. Your dedication has strengthened this institution and brought distinction to Belize.

Happy Thirty-Fifth Anniversary to IMMARBE. May the next chapter be defined by quality, confidence, and continued service to Belize and to the international maritime community.

Thank you.

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