

Presentation by Myrtle Palacio
Book Launching—“A Framework for Voter Education”

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The Journey continues

There are two electoral management bodies in Belize—The Elections and Boundaries Commission and the Elections and Boundaries Department. Both work in tandem and are entrusted by law with the vital functions and exclusive powers to execute these functions to ensure free and fair democratic elections in Belize. The key issue in election organization then, is the ability of the Election Management Bodies to generate confidence in the electoral process. Ladies and gentlemen, Fellow Belizeans, **THAT IS THE BOTTOM LINE.** We at Elections and Boundaries Department are in the business of elections, and FAILURE is NOT an option.

How can this best be achieved? Well welcome to the journey! Our journey at the Elections and Boundaries Department.

After conducting a situational Analysis in 1999, the Department set out to create positive organizational changes and improvements in operational performance. Armed with a Mission, Goals and Objectives, we chose a direction of **1. Transparency** and **2. Voter Education**—both go hand in hand, because knowledge and participation is meaningful in any working democracy.

The Electoral List is the lifeblood of our democracy as it determines WHO will participate in the election long before Polling Day. Therefore the Electoral List is a crucial feature in the organization of free and fair elections, and as such, the Department has devised a strategy to include stakeholders as partners to help us ensure that those who get on the list are duly qualified to do so. The law also empowers individual electors to peruse the list and object to any person, with basis, who should not get on the List or remain on the Electoral List. ***BUT do we know these laws?***

The trends towards economic globalization are having an impact on our social and political arena. The electoral processes cannot escape this global phenomenon. Democracy is one of the most used terms in the international political jargon, and is highly promoted in the agenda of international bodies as an ideal to be pursued—the WILL of the people must be heard through their voice at the Polls. **BUT** the WILL of the people must be preceded and accompanied by the knowledge of our laws and in this case the laws that govern the election and registration processes. ***Do we know these laws? What are our rights and responsibilities under these laws?***

We at the Department value you as partners—the Church, the political party/Activist, the private sector, Mr. Jose Citizen, Civil society—in building and maintaining our democracy. In this light I invite you to read and comprehend the contents of this book. There is no room for analysis unfortunately, as it is a book on the facts of law. The style and size is deliberate, so as to attract our younger Belizeans, a large percent of whom were born after Belize's independence. In particular I invite educators from both formal and informal institutions to use it as a resource for civic education. The book is not copyrighted, again this is deliberate, so that one can duplicate it if needs be.

Transparency + Voter Education --- Power to us as Belizean Electors