

## Belize Celebrates International Day of Older persons Radio address



**October 26th, 2018 12:23 p.m. EST-** This past October 1st Belize observed International Older Persons Day and Maria Elena Sylvestre, patroness of Help Age Belize delivered the following radio address on Belize's radio station, Love F.M., for the opening of Older Persons week:

Address on the occasion of Older Persons Week, by Maria Elena Sylvestre Patroness of HelpAge Belize.

On October 1st each year, in more than 50 countries the communities of HelpAge International pause to pay tribute to our elders. It is a time for celebration and joy as well as a time to reflect and consider how far we have come in achieving the goals set by the United Nations to protect the rights of our seniors. It is my privilege and honor to greet you on behalf of the extended family of HelpAge Belize situated in every district, our capital city, Belmopan, and the villages of Seine Bight and Hopkins.

I take great pride in sharing with you the many ways that our 11 branches fulfill the vision of HelpAge, by caring for, working with, and enjoying sharing the life's experiences of our older persons. Each branch has its own unique way of serving their members. Under the leadership of Chair Mr. Evan Dakers, and his committed board members, and the hard work of our Executive Director Ms. Ivorine Bulwer and her staff, 2017 and 2018 saw many innovations and improvements in the management and delivery of services. Our two residential homes, Sr. Cecilia and Octavia Waight, continue to work with small resources—but with great results—in their determination to effect constant improvements in their delivery of care to their residents.

Our tribute and recognition this year to an outstanding older person at our annual gala, went to the Right Hon. Dr. Sir Manuel Esquivel, former Prime Minister of Belize. It was a huge success, and the love that was expressed to our former Prime Minister was a joy to behold and experience. HelpAge Belize was indeed privileged to be able to pay tribute to this Belizean, who served his people and country with integrity, dedication, and humility.

Each year we look back on the work of HelpAge and there is much to celebrate, but each year I have the task to lament. I know you share my sadness and consternation when we see in the news—and indeed experience first hand—the many instances of violence, abuse, and even murder of the most vulnerable in our society. In every country the most vulnerable are the children and the older persons. It is right and just to prioritize the needs of our children, however, our children—as well—are falling victim to the callous disregard for the lives and wellbeing of the hardworking Belizean people.

I speak for our older citizens, and I urge the leaders of our country to mete out sentences and punishment that would deter the tendency to target older persons because they are less able to defend themselves. Every Belizean should participate in the dialogue to brainstorm solutions and ways to reset our society that so desperately needs to walk back from the brink of chaos that we are currently facing.

I hark back to that time in our history when the family, its traditions, and values were the bulwark of our society. Children were cherished and disciplined in the home first, grandparents were loved and respected. Through many generations the lores and legends of our culture were handed down from parents to sons and

daughters . These core values, still reside in the hearts and minds of every Belizean. It only needs to be nurtured so it can flourish once again. Our precious country of less than four hundred thousand persons should be able to work together with one goal to make Belize an oasis of peace and tranquility, where young and old can enjoy the true Belizean experience that makes us so uniquely special.

Throughout this week up to October 1st, let us demonstrate just how much we love our parents and grandparents, and how grateful we are to still have them in our lives.

May God bless you and bless Belize.

