



U.S. Embassy Belize *Press Release*

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US\$ 3 Million for Sustainable Management and Conservation of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System

Belize City, Belize. – A pioneer alliance aimed at managing and conserving the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef will be signed between the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Nations Foundation (UNF) on February 3, 2004.

This innovative alliance, technically led by the International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN) will engage the private sector, NGOs, and international donors in the adoption of better practices in the areas of fisheries, tourism and agriculture to reduce negative impacts on the Mesoamerican reef system. The signing ceremony for the Mesoamerican Reef Alliance will be held at the Radisson Fort George Hotel and Marina in Belize City. The Honorable Deputy Prime Minister of Belize, John Briceno, and the Honorable Russell F. Freeman, United States Ambassador in Belize, will welcome international and national guests to this ceremony. USAID Guatemala/Central American Programs Mission Director Glenn Anders, UNF Vice-President for Programs Melinda Kimble, and Minister of Environment of Guatemala and President-protempore of the Central American Commission for Environment and Development Licenciado Juan Mario Dary, will be signing this alliance.

The alliance will link social, economic, and institutional aspects of conservation in partnership with cruise-ship lines and agro-industries of the region.

The Mesoamerican Reef is the largest barrier coral reef system in the Western Hemisphere and the second largest in the world. Portions of this reef system have been designated as World Heritage sites, and the reef serves as an important source of economically valuable resources for many coastal populations. Unfortunately, the reef is currently threatened by:

- over fishing and inappropriate aquaculture development;
- unregulated coastal/island development and unsustainable tourism;
- inappropriate use of land and resources and industrial development (runoff/pollution);
- port and ship based pollution; as well as
- storms and climate change related phenomena.

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These threats have begun to have serious negative impacts on the ecological health of the Mesoamerican Reef, resulting in reduced productivity. Coastal economies are affected, particularly the fishing and tourism industries. In response to these threats, USAID formed this alliance with the UN Foundation. The Mesoamerican Barrier Reef Alliance implemented by ICRAN will address three major components: Watershed Management, Sustainable Fisheries, and Sustainable Tourism.

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