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PRESS RELEASE

Foreign Minister Represents Belize at CARICOM's 89th Special Meeting of the Council for Trade and Economic Development

Belmopan. February 5, 2021. 9:00 a.m.

Senator Hon. Eamon Courtenay, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Immigration, led Belize's delegation at the 89th Special Ministerial Meeting of the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) on February 4, 2021, via videoconference.

The meeting focused on executing a previous decision of COTED which requires CARICOM to establish a comprehensive monitoring mechanism for all sugars imported into the CARICOM market. The CARICOM Secretariat, in consultation with Belize, developed the terms of reference (TOR) for the monitoring mechanism for sugar, which was submitted to member states for adoption and approval. Minister Courtenay acknowledged the feedback received from member states regarding their concerns with the TOR. Member states agreed to meet on February 19, 2021 to further discuss outstanding concerns and issues in order to expedite the approval and implementation of a monitoring mechanism for sugar which is of critical importance to livelihoods in Belize.

Once established and implemented, the monitoring mechanism will put in place arrangements to ensure that, where extra-regional imports of refined sugar are being contemplated, regional producers are given the opportunity to prove that they are able to supply the quantities and specifications required by importers as indicated through an application to COTED. Only where regional suppliers are unable to supply will member states be authorized to exempt the payment of the Common External Tariff (CET) on imports of sugar.

Other issues addressed were a petition by Guyana for COTED's approval for them to grant preferential treatment on an additional list of agro-processed products under the Guyana/Brazil/St. Kitts and Nevis Partial Scope Agreement; and a case on cement raised at the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) - *Rock Hard Distribution Limited, Rock Hard Distributors Limited, Mootilal and Sons Contracting Limited - V- The State of Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean Community*.

Member states were given additional time to review both issues to ensure that their trade interests would not be prejudiced. Belize has expressed interest in further developing key agriculture sectors and will further review the inclusion of a number of goods proposed for import duty concession to Brazil. In light of recent investment in cement production, Belize will be following the Rock Hard Distribution Limited cement case closely as it could set precedent for the treatment of imports of cement from outside the CARICOM Single Market.

Foreign Minister Courtenay was supported by Ambassador Amalia Mai, Chief Executive Officer; H.E. Lawrence Sylvester, Belize's Ambassador to CARICOM; and senior officials from the Directorate General for Foreign Trade, the Attorney General's Ministry, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise, the Belize Customs and Excise Department; and representatives from the Belize Sugar Industry.

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