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PRESS RELEASE

Statement on Land Issues in Toledo District

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It has come to the attention of the Government of Belize and the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs that various private landowners and entities have made complaints and representations to government that they believe that their private landowner rights are being infringed due to the Maya Land Rights Judgement of 2015. It is the view of these landowners that they are experiencing an erosion of their constitutional rights, and therefore, they are increasingly concerned about their investments and future plans. There is the perception that some alcaldes, village councils and other Maya leaders have become emboldened in their dealings with private landowners.

It is of grave concern to these landowners that some village leaders and Maya leaders are of the view that the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) Consent Order has bestowed absolute rights on them. While the Government of Belize fully recognizes the need to implement the ruling of Belize's highest court, the government must seek to achieve a balancing act between the customary land rights of Maya people and the right to private land ownership, both of which are protected by the Constitution.

For example, village leaders and Maya leaders are within their rights to respectfully request that government and private landowners refrain from further surveys, leases and land transfers until a comprehensive legal framework can be adopted and administrative measures put in place. What village leaders and Maya leaders may NOT do is conduct themselves as if private owners do not continue to enjoy their rights of ownership to their land. Existing roadways, easements, shared access, etc. cannot arbitrarily be fettered by alcaldes and village chairmen as they see fit.

The government is committed to the Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) Protocol that has been filed, but all parties must be respectful of one

another's interests and constitutional rights. Where there may be conflicts, government is again committed to facilitation and mediation processes that may be required. The government is aware that the full extent of Maya customary land rights has yet to be defined. Therefore, full respect must be accorded to private land ownership, and vice versa, private landowners should have similar respect for Maya land tenure as established by the courts.

The Government of Belize and all relevant ministries are committed to the protection of individual land rights, the recognition of Maya customary land tenure, and the processes that are necessary for balancing these competing interests where necessary. Additionally, the government is moving to put in place the legislative and administrative framework that the CCJ Consent ruling has directed. The government reiterates that it is vital that ALL parties concerned operate in a completely professional and respectful manner thereby acknowledging the rights of one another.

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