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PRESS RELEASE

Ministers Collaborate on Working Visit to Southern Communities

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Hon. Dolores Balderamos Garcia, Minister of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, along with Hon. Gilroy Usher, Minister of State, led a successful three-day visit to indigenous communities in Southern Belize.

They visited Ministry offices in Independence and Punta Gorda Town on Friday, April 30, and engaged in productive discussions with staff, with a view to improving working conditions and enhancing the delivery of services. The ministers also met with executive members of the National Garifuna Council Punta Gorda Branch.

On Saturday, May 1, the ministers, accompanied by Tanya Santos Neal, CEO in the Ministry, and Gregory Ch'oc, Commissioner of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, visited the Rax Mu Q'iche Forestry Enterprise in Conejo Village, which is contributing to the livelihoods of the community members. The ministers were warmly welcomed by villagers of Conejo with Marimba music. The attendees shared concerns about the work of the Ministry. At the end of the event, everyone was treated to a Maya traditional meal. Attendees included members of the buffer communities of Sunday Wood, Crique Sarco, Santa Teresa, Midway and Barranco. Also present was the Governor General Designate Froyla Tzalam, who will be demitting her post as executive director of the Sarstoon Temash Institute for Indigenous Management.

The Ministry delegation met with Hon. Oscar Requena, Minister of Rural Transformation, Community Development, Labour and Local Government, and community leaders from San Antonio Village. A brief overview of the Consent Order on the Maya Land Rights was discussed. The delegation also

visited with IxKän Tziit Women's Group, which shared their concerns and plans. A meeting was held later that day at the Father Ring Parish Hall in Punta Gorda with stakeholders and leaders of the Maya communities where the participants shared ideas of mutual interest.

On Sunday, May 2, the delegation travelled by boat to the southern coastal community of Barranco, where they were warmly welcomed by community leaders. Egbert Valencio, Dr. Joseph Palacio, Irma Gonzalez and Rozel Arana led a short tour of the village, including the Garifuna museum. The delegation engaged in a lively meeting. The ministers pledged the ministry's cooperation and gave their commitment to addressing the community's concerns. The ministers also received gifts from the Barranco Community.

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