



PR#139-23

PRESS RELEASE

Ministries of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs and Culture Unveil Newly Acquired Deer Dance Attire and Marimba

Belmopan, June 15, 2023.

In recognition of the need to safeguard, preserve, and promote the rich culture of the Maya people of Belize, the Ministry of Human Development, Families, and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs and the National Institute of Culture and History (NICH), under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, collaborated over the last two months to source and purchase a new set of Deer Dance costumes and marimba from Cobán, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala. This government investment, which includes 25 Deer Dance costumes and the marimba, is valued at over BZ\$50,000 and will be housed at NICH for use whenever there is a request from a specific village.

The cultural items were officially unveiled at the Lubaantun Maya Temple in San Pedro Columbia, Toledo District, on June 14 as 23 dancers dressed in colourful attire and 18 copal incense bearers filled the sacred plaza, where they performed the sacred Deer Dance. The dance and cultural activity are a collective festive celebration that many Maya communities have practised for over 25 years. Throughout this time, villages across the district have organized performances usually using attire and marimba rented from Guatemala.

The traditional Maya Deer Dance is a pre-Hispanic Maya dance that shows the resistance of indigenous peoples. It also demonstrates the harmonious relationship of the Maya people with nature, and its sacred animals, especially the deer, jaguar, and monkey, which are evident in the spectacular display and dance.

The brand-new marimba will be used for various Maya festivals in Belize. The instrument is named "Li Xwajleb'aal Kalebaal" in Q'eqchi Maya and "Uh Pax Kah" in Mopan Maya, which translates to "The Community's marimba" in English. The vision of both ministries is that through its melodies, the marimba will be used to pass on the traditional heritage of the Maya for many years to come.

The ministries of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs and Culture are pleased with this vital acquisition that will support their mission of championing cultural preservation and celebration within Maya communities and for all Belizeans.

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