



PR#021-25

PRESS RELEASE

117th Special Meeting of the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED)

Belmopan, February 13, 2025.

The 117th Special Meeting of COTED was held virtually to consider requests from the Governments of Trinidad and Tobago and Belize for the approval of the Partial Scope Agreement (PSA) between the Republic of Chile and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Partial Scope Agreement between the Government of Belize and the Republic of El Salvador. This meeting follows the decisions resulting from the 59th Regular Meeting of COTED held in November 2024, during which the Secretariat requested that Member States review and provide their respective comments on the Agreements.

In preparation for the 117th Special Meeting, Belize held several bilateral meetings at the technical level with Member States to address concerns regarding the PSA between Belize and El Salvador, particularly on regionally sensitive products requested by El Salvador. Belize has so far received full support from Antigua and Barbuda, Suriname, and Guyana with responses from other Member States still pending.

Belize requested that Member States consider their positions on the commodities of concern negotiated within the Agreement with El Salvador, based on historical production data and the ability to meet the required 75% CARICOM demand threshold to qualify for a protective tariff on those commodities. Where production data does not meet the required 75% threshold, Belize requested flexibility from Member States to support the negotiated goods.

The Belize delegation, led by Mr. Andy Sutherland, Director General for Foreign Trade under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, emphasized the importance of this Agreement to Belize's overall economic growth and the urgent need for full support from Member States. Belize also informed the Member States that the Agreement aligns with key policies under the Government of Belize's National Medium-Term Development Plan, aimed at strengthening regional trade and reducing the trade deficit through increased access to export markets, particularly with its Central American neighbours.

Mr. Andy Sutherland was supported by senior officials from the Ministry and the Customs and Excise Department.

Belize will continue its bilateral engagements with Member States to further address concerns and secure full support from the region.

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