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Prime Minister Rt. Hon. Dean Barrow Expresses Condolences on the Passing of COVID-19 Patient

My Fellow Belizeans,

It is my sad duty to announce the death this afternoon of the fourth patient to be diagnosed in Belize with COVID-19. On behalf of the entire nation, I offer deepest condolences to the wife and family of Hubert Pipersburgh. He was a well-known, indeed renowned, Belizean who served his country both at home and in the diaspora.

Mr. Pipersburgh was diagnosed in San Ignacio early on Friday last, and was transferred to the KMH that same evening. He was then intubated and appeared stable until today, when he deteriorated sharply. He died despite what I am assured were Herculean efforts on the part of the medical staff to save him.

Mr. Pipersburgh's death is an occasion for mourning. It is also a reminder, coming to us in the worst possible way, of the need for all Belizeans to treat this terrible virus with the grave seriousness it deserves. No one need doubt that such a reminder is necessary. Every day since the declaration of the state of emergency, the police have had to arrest scores of persons for breaking curfew and breaching the stay-at-home and social distancing regulations. The social media pictures of people piled almost on top of one another at the Michael Finnegan market in Belize City yesterday, are further and shocking proof of our heedlessness.

I can only hope and plea that the tragic death of Mr. Pipersburgh, and the announcement early this morning of COVID-19's fifth confirmed case in Belize, will cause the fundamental change in behavior that is a must if we are to defeat the pandemic.

Of course, the Ministry of Health continues to work tirelessly to combat the spread of the virus. Very quickly after his diagnosis, close contacts of Mr. Pipersburgh, both in San Ignacio and Belize City where he worked, were swabbed and tested. That number amounted to 49. Additionally, 41 health care providers from the three medical facilities he visited were also tested. Thankfully, all tests have come back negative.

The Ministry has also placed patient #5, a Belizean that a couple of days ago came back from the U.S. via Mexico, in strict quarantine. This was done in Corozal immediately upon his entry into the country, thus minimizing the possibility of any transmission from that patient.

The point of rehearsing all this Ministry of Health activity is to reassure Belizeans. Tireless work is being done on the medical front, and there is no need to panic.

The front line of the Ministry of Health has been strengthened by the recently arrived Cuban medical brigade. And I have directed the drafting of a number of non-government medical personnel, both doctors and nurses, to join an advisory, planning and coping unit to assist the Director of Health Services and his team.

The National Oversight Committee meets virtually tomorrow and the same modality will now serve for Cabinet meetings. In that context, I expect an urgent analysis of the current medical situation and consideration of any further measures that may be necessary.

I will report accordingly, and meantime, I thank you and ask God's blessing on Belize.