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PRESS RELEASE

Statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, and Immigration in Response to Remarks by PSU President

Belmopan. December 2, 2021. 5:00 p.m.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, and **Immigration** hereby informs that the statements made by Mr. Dean Flowers, President of the Public Service Union, and led on by Mr. Jules Vasquez of 7News Belize on the 'Jules Vasquez Uncut' show on December 1, 2021, were libelous. Consequently, this issue will be addressed legally.

Mr. Flowers stated, "that it is no longer a rumour, it is truth, and I have to tie it to what is happening on the narco front, (Mr. Vasquez, "Don't make too great a stretch, but go ahead"). The Union had received information that a team of immigration officials were sent to Bolivia, and most recently also sent to Peru. I understand that the team of public officers included Immigration Officers, public officers and IT specialist, (Mr. Vasquez, "Did they go for training?") They went to Bolivia to issue Belizean passports."

The ministry hereby explicitly states that the immigration services provided to Belizeans and foreigners are not related to the narcotics trade. Furthermore, the ministry categorically denies that the services provided to Belizeans living in Bolivia and Peru were tied to the narcotics trade.

In reference to providing secured travel documents to Belizeans, locally and globally as per the mission of the Department of Nationality and Passport, the ministry carried out two scheduled Special Assignments for the calendar year 2021 to provide passport application services to Belizeans abroad as follows:

- Bolivia - Approximately 996 applications from 10-2-2021 to 2-3-2021
- Peru - Approximately 142 applications from 12-11-2021 to 23-11-2021

From a foreign relations perspective, the ministry liaised with Belize's Foreign Affairs office and the Foreign Affairs offices of the respective countries. From a financial perspective, the ministry liaised with the offices of the Financial Secretary and the Accountant General for protocols to collect payments, issue receipts and final consolidation.

These initiatives were not Belize Cabinet decisions. Consequently, they were not in the Cabinet Briefs. These were ministry-level initiatives requiring public officers to carry out the respective functions to Belizeans in the Belize diaspora.

These Special Assignments involve travelling to countries where Belizeans currently reside and have no access to Belizean embassies to collect passport renewal applications. Special assignments of this nature were previously done as follows:

- Bolivia - Approximately 1,100 applicants from 10-2-2012 to 2-3-2012
- Mexico - Approximately 25 applications from 23-10-2012 to 26-10-2012
- Dubai - Approximately 50 applications from 2-5-2016 to 7-2-2016

Furthermore, for calendar year 2022, the ministry is planning to carry out similar Special Assignments in various locations in the United States of America as is being requested by Belize Foreign Missions in the U.S. These are locations of high concentrations of Belizeans that do not have Belizean embassies to process renewals of passports.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, and Immigration will continue to manage migration for the national security and socio-economic development of Belize.

Ends