



PR#252-23

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Government of Belize Responds to the Belize Council of Churches and the National Evangelical Association of Belize**

*Belmopan, November 16, 2023.*

The Government of Belize has noted that today, two press releases were issued by the Belize Council of Churches (BCC) and the National Evangelical Association of Belize (NEAB) on the decisions made by the government regarding diplomatic relations between Belize and Israel.

#### **The Belize Council of Churches**

The BCC's release states, in part:

*"The recent decision of the Government of Belize to suspend diplomatic relations with Israel, therefore, increase obstacles for Belizeans wanting to visit the Holy Land, is unfortunate, and fails to foster the dialogue necessary for peace; however, we are hopeful to hear that the measures taken stops short of formally revoking relations with Israel. We look forward to the GOB prudently restoring relations when possible. Although much healing and time will be necessary, it is the position of the church that a two-state solution remains the best option in the long-term, where peoples are respected, and the cultures are promoted and preserved."*

The public should be aware that Belizeans are free to visit Israel. There is no visa requirement. Furthermore, when the war erupted, the government arranged with a friendly third country to render aid and assistance to any Belizean in Israel in difficulty. Therefore, it is incorrect for the BCC to say, *"The recent decision of the Government of Belize to suspend diplomatic relations with Israel, therefore, increase obstacles for Belizeans wanting to visit the Holy Land"*.

On the question of dialogue, the Government of Belize has communicated to Israel by diplomatic note, to which there has been no response by Israel.

The government is pleased to observe that the BCC believes *"that a two-state solution remains the best option in the long-term, where peoples are respected, and the cultures are promoted and preserved."*

#### **The National Evangelical Association of Belize**

In its release, the NEAB complains that the government *"condemn Israel, and not Hamas?"* This is false.

At the meeting of the House of Representatives on October 13, 2023, Prime Minister Hon. John Briceño stated that Belize does not support what Hamas did on October 7, 2023.

At the meeting of the Senate on October 26, 2023, Foreign Minister Hon. Eamon Courtenay said:

*“The histories of Palestine and of Israel are as long as time itself. It is a complicated history weighted by religion, by war, by oppression, by geopolitics, by apartheid policies, by systematic violations of human rights, by impunity, by disregard for international law, by the appropriation of territory and by occupation.*

*Notwithstanding this complicated context, Belize’s position is clear:  
We condemn the unjustified use of force and the killing of innocent civilians by both sides.  
We call for an immediate ceasefire.  
We call for the immediate release of all hostages.  
We demand that international humanitarian and human rights law be respected by all parties.  
We call for the safe, unimpeded access for adequate humanitarian support to Gaza.”*

The Foreign Minister’s statement was widely reported in the Belizean media.

The government notes that neither the BCC nor the NEAB condemned the killing of over 11,000 civilians by Israeli Defence Forces, the internal displacement of more than one million Gazans, the illegal siege imposed by Israel on Gaza that has denied innocent persons food, water, electricity, medicine. Neither organization condemned Israel’s relentless and indiscriminate bombing for nearly 50 days, including destroying hospitals, refugee camps and other infrastructure.

**Ends**