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PRESS RELEASE

Cabinet Brief

Belmopan. November 25, 2020. 6:00 p.m.

The Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister Hon. John Briceño met in regular session on November 24th, 2020.

The Cabinet received a full report from the Hon. Michel Chebat, Minister of Health and Wellness, regarding the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Belize. Cabinet considered the report, noted the dire effects of the pandemic, the fact that there is no plan in place to address the crisis, and approved the new measures to be implemented with a view to arresting the spread of the virus.

The Ministry of Health will hold a press conference on Thursday, November 26th, to update the public on the crisis arising from the COVID-19 outbreak. The Minister will lay out the Government's plan to address the COVID-19 pandemic and announce new measures including an increase in the number of testing centers to increase testing and an aggressive awareness campaign.

The Hon. Orlando Habet, Minister of Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management, briefed the Cabinet on the National Emergency Management Organization's preliminary report on the impact of the rains associated with Hurricanes ETA and IOTA. The preliminary estimate of loss exceeds BZ\$150 million countrywide. This includes loss to agriculture, housing and infrastructure.

To alleviate the needs of persons affected by the flooding situation, Cabinet approved the request for funding by the Ministry of Sustainable Development, Climate Change, and Disaster Risk Management, for food assessment for 5,000 Belizeans.

At the request of the Hon. Julius Espat, Minister of Infrastructure Development and Housing, the Cabinet approved initial funding to begin road works especially on the major roads and highways severely impacted by the recent rains and floods. The Cabinet will revisit this matter at its next regular meeting.

Following the presentation at last week's meeting on the State of Public Finances and the Economy presented by Mr. Joseph Waight, Financial Secretary; Ambassador Joy Grant, Governor of the Central Bank; and Mr. Kareem Michaels, Deputy Governor of the Central Bank, Cabinet received a further brief on the state of the economy and Government finances. Cabinet agreed to present a new budget for the remainder of the financial year at its first working session of the House of Representatives in early December.

The Prime Minister Hon. John Briceño informed Cabinet that Ambassador Joy Grant, Governor of the Central Bank of Belize, had informed him that at a meeting held on November 18th, 2020, that the Central Bank granted the approval of the merger between the Belize Bank Limited with the Bank of Nova Scotia Limited. The Cabinet noted that under the Domestic Banks and Financial Institutions Act this approval was granted by the Central Bank of Belize and not the Minister of Finance. The Cabinet also decided that it would move promptly to appoint a new Board for the Central Bank of Belize.

Finally, the Cabinet considered a letter from the Public Service Union (PSU) regarding the investigation into the "fire sale" of Government's assets by the previous administration. The Cabinet agreed to meet with the PSU to look into setting up a committee to further investigate this matter.

Ends