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PRESS RELEASE

Belize Establishes National Biodiversity Office on United Nations' International Biodiversity Day

Belmopan. May 22, 2020.

Today, Belize joins countries around the world in celebrating the United Nations' International Day for Biological Diversity. The Day was declared under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity to increase understanding and awareness of biodiversity issues. This year, this important day is being celebrated under the theme, '**Our Solutions are in Nature**' to highlight the intricate link between human health and safety and wellbeing of the environment. To mark the occasion, Belize today established its National Biodiversity Office under the Ministry of Fisheries, Forestry, the Environment and Sustainable Development.

The National Biodiversity Office will be responsible for implementing Belize's agenda related to biodiversity and protected areas, particularly national parks, nature reserves, wildlife sanctuaries, natural monuments, biological corridors and private protected areas, in partnership with the Protected Areas Conservation Trust. The Unit, which will be the Ministry in the Old Lands Building, Market Square, Belmopan, will also be charged with regulatory roles in relation to biodiversity, protected areas, and trade in endangered species.

Biological diversity (biodiversity) refers to the variety of living things on earth, and plays a crucial role in providing food, water, medicines, and energy to sustain human life. Mismanagement of biodiversity through harmful choices and practices such as uncontrolled habitat destruction, hunting species to extinction, trading and eating exotic species, and pollution can lead to

devastating consequences for humans, such as unleashing new deadly viruses that spark pandemics like COVID-19.

The current pandemic teaches us a harsh lesson that human health and survival are inextricably linked to the health and survival of the natural world. As we seek to build back better from the current crisis, the preservation of biodiversity and better management of our interaction with the natural world will help to achieve the future we want, while protecting the health and wellbeing for generations to come.

Since the middle of the 20th Century, Belize began protecting its biological diversity through the establishment of reserves, one of the first being the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve in 1944. Preserving and sustainably using biodiversity is necessary for guaranteeing water and food security, mitigating climate disruption, and even preventing pandemics. Today, the preservation of Belize's biodiversity is achieved through the establishment and maintenance of the National Protected Areas System (NPAS) that now covers around 46% of its landmass. The regulation, oversight and management of approximately half of the NPAS will now be the responsibility of the National Biodiversity Office. The other half is managed as extractive reserves under the purview of the Fisheries and Forest Departments.

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