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PRESS RELEASE

Belize Delivers Statement at the Commonwealth

Belmopan, March 16, 2023.

Hon. Eamon Courtenay, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Immigration, delivered a statement at the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers Meeting at Marlborough House in London on March 15, 2023.

The Commonwealth Charter commits member states to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant human rights covenants and international instruments, including the Refugee Convention and its protocol, and to protecting peoples who are most vulnerable and at risk. In his statement, Foreign Minister Courtenay acknowledged the Commonwealth's longstanding recognition of the importance of building peaceful, just and stable societies through the protection of human rights.

“Belize, as a country that is both a destination and a transit country for migrants and asylum seekers, is deeply concerned by some of the policy positions that have been adopted by members of the Commonwealth family. Do we build just societies and protect the most vulnerable when we say that if you arrive on my shores illegally, I will deny you the right accorded to you by the Refugee Convention? Do we build just societies and protect the most vulnerable if we say that if you arrive in my country and you seek asylum, I will transfer you forcibly to a third country? We, in Belize, who are confronted with tens of thousands of migrants from Central America, from Haiti, from Venezuela, from Cuba passing through our country and some staying, have to ask ourselves: should we adopt a similar policy? And I ask myself whether the Commonwealth members should all adopt that policy. Will we be discharging our faithful commitment to our Charter?”

Minister Courtenay said that Belize calls for the Commonwealth's renewal of its commitment to the Refugee Convention and Protocol; for the humane treatment of asylum seekers and migrants; and for faithful compliance with individual and collective legal obligations. Belize further calls on the Commonwealth family to take up the issue of inhumane and unlawful treatment of migrants and refugees as an emerging and evolving issue for the Commonwealth family.

Furthermore, an update was given to Commonwealth foreign ministers on the territorial, insular and maritime claims of Guatemala against Belize. The Commonwealth has long affirmed its support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Belize.

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