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PRESS RELEASE

Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Belmopan, September 14, 2026.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade registers its strongest protest over an incident that occurred on Thursday, September 10, 2026, in which a significant deployment of Guatemalan military and civilian vessels obstructed a group of Belizean nationals from completing their customary passage around Sarstoon Island.

The Belize Territorial Volunteers (BTV), escorted by the Belize Defence Force (BDF) and the Belize Coast Guard, departed Punta Gorda for their annual journey to circle Sarstoon Island — a passage the group has undertaken for nearly two decades. Approximately eighteen (18) Guatemalan vessels, comprising both military and civilian craft, were present in Belizean waters within the immediate vicinity of the island.

The Foreign Ministry wishes to be unequivocal: the Sarstoon River constitutes part of the international boundary between Belize and Guatemala, as established under the 1859 Boundary Treaty between Great Britain and Guatemala, with the boundary line running along the mid-channel of the river. Sarstoon Island lies within Belizean sovereign territory, and the treaty guarantees that the channels of the river remain equally free and open to the vessels of both countries. Guatemala's deployment of a disproportionate flotilla in Belizean waters in violation of Belize's sovereignty and to obstruct the lawful passage of unarmed Belizean nationals is inconsistent with these obligations. Furthermore, the presence of Guatemalan civilians within the military deployment represents an unwelcome escalation in an already sensitive border area.

The Ministry has dispatched a Note Verbale to the Ministry of External Affairs of Guatemala protesting in the strongest terms the aforementioned incident of September 10, 2026. The Ministry is also formally notifying Belize's international partners and friends, as well as the Organization of American States (OAS), of this incident and its implications for regional stability.

Furthermore, the Ministry will seek an explanation of the aggressive behaviour of the Guatemalan military from the Ambassador of Guatemala to Belize. A bilateral meeting will also be sought between Prime Minister Briceño and President Arévalo next week on the margins of the UN General Assembly.

Belize reaffirms its full confidence in the International Court of Justice process as the appropriate mechanism for the final resolution of Guatemala's territorial, insular, and maritime claim, and calls on the Government of Guatemala to refrain from actions on the ground that prejudge the outcome of that process or place civilians and security personnel at unnecessary risk.

The Ministry has instructed the Office of the Agent to consult Belize's international legal team to ensure that these acts are appropriately referred to at the hearings before the Court and that the Court is apprised of these and any acts of a similar nature.

The Government of Belize commends the professionalism and restraint exercised by members of the BDF and the Belize Coast Guard in managing this encounter and reassures the Belizean public that it will continue to take all necessary and appropriate diplomatic measures to safeguard Belize's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

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