PRESS RELEASE

-BCCI Supports our Armed Forces in their defence of our Sovereignty-

The Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry (BCCI) regrets that 13 year old Julio Alvarado, a minor, fell victim to the on-going territorial dispute between Belize and Guatemala, and that the President of Guatemala has taken this very unfortunate circumstance as an opportunity to justify escalating aggression towards Belize and seeking to take control of the adjacency zone.

While the BCCI regrets this circumstance, Guatemalan civilians are not entirely without fault when they trespass into Belizean territory and use aggression towards our security forces. That very aggression resulted in the shooting of Staff Sergeant Richard Lambey on 26th March 2016, and the untimely death of 20 year old Constable Danny Conorquie on 26th September 2014. Both officers were injured while discharging their duties in Belizean territory, and while exerting no aggression towards any person.

The BCCI supports and applauds the bravery of our security forces who encounter dangers daily while protecting our country, our people and our sovereignty. It is therefore imperative that there be a proper investigation into the death of Julio Alvarado and that every attempt is made by our Government to protect the integrity of our security forces if the death of Julio Alvarado was in fact the result of an act of self-defence.

The BCCI condemns the irresponsible and inflammatory comments made by Guatemala’s President prior to any proper investigation into the death of Julio Alvarado. However, those inflammatory comments must be met with calm and firmness on the part of the Government of Belize and Belizeans. In this crucial time it is critical that we stand our ground as Belizeans and demonstrate to Guatemala that we are firmly resolved to protect and defend our country. Our values and our traditions do not allow us to yield or acquiesce to hysteria, but rather to engage and stand our ground ‘Shoulder to Shoulder’ as is the motto of the Belize Defence Force.
We call on the government to take the strongest possible diplomatic measures to highlight and protest Guatemala's escalation of aggression as well as the rhetoric of its President, including briefing our international partners and friends every step of the way. On the matter of human rights, Guatemala and its President should be called upon by members of the international community to honour the commitments made under the Confidence Building Measures, as well as honour other international commitments guaranteeing every child the right to an education and the outlawing of child labour.

Finally, we call on all political parties to keep in mind that threats to our sovereignty supersede party politics and it is therefore imperative that they unite in the face of such threats. Belize is a sovereign nation and our measured responses should demonstrate, in the strongest possible terms, our determination and will to chart our own course and develop our own future as a peace loving nation, rather than to allow our neighbours the opportunity to direct it for us.

God Bless Belize - Land of the Free!

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Media Contact:
Jamie Rocke (Ms.)
Marketing & Public Relations Officer
Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry
Email: mpo@belize.org
Tel: 223-5330; Fax: 223-5333