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17th December, 2020

Media Release: BELIZEANS HAVE THE RIGHT TO KNOW GUATEMALA'S CLAIM

In a press release on December 8, 2020, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that it had: *"received Guatemala's Memorial in relation to Guatemala's Territorial, Insular and Maritime Claim to Belizean territory. . ."* The release further stated: *"The ICJ rules do not allow Belize to disclose Guatemala's pleadings, and Belize is obliged to abide by these rules. (Article 53(2))."* For reference, Article 53(2) reads: **"The Court may, after ascertaining the views of the parties, decide that copies of the pleadings and documents annexed shall be made accessible to the public on or after the opening of the oral proceedings."**

It is important to understand that the term *"copies of the pleadings and documents annexed"* speaks about **certified copies** by the ICJ registry that the court will recognize as official and legitimate. It is also important to understand that the ICJ is a court for State Parties and not for Individuals. The term *"public"* in that context refers to United Nations Organs, Agencies and OTHER STATES WHO ARE NOT PARTIES TO THE LITIGATION. In fact, there is good practical reason for the ICJ to withhold certified copies of pleadings until *"oral proceedings"* has commenced. This is because litigants may amend their pleadings up to that point. Any official copies issued before the close of pleadings might be with error or incomplete. Interpreting the said Article to connote an *"oath of secrecy"* is therefore misleading and false.

What and how much of Guatemala's current memorial the government of Belize shares with the people of Belize is not governed by any ICJ statute or court rule. That decision is the choice of the government of Belize. What is being litigated is the assets of the people, and not the assets of government. Belizeans therefore, have the absolute right to know what is happening with their heritage at each and every step of the way. We the people demand the truth!

The BPM and conscious Belizeans know that this is an existential crises as the ICJ will literally decide whether Belize will continue to exist with all its territory intact or be dismembered. The least our government can do at this stage is to afford us our right to be fully informed. We maintain that the only effective antidote against corruption is total transparency. The BPM remains on duty as the vanguard of our democracy and we will not be deterred by any lame political excuse for corruption!

End of release