



## BELIZE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

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# 4792 Coney Drive, 2nd Floor Withfield Tower, P.O. Box 291 , Belize City, Belize, Central America

Tuesday, July 28th, 2020

### **BCCI CONCERNED ABOUT IMPLICATIONS OF PBL'S CLOSURE**

#### **- For Immediate Release-**

The current impasse between the Port of Belize Limited (PBL) and Christian Workers Union (CWU), and the resultant disruption of the Belize City Port's operations, is a gravely serious matter for the entire Belizean economy. The Port's closure has already had substantial effect on the business community, since vessels have not been able to discharge cargo or receive Belizean exports in order to earn much needed foreign exchange. The Belizean economy is already fragile due to COVID-19 pandemic impact and the further damage caused by the business community's inability to rely on efficient and consistent port services from the country's primary port will make recovery much more difficult, putting jobs, investments and livelihoods at serious risk.

BCCI, therefore, encourages all relevant parties to exercise *good faith* by returning to the negotiating table, and committing to allowing the due process established under the Labour Act or under the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) to have their intended effect.

The BCCI, being the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s Employers' Representative in Belize, underscores the fact that the aforementioned due process includes, among other things, the formation of the *Essential Services Arbitration Tribunal (ESAT)*, to which the BCCI had appointed a representative and which was scheduled to convene on Wednesday, July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020, but did not due the altercations involving protestors and the Police Force. It also involves provisions enshrined within the Labour Act itself that allow for, *inter alia*, arbitration proceedings to be instituted by the Labour Ministry, the primary body established under Belize's Laws to ensure conciliatory outcomes in labour matters.

Consequently, considering that the processes outlined under the Law has been activated, and the right to appeal is also available under the laws of Belize, the BCCI estimates that the PBL, CWU

and the Ministry of Labour have sufficient means available to them to ensure amicable outcomes without further exacerbating the already depressed economic conditions brought about by the COVID 19 pandemic. Belize needs a fully functional PBL, and the PBL needs the right mix of labour to remain viable and functional. Companies around the world are adjusting their business models to survive this global pandemic, and it behooves leaders on both sides to appreciate these new realities, to be able to recalibrate expectations. There must be a way to restore the pendulum to its position of equilibrium

The BCCI therefore calls on the parties to recommit, in good faith, to employ the existing lawful procedures without further aggravating actions which impact due process, with the goal of settling this dispute for the benefit of all stakeholders, while keeping the economy moving to the best extent possible. The BCCI stands ready to assist in any way it can to make this happen.

**- End -**

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