



October 26th 2020.

PRESS RELEASE

Update from Leadership Debate Committee

The four political party leaders were invited to attend a virtual meeting today, October 26th 2020 at 2:00pm, with the Leadership Debate Committee (LDC) for clarification of rules, format, announcement of the moderator as well as a general question and answer opportunity. In sending the meeting details to the leaders, a Statement of Commitment for the signature of each leader was sent. That Statement of Commitment is to be considered as the ultimate indication of an intention to adhere by the rules and regulations set out by the LDC as well as the intention to participate in the Prime Ministerial Debate on October 28th 2020 at 8:00pm.

As a reminder to the public, the Belize People's Front (BPF) and the Belize Progressive Party (BPP) had accepted, with the BPF requesting an opportunity to query one of the debater guidelines. The People's United Party (PUP) had indicated by letter to the LDC that unless queries were answered by way of a meeting with the LDC, the Leader would not be in a position to indicate whether he will participate in the debate or not. The Leader of the United Democratic Party (UDP) had first publicly indicated a willingness to participate during a televised interview though he indicated that there were issues to be addressed. The UDP Leader later indicated in an email that he is willing to participate, only if all other leaders agreed to participate. In the interest of transparency, one of the rules of the LDC is that there will be no one-on-one communications with any individual party or leader. However, all concerns received by the LDC in writing were addressed either in letters to all leaders or by way of inviting the leaders to air those concerns in the meeting held today at 2:00pm, prior to submitting their signed Statement of Commitment.

At the time of writing this release, the LDC can report that the BPF and the BPP have provided a signed Statement of Commitment to participate in the Debate. Also, the BPF was the only political party which attended the meeting organized by the LDC and attended by ten (10) LDC members today, October 26th. The LDC proceeded with its agenda for that meeting and reviewed all rules and the running order of the debate, and fielded questions/concerns from the BPF Leader.

It is important to note that all deadlines were put in place specifically to allow questions and concerns to be answered, and for adequate production time to be allotted for the organizers. As the Debate nears, it becomes increasingly difficult for the LDC to accommodate further extensions and/or concessions for leaders as it relates to the guidelines and format provided by the Jamaica Debates Commission. The public, who has been extremely interested and excited for this Debate, and who is eager to hear what the aspiring leaders have planned for Belize and the issues it faces, is sure to be disappointed by the absence of any leader from this organized platform. Having an objective and well-structured debate is very important during the 2020 General Elections campaign. Candidates expose their political opinions, mental agility, critical thinking skills and readiness to potential voters.

Despite some public expressions of doubt of the occurrence of this Debate without full participation of all four political party leaders, from the onset the LDC has been of the view that **'the show must go on'** due to the desire to ensure that Belizeans benefit from a robust Debate of all leaders through a fair, impartial and sophisticated debate platform. Particularly considering the uncertainty and instability of the times Belize faces, the LDC saw this as an ideal opportunity for leaders to stand up, speak out and differentiate their ability to lead as well as to instil confidence in their vision for achieving sustainable development in Belize, within a controlled environment.

The absence of any leader from this debate is sure to damage the image of Belize's political system internationally, as the Jamaica Debates Committee plans to share the viewing link within their global networks. In a final effort to ensure that there is a robust Debate with full participation, the LDC has agreed to **extend the deadline for the signed Letter of Commitment from leaders to Tuesday October 27th 2020 at 3:00pm.**

The LDC commends the two parties who have committed to the Debate throughout this process by adhering to deadlines and complying with the parameters established by the LDC, particularly the rule of not engaging in one-on-one communications with the LDC outside of the planned group engagements. We continue to look forward to an exciting Debate on October 28th 2020.

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