



National Assembly of Belize

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PUBLIC NOTICE

Today, Monday, 28th October 2024, the Senate Special Select Committee (SSSC) held its eight Public Hearing tied to its impartial investigation into the “Definitive Agreement” signed by Mr. Erwin Contreras, former government Minister along with a representative from Portico Enterprises Ltd. (DBA), Port of Magical Belize.

That Agreement, signed by a single Minister in secrecy, committed the government and people of Belize to be deprived of millions of tax revenues for 30 years.

Today’s Public Hearing saw the Committee having to issue a warrant for the arrest of witness Mr. Erwin Contreras who over the last eleven months has frustrated every effort to have him appear. The warrant was executed and the witness was brought to the Public Hearing, and yet he was able to decline to answer any questions without fear of any penalty, and disrespectfully left the Chambers. The SSSC considers this a travesty.

The Senate is the only arm of government empowered by the Constitution to conduct such a high-level investigation. The Senate appointed this SSSC, comprised of seven Senators to investigate all documents, communications, and processes tied to the “Definitive Agreement” along with a Cabinet Paper and a Draft Law which were to be submitted to the National Assembly for approval. A Cabinet leak led to public outcry and allegations of corruption. The Senate subsequently unanimously approved the appointment of the Special Select Committee on 10th July 2023 to conduct a public investigation.

The SSSC, in carrying out its terms of reference, must comply with section 61A of the Constitution, the Standing Orders of the Senate, 1967, and the Legislative Assembly (Powers and Privileges) Ordinance, dated NO. 23 of 1962, of which the latter two have shown to be inadequate.

The attendance of witnesses who attended and left without answering questions or providing any information are examples of the inadequacies that have faced the Committee and related recommendations will be included in the Committee’s final report.

Since beginning its work on 15th August 2023, the SSSC has held twenty-five meetings and eight public hearings. The SSSC informs that they have obtained sufficient information to proceed to write a final report which will contain their findings and recommendations, and which will be made available to the full Senate, the government and the citizens of Belize.

National Assembly

Belmopan

October 28, 2024

DB/hdjb.

