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PRESS RELEASE

ONE DAY FORUM ON THE CONVENTION OF THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW)

-Thursday, 28th November 2024-Every day, at least three Belizean women report an incident of violence. This statistic confirms that pervasive discrimination and unrelenting violence against women remains a scourge in our Caribbean society. As long as the number of women in parliaments in the region remain low, the amplification of these critical issues, and the resulting lack of political will to make meaningful changes, will continue. On Wednesday, 27th November 2024, the Women's Parliamentary Caucus, a Joint Standing Committee of the National Assembly, facilitated a one-day forum on the Convention to End All Form of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). A dedicated understanding of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) can serve as a catalyst for positive change. The all too few voices in parliament can be enhanced by voices in both civil society and across the electorate.

Key objectives of the event were to discuss and understand the human rights standards for women and girls that are enshrined in CEDAW; to identify and highlight the achievements and challenges in implementing CEDAW in the Caribbean; to champion best practices in combatting discrimination and violence against women and to create awareness among all parliamentarians to advocate for a legislative agenda that meets the CEDAW obligations. The revealing statistical data, troubling analysis, meaningful actions taken and the widening gaps yet to addressed were presented by Belizean experts and their Caribbean peers. The forum's keynote address was delivered by Marley Ack-Goodin, who called on parliamentarians to renew focus and commitment on much needed policy and legislative recommendations.

"Eliminating all forms of discrimination against women must become a national priority. The disturbing psychosocial costs to Belize are only exacerbated by the dramatic economic losses to our Gross Domestic Product because we are failing to leverage the potential of all our women," commented the Chair of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus, the Hon. Senator Janelle Chanona.

The Women's Parliamentary Caucus is committed to building on the exchange of ideas on best practices in implementing strategies towards the elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and girls to increase public awareness and practical understanding of the

implementation of CEDAW; ensuring parliamentarians understand the role of parliamentarians in meeting the obligations of the state in the implementation of CEDAW; and to actively promote of women's rights as human rights.

Minister of Home Affairs, the Hon. Kareem Musa, moderator of one of the forum's panel discussions maintains, "***To achieve genuine substantive equality, parliamentary action must go beyond legislation, employing greater advocacy and utilizing the level of influence to affect real change in traditional mindsets and entrenched cultural practices.***"

The one-day forum on the Convention to End All Form of Discrimination Against Women was made possible through grant funding and technical support from the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Regional Strengthening Funds 2024, the United Nations agencies in Belize and the National Assembly of Belize and in collaboration with Caribbean Women in Leadership (CIWIL). The Women's Parliamentary Caucus takes this opportunity to acknowledge the invaluable support of the staff of the National Assembly in organizing this event and to thank fellow parliamentarians, panelists, moderators and attendees for their active participation in the one-day forum.

A full report of the interventions shared, and recommendations generated by the one-day forum will be published in December 2024.

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Note to Editors:

In May 2023, the Women's Parliamentary Caucus was established by the National Assembly as a Joint Standing Committee [comprised by members from both chambers] to create a formal space to address issues of gender equality, promote greater participation in legislative processes and encourage the inclusion of gender perspectives and sensitization in the work of the National Assembly. There are currently three women in the Senate, four in the House of Representatives and two women presiding officers. Women therefore account for just under 20% of the members in the National Assembly. Belize is well off the mark from achieving the critical mass of 30% outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action. That such is the case for most of the Caribbean region underscores the collective action urgently required.

