



BELIZE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

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BCCI Proposes Confidence Building Measures for Business Continuity

- For Immediate Release -

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID 19) has undoubtedly forced the global economy into an unprecedented balancing act of balancing “lives” and “livelihoods”. This requires due consideration of economic health and public health in each action taken, and the Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry (BCCI) fully acknowledges that this is no simple task, as either decision carries its own set of ramifications.

Considering the current wave of COVID-19 cases, which at the moment has exceeded nine hundred active cases, representing roughly 12% of the total number of COVID tests carried out, the constant efforts at outlining statutory Instruments to control the spread of COVID-19 are prudent and should rightly continue as the “new normal” until the transmission rate returns comfortably below 5% of total tests performed.

The economic health of Belize, as contributed to by the business community, will rely on a collective public-private partnership approach to risk management, crisis management, and continued focus on the ease of doing business despite the instability of this situation. On the matter of preserving “livelihoods, the recent release from the Statistical Institute of Belize (SIB) has demonstrated, unsurprisingly the Belizean economy shrank by more than 23% for the Second Quarter. Therefore, as partners in development, the BCCI has developed a set of “Confidence Building Measures for Business Continuity” (attached), which highlights four pillars namely ‘Health’, ‘Business’, ‘Immigration’ and ‘National Security’ measures which, if implemented, can bring predictability to businesses working within the parameters of national response to the everchanging benchmarks. The Confidence Building Measures for Business Continuity document is intended to build on the present regulations and to provide guidance on any future escalation of public health restrictive measures, and treats a full lockdown as the ultimately last resort.

- End -

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Cross-Cutting Confidence Building Measures for Opening Up

The Confidence-Building Measures for Economic Continuity during COVID-19 are built upon the country-wide health regulations set by Statutory Instrument (S.I.) Number 121 and its amendment S.I. No. 122 of 2020. While these measures presented here are premised on the importance of maintaining business activity as much as possible, the government is encouraged to maintain the baseline outlined in the previously cited laws.



The Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry



HEALTH

- Estimate and publicize Belize's "surge capacity" under different case load scenarios and indicate country's outstanding need that can be filled via Public Private Partnership;
- Use "surge capacity" information to inform a publicized phased-lockdown strategy (See recommended approach to phased lockdown below);
- Estimate and publicize projections on peak periods;
- Invest in health system capacity nationwide for non-COVID and COVID related health sector demands;
- Review the testing protocols to allow private sector labs to conduct testing.
- Develop a Vaccination Plan, including a rapid-sourcing strategy, that will go immediately into action as soon as a vaccine is approved.

SUCCESS



BUSINESS MEASURES

- Establish an occupational risk profile index to be used to inject predictability into the treatment of various occupations within business sectors based on their disparate risk assessment;
- Based on Risk Profile, establish business health protocols that coincides with respective Phases of Public Health Restrictions (PHR). These protocols should identify clear triggers for when PHRs are increased and when they are decreased. This is to remove subjectivity and arbitrariness in decision making.
- Expedite comprehensive tax reform as a means to strengthen the local economy, including land-border exit tax to encourage consumers to buy locally produced goods.
- Urgently implement the Business Adaptation Fund to finance COVID 19 Bio Security Compliance by businesses similar to that proposed in the Economic Recovery Strategy.

Immigration

IMMIGRATION

- Re-open airport only when necessary precautions have been put in place including tracking band, tracking app and testing facilities;
- Based on "surge capacity" and other key indicators within health care system, closely monitor the maximum number of international travellers permitted entry. This should work in tandem with health sector capacity for critical care, based on the assumption (as seen in other jurisdictions) that a set proportion of international travelers are likely to be COVID Positive.
- Keep land borders closed until neighboring countries' transmission become controlled. (Aim for 2021 opening). This, of course, does not relate to the movement of cargo and emergencies as already permitted under the current regulations.

NATIONAL SECURITY

NATIONAL SECURITY

- Develop a quick response, 24/7 border monitoring regime, and patrol to counter contraband activity.
- Train and empower the police department to enforce occupation-sector-specific protocols for high-risk job categories.
- Invest in technology for effective border patrolling.