



## **TOLEDO ALCALDES ASSOCIATION**

Voice of America Road, Punta Gorda Town, Toledo, Belize, C.A.

Email: [taa1992@gmail.com](mailto:taa1992@gmail.com) Telephone: (501) 662-1663

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

#### **The Collective Arbiter of Customary Law Response to the Government of Belize's Discriminatory Acts Against the Maya People**

*Punta Gorda Town, Toledo District, July 29, 2017.* The Toledo Alcaldes Association at its Assembly meeting of July 29, 2017 resolved to make the following collective statement:

The Alcalde system is an established customary form of Maya leadership existing prior to European contact. Alcaldes are the traditional governing authorities who maintain village order, protect the land tenure system, and safeguard the cultural integrity of the community.

The Alcaldes are elected by the villages, and since the Alcalde Act of 1858, the government of Belize has appointed those elected, recognizing them as judicial officers under Belize law with immunity from prosecution for carrying out their official duties. The government legitimized the Alcalde system as it ensured law and order in the villages and enabled collection of taxes.

In 1953 the Inferior Courts Act provided for the appointment of Maya elected Alcaldes and designation of Alcalde jurisdiction districts by publication in the Gazette. The government has not always published the Alcaldes in accordance with the Act, but such technical omissions did not reach the attention of the Alcaldes, nor did it cause any problems, as their role is well maintained under Maya customary law.

In 2015, the Government of Belize committed to promote and protect the right of each Maya village to collectively manage the use and occupation of its lands and resources through Maya modes of governance. This commitment requires the government of Belize to promote and protect the Alcalde system, as it is the traditional Maya mode of governance. The Caribbean Court of Justice affirmed this Commitment in a Consent Order on April 22, 2015.

These actions create reliance and expectation that governmental recognition and appointment of each Maya village's elected Alcalde will continue to be honoured.

This longstanding practice of respecting the Maya people's traditional governance system accords with The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which affirms that "indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs" (Article 4). This includes the right to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making, representative, and political institutions (Articles 18-20).

The American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples also calls for State recognition of the juridical personality of indigenous peoples and respect for their forms of organization. It



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affirms that “indigenous law and legal systems shall be recognized and respected by the national legal systems” (Article XXII).

Despite historical practices and international norms, the government of Belize in February 2017 informed the Toledo Alcaldes Association that it has not published the appointment of Alcaldes since 2015 and that no Alcalde jurisdictions have been properly published since 1953. The government’s failure to carry out its own legal requirements threatens the protection of the Alcaldes who are committed to maintain governance within their communities.

The government of Belize made a commitment to the Toledo Alcaldes Association to regularize the Alcaldes jurisdictions and to publish the Alcaldes in the Gazette, but it has failed to honour this commitment. This amounts to discrimination under domestic and international law.

Despite the government’s discriminatory refusal to honor Maya customary governance, the Alcaldes continue to serve the Maya villages in accordance with customary law.

The government of Belize must recognize the Alcalde jurisdictions and appointments in the 39 Maya villages in a manner consistent with its obligation under Maya customary law, domestic law, and international law without further delay.

**ON BEHALF** of the collective 78 Alcaldes of the 39 Maya communities in Southern Belize,

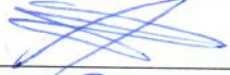










Mr. Santiago Quib – President

Mr. Adriano Mas – Vice President






### Statement from the Toledo Alcaldes Association

In affirmation and support of the "Response to the Government of Belize's Discriminatory Acts Against the Maya People", **WE collectively** place our signatures on behalf of the 39 Maya villages of the Toledo District in Southern Belize.

Name	Village	Signature
Andres Kus	San Miguel	
Andres Bo	Crique Sarco	
Eddison Choco	San Pedro Colombia	E. Choco
Narcissus Ash	San Pedro Colombia	N Ash
Alejandro Coy	Crique Sarco	
Julio Ba	Sunday wood	
Alejandro choc	Silver creek	
Juan Acal	San Miguel	Juan
Pedro Rash	San Marcos	
Emilio Pau	Sunday wood	
Antonio Shul	Golden Stream	A Shul
Pedro Canti	Santa Cruz	
Edgar Pinto	San Vicente	Edgar Pinto
Jose Pau	Midway	José Pau
Augustine Cucul	Midway	
Celestino Choc	Santa Elena	
Bonifacio Tut	Big Falls	B. Tut
Ismael Bol	Na Loom Ca	I. Bol
Emiliano Chiac	Crique Jute	

Name	Village	Signature
Santiago Salam	Mabil Ha	X
Antonio Mis	Mabil Ha	<del>Antonio</del>
Esteban Coc	Dolores	Coc
Celestino Choc	Santa Elena	X
Santiago Pec	Otocha	X
Martin Chen	Otocha	Martin
Maximo Pan	Dolores	MP
Abraham Kan	Aguacate	AK
Silvino Sho	San Antonio	S. Sho
Diego Ott	Na luum Caj	Diego Ott
John Rash	Indian Creek	J. Rash
Pedro Pop	Big falls	Pedro Pop
Pedro Ical	Jalacte	Pedro Ical
Mateo Pop	Jalacte	Mateo Pop
Alejandro Coy	Medina Bank	ACoy
Eusebio Pop	Blue creek	Eusebio Pop
Marcelino Chiac	Blue creek	Chiac
Constancio Teul	Maya mopan	Constancio Teul
Basilio Teul	Santa Cruz	Teul
Jose Shol	Laguna	Shol
Norberto Alkalha	Craque Duta	Norberto
Adriano Mas	Indian Creek	Adriano
Francisco Chub	Laguna	Chub
Joaquin makin	San Pablo	J. makin

Name	Village	Signature
Domingo Acal	Aguacate	
Gregorio Chiac	San Antonio	
Marcus Caal	Medina Bank	
<del>Celestino Choc</del>		
Eusebio Choc	maya mopon	