



National Assembly of Belize

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PRESS RELEASE

Women Parliamentarians Caucus Speaks Out

—Monday, 8th August 2022— The Belize Women Parliamentarians Caucus of the National Assembly was formed in February 2022. This past Friday the Caucus met for the third time to consider the administrative matters of the caucus and next steps in establishing a formal structure. In addition to these matters, there was a presentation and discussion on gender equality and its challenges. It is in this context that the most recent public incident involving PlusTV's morning talk show host was raised, whereby language was used that referenced the genitalia of women. It has been two (2) weeks since the remark was made with no retraction to date.

The Caucus takes this opportunity to remind all those in leadership roles that to use words associated with the genitalia of women to convey weakness, or a cowardly man or "being less than a giant" is offensive, disrespectful, discriminatory and continues the patriarchal narrative that women are weaker than men. It is also misogynistic because it figuratively connects the female sex organ with weakness. It is also unacceptable to use it towards members of the LGBT community. This should not be the language or message that is encouraged.

We demand better from all those who are leaders or who operate from a platform of influence. As disappointing and unfortunate as the incident was, we can use it as a teachable moment on gender equality. We call on PlusTV to issue a public apology for the use of the word on its media. The Constitution of Belize states in its preamble (e) "whereas the people of Belize require policies of state which ensures gender equality". Language and choice of words we use particularly from a leadership platform are critical if we are to honor this guiding principle.

The Women Parliamentarians Caucus is cognizant that much work also must be done in parliament to lead by that example. The Caucus pledges its commitment collectively and as individual parliamentarians to do more to raise the level of discourse in the National Assembly and to increase the awareness of the importance of gender equality. The Caucus calls on all those in leadership positions, both inside the parliament and in the wider society, to join in this effort to ensure more careful attention is given to the choice of words they use.

—The End—

The Women Parliamentarians Caucus is the space created by women parliamentarians from the government, the opposition, and social partners in the National Assembly to strengthen women's voices in parliament, to encourage gender perspectives in the day-to-day operations of the parliament, and to raise awareness of the importance of gender equality and inclusion in the parliament. For more information on the Caucus, contact the Interim Chair of the Women Parliamentarians Caucus, Speaker Valerie Woods of the House of Representatives.

