



From the President's Desk

Greetings Public Service Union of Belize (PSU) Members,

As we continue to traverse the rocky road that COVID-19 has brought upon our country, on behalf of the Council of Management (COM), I implore each of you to please continue practicing the safety protocols of proper mask wearing, social distancing and continuous washing and sanitizing of the hands. Proper coughing and sneezing hygiene coupled with the COVID-19 safety protocols, continue to be our best and safest way to fight against the coronavirus. Public Officers continue to be called upon to stand on the frontline against the deadly virus, and PSU remains grateful for all the sacrifices being made by our frontliners in ensuring continued Public Service while also doing their best in keeping citizens safe and alive where possible. A huge thank you to our Health Care Workers who despite less-than ideal working conditions, and next to no regards for their social, economic, physical, and mental welfare by those in authority, continue relentlessly to do their part in the fight against the virus. Condolences to the families of those fallen comrades as a result of the virus.

The recent pronouncement by the Minister of Health & Wellness (MoHW) of the Government's plan to make mandatory vaccination a requirement for any citizen to enter public buildings is not only misguided but is the worst possible way to grow confidence in the vaccine and should not be supported. The Minister's pronouncement is another classical example of an overzealous politician who continues to be ignorant of his role within the Executive arm of Government. As I was reminded most recently, "politicians are the worst messengers" especially in times of crisis. The Ministry of Health and Wellness has a PR Officer, a Communication Officer, several Advisors, an Acting Director of Health Services (DHS), a Deputy DHS, a muffled DHS, a Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and yet the communication strategy is the worst it has ever been since the start of the pandemic. It is my hope that the communication and health professionals will be called up and allowed to do their jobs. The PSU encourages all its Members to kindly participate in the Union's own consultation process surrounding mandatory vaccination, and also encourage all Public Officers to participate in all and any public consultation surrounding this matter to ensure their concerns and suggestions are heard.

Notes

1. The Union held follow-up discussions with the Ministry of Public Service, Constitutional, and Political Reform (MPSCPR) to ascertain the final decision of the country's dictatorial Cabinet on whether there was a reconsideration of the exemption of the 10% salary cut to Chief Executive Officers. The Minister of Public Service informed that Cabinet reaffirms its position that CEOs are not to receive any salary cuts and are exempted from the 10% salary adjustment levied on Public Officers making \$12,001 and above. This reinforced decision is a stark reminder to us of the hypocrisy of successive Governments that proclaim the absolute equality of their citizens but give power and privileges to a small elite. Two (2) letters to the Prime Minister on this matter remains unanswered whilst the alleged CEO caucus letter to the PM threatening mass resignation by CEO's, if their salaries were cut was responded to post haste even without the knowledge of Cabinet. A stark reminder that George Orwell's, *Animal Farm*, remains very much alive and this we must never forget.
2. Following consultation with the Ministry of Public Service, Constitutional, and Political Reform (MPSCPR) and the subsequent visit to Dangriga to meet with the Officers-in-Charge of the five (5) Departments that stood to be affected by the relocation of Government offices from the Castillo building and back into the Zabaneh building, there has been no update on the status of the repairs and rehabilitation of the Zabaneh building which is smaller, was prone to leaks, and comprised of sections that were mold infested. The Union was provided with correspondences sent to the former CEO in the (MPSCPR) which suggested that Castillo was prepared to continue renting his building which is larger, more spacious and equipped with proper parking and security at a cheaper price than the Zabaneh's building. However, these correspondences were never acknowledged or responded to by the MPSCPR. The Union is yet to receive a definitive and substantiated response on this matter, but all indications are the decision is final considering a contract was signed with Zabaneh long before rehabilitation works were completed. At our last visit rehabilitation work was ongoing.
3. Following meetings with the Chief Elections Officer and Staff Members of the Elections and Boundaries Department Headquarters in Belize City with reference to the relocation of the Elections and Boundaries Headquarters from Belize City to the City of Belmopan, the Union wrote and sent several reminders to the CEO in the Ministry of Public Service on staff fears and concerns whilst providing various suggestions and solutions to mitigate the areas of concern. At last month's meeting with the (MPSCPR), the Minister informed the Union that contrary to the Union's report from staff, during his own visit to the Department. The staff of the Department were welcoming of the move and were excited about the relocation of the E&B Headquarters from Belize City to the City of Belmopan. The Union has not received a formal response from the (MPSCPR) and continues to follow up for a formal response to report back to the staff of the E&B on the matter. The (MPSCPR) now informs us that a response is being sought from the Chief Elections Officer.
4. The Union's representative on the Commission of Inquiry to investigate the sale of Government assets, has informed the PSU that it is very likely that the Commission has held its final meeting. The Commissioners are now in the process of putting their reports together. The PSU also awaits a summary submission and recommendations from the Union's representative. A team led by the National Treasurer was tasked to offer support to the Union's representative on the Commission.
5. There continues to be a delay by the Ministry of Public Service, Constitutional, and Political Reform (MPSCPR) with the appointment of the Joint Staff Relations Council (JSRC). Realizing the importance of the (JSRC) and the constitutional role it plays, the PSU continues to aggressively push for the appointments of the (JSRC) Members and for the convening of meetings thereafter.



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6. Public Service International (PSI) communicated with its affiliates that the International Labour Organization Governing Body adopted early this year a decision to hold a "Technical meeting on the protection of whistle-blowers in the Public Sector" in 2022. The technical meeting will discuss compelling issues concerning whistle-blowers in the Public Sector and their protection. It will further discuss how the independence of Public Sector is relevant in the fight against corruption; identify gaps and difficulties in the application of the current whistle-blowers protection frameworks; identify the extent to which ILO instruments are relevant to the protection of whistle-blowers; and make recommendations on a way forward. In preparation for the meeting, the ILO carried out a survey that sought to complement the information on the background document that will be discussed during the meeting. In accordance with the survey, the PSU shared the survey and sought input from the Ministry of Finance, Auditor General, Accountant General and Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU). Only FIU and Auditor General submitted their data and information that was requested. Despite repeated request no response was forthcoming from the Ministry of Finance (Financial Secretary) or the Accountant General. The PSU was therefore unable to fulfill its submission to PSI.
7. The PSU is monitoring developments of a couple of resignations within the Ministry of Health and Wellness by nurses and doctors due to lack of proper consultation and communication by the authorities with Health Care Workers and also due the severe negative impact the transfers are having on the families of Health Workers and the undue mental, physical and economic stress these transfers, some punitive in nature, are having on Public Officers especially during the pandemic. The PSU is in receipt of several more threats of resignation from the Public Sector by Health Care Professionals and will be addressing this issue with the (MPSCPR) as it is putting further negative impact on the Health Sector. Coupled with the demand to work additional hours, untimely payment of overtime hours, and postponement of vacation leaves, I encourage all Members to take a minute to lift our brothers and sisters in the MOHW up in prayers.
8. The PSU is also wrapping up its investigation surrounding the recent questionable promotions of several Custom and Excise Officers to the post of Assistance Comptroller of Custom and Deputy Comptroller of Custom, whilst other higher ranked and qualified Officers were sidestepped without good and sufficient reason. The investigation thus far has revealed that the Department now has nine (9) appointed Assistant Comptroller of Customs and three (3) Deputy Comptroller of Customs.

**PSU National
General Membership Meeting
Wednesday
September 15, 2021
@ 7PM**

On the agenda:

**Government's Vaccine
Mandate**

September 15, 2021
7PM

via Zoom

Upcoming

- ⇒ National Membership Meeting—September 15
- ⇒ 2nd Biennial Caribbean Workers Forum—September 15-18
- ⇒ SUBWOC Meeting/Young Workers Caucus—September 21
- ⇒ Membership Induction Training—September 25
- ⇒ SUBRAC Meeting—September 28
- ⇒ Council of Management Meeting—October 2
- ⇒ Monthly PSU/MPSCPR Meeting—October 4
- ⇒ SUBRAC Meeting—October 15
- ⇒ National Ecumenical Service—TBD

Mentions

- Five (5) Council of Management (CoM) members will attend the virtual 2nd Biennial Caribbean Workers Forum (CWF II) to be held September 15th to 18th 2021.
- The 2021 PSI Caribbean Sub-regional Meetings will be held virtually on September 21, September 28 and October 15. These include the Young Workers Caucus, the Sub-Regional Women's Advisory Committee (SUBWOC) meeting, and the Sub-Regional Advisory Committee (SUBRAC). A delegate of six (6) will be participating.
- The PSU has monthly meetings with the Minister and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Ministry of Public Service, Constitutional and Political Reform (MPSCPR). Members are encouraged to lodge their concerns with their Chairs or to send in via email to info@psubelize.org so that these may be addressed.