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Belize

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BELIZE

The following is a brief summary of recent legal developments in Belize.

Immediately preceding and during 1986, several legal developments occurred in Belize that are significant to foreign investors and persons interested in international and comparative law developments. Some of these developments result from the enactment of laws, while others result directly from the investment climate. Other developments, have occurred in the infrastructure and legal culture of Belize.

Belize's current administration under Manuel Esquivel came into power peacefully after the 1984 election. The Esquivel administration has welcomed international investment and commerce.¹ Another important development is the resumption of diplomatic relations between Guatemala and Belize, and discussions concerning the settlement of the longstanding boundary dispute.²

I. IMMIGRATION BY SUBSTANTIAL INVESTORS

Two laws passed by the Belize Government will facilitate immigration for investors.³ Law No. 14 of 1985 (November 1, 1985) amends Section 26 of the Constitution of Belize to make persons who have made a substantial contribution to the economy or well-being of Belize, or persons who have rendered distinguished service to Belize, eligible for Belizean nationality. In addition, Law No. 15 of 1985 (November 1, 1985) Belize Nationality Act 1985, amends the Nationality Act, by providing that a person who has made a substantial contribution to the economy or well-being of Belize, or who has rendered distinguished service to Belize, may be granted citizenship along with his or her spouse and resident children, provided that he or she is not entitled to registration under any other

1. See generally Zagaris & Kochinke, *Belize: A Base for International Investment*, in U.S. Taxation of International Operations: Tax Ideas ¶ 8521 (P-H) (1986) (comprehensive discussion of international investment opportunities).

2. See generally Menon, *The Anglo-Guatemalan Territorial Dispute over the Colony of Belize*, II J. LAT. AM. STUD. 343 (1979) (discussion of the international law and historical aspects of the dispute).

3. See Zagaris, *Belize offers Passports to Foreign Investors*, 78 TAXES INT'L 80 (1986).

provisions of the Act. The bill is related to the sale of Belize interest-free government bonds, which mature in 1997. Substantial contribution to the economy is set at a U.S. \$25,000 investment.

II. RELEASE OF FIVE YEAR MACRO-ECONOMIC PLAN (1985-89)

In 1986, the Government released its five year macro-economic plan for 1985-89. The document provides an economic road map to gauge future official development strategy. The strategy is to promote export products to stimulate economic growth, with emphasis upon the diversification of exports. The plan allocated the responsibility for organizing national resources into productive activities to the private sector. The government's role is to provide the infrastructure and the policy framework to facilitate the profitability of private investment. According to this plan, the priority industries are agro-industry, tourism, fisheries and marine culture, forest based industries and manufacturing. The development of indigenous sources of energy is also emphasized in order to relieve the energy costs on the import bill. The following priority areas are identified for economic growth:

(a) Agro-industry—particularly the processing of agricultural output. A major goal of the plan is to improve food security and to move towards national self-sufficiency.

(b) Tourism—the government will pursue policies to encourage the modernization and expansion of the industry, to increase the use of local resources and to increase the net returns from the industry.

(c) Fisheries—including marine culture. The government will explore the possibility of developing deep-sea fishing as a way of modernizing and expanding the fishing industry. Special attention will be paid to encourage Belizeans to participate in shrimp farming.

(d) Forest-based Industries—Incentives will be provided to private investors who are prepared to revitalize and develop timber production and processing.

(e) Manufacturing—Priority will be given to the manufacture of garments and electronics for export and wood products both for the domestic market and for export.

Diversification of exports will involve the following:

(a) expansion of existing secondary exports, such as citrus, ba-

nanas, fish, timber, livestock and meat products, and tourism,

(b) development of new exports such as cocoa, winter vegetables and orchard crops,

(c) penetration of new markets within the economies of traditional trading partners,

(d) opening of new markets, particularly within the region, and

(e) development of non-sugar by-products from sugar cane.

III. INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND COOPERATION

Belize has been very active in international organizations during the Esquivel administration. In October 1986, Belize was elected to membership in the Economic and Social Council, an organ of the United Nations. In March 1987, Belize hosted a regional conference on drug abuse and drug trafficking. Representatives from over twenty governments in the region as well as numerous international and national agencies concerned with drugs and related matters attended. Various national programs and a regional approach or common plan against drug-related problems were discussed.

In October 1986, Belize's Ambassador to the United States, Edward A. Laing, represented Belize as an observer at the Annual General Assembly of the Organization of American States. Held in Guatemala, this event marked the first time that Belize was represented at any meeting of the OAS. Belize now hopes to become a member of the OAS by 1990.

Attorney General Dean Barrow has appointed a National Advisory Committee comprised of the judiciary, the government legal service and the private bar to implement the AID-UWI Caribbean Justice Improvement Project in Belize. The Committee's members are Acting Chief Justice, Mr. George Brown; Solicitor General, Mr. Gian Gandhi; Attorneys-at-Law Mr. Derek Courtenay, Mr. Denys Barrow, and Mr. Manuel Sosa. UWI Resident Tutor, Dr. Joseph Palacio, will serve in a liaison capacity. This five year project, sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) provides approximately \$10,000,000 to the University of the West Indies (UWI), which will in turn lend funds to Belize and the members of the Organization of East Caribbean States (OECS) to improve their legal systems. Major project activities include im-

provement in the physical environment of the courts, law revision and reform, law library enhancement, introduction of a case reporter system and technical assistance and training.⁴

IV. MISCELLANEOUS

In September 1986, acting Chief Justice George Brown promoted four lawyers to the status of Senior Consuls. These four are Dean Barrow, Attorney General and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bernard Pitts, Manuel Sosa, and Edwin Flowers.

BRUCE ZAGARIS
BERLINER & MALONEY
Washington D.C.

4. See generally Zagaris, *University of West Indies & AID Administration of Justice Project Underway*, 2 INT'L ENFORCEMENT L. REP. 318 (1986)(background); U.S. AID, Project Paper, *Caribbean Justice Improvement* (AID/LAC/P-318) Project: 598-0645 (details of the project).