



National Association of Village Councils  
National Agriculture and Trade Show Grounds  
Belmopan, Cayo District  
Tel: 822-0253  
[NAVCOBelize@gmail.com](mailto:NAVCOBelize@gmail.com)

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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For more information contact:

Mr. Justo Augustine  
Phone: 822-0254  
[NAVCOBelize@gmail.com](mailto:NAVCOBelize@gmail.com)

### **National Association of Village Councils Statement on the ICJ Referendum**

The National Association of Village Councils (NAVCO) represents over 200 villages countrywide, which make up more than 55 percent of Belize's population. It has as its mission to spearhead development of rural communities to improve quality of life for all residents, through the spectrum of public participation, representation and dialogue at all levels. NAVCO's authority, responsibility and legitimacy is derived directly from the people through the most democratic process, starting with the election of village councils and district associations.

We are cognizant of the fact that the unresolved territorial claim by Guatemala has direct impact and implications on the security and development of our Belizean communities. By virtue of the democratically derived authority we hold, our national, district and village council leaders have had an integral and active role in helping to organize the national education process for more than two solid years since 2017 in conjunction and coordination with the ICJ Referendum Unit. We can therefore attest to the fact that this education process has been as thorough and objective as is humanly possible, and we are satisfied that our people are empowered and armed with the necessary information and facts to make an educated decision on the matter.

Having seriously and objectively considered all the information and facts surrounding the question of taking the Guatemalan claim to the ICJ for final settlement, NAVCO is convinced we have an unassailable legal case for the validation and confirmation by the world's highest court. We believe it is in the nation's best interest to seize this opportunity now to bring finality to the long-standing unfounded Guatemalan claim by voting yes to the ICJ. We believe we have a responsibility to not pass on to future generations what is in our power to resolve today. This is all in the spirit of securing Belize's full territorial integrity while pursuing development through peace, respect and good relations with our neighbors.

We nevertheless encourage everyone to continue seeking and searching for whatever additional and relevant information they can find between now and the scheduled date of the referendum, while at the same time guarding against misinformation and scaremongering. We also encourage and urge residents throughout our villages and communities who are registered electors, and all voters throughout the country of Belize, to exercise their democratic right and civic duty to cast their ballot on referendum day, whatever their conviction or decision on the matter.

Finally, we exhort all citizens, as they participate in this democratic process, to do so in a spirit of mutual respect and national unity, regardless of our differences. We call on all Belizeans to accept whatever is the outcome of the referendum, in the understanding that we will all have to live with that democratic collective decision as we continue to pursue our national goals and aspirations as one people united in one indivisible Belize under one flag. May God continue to guide us all in our decision making process on such an important and historic national issue.

***“Strengthening Local Level Governance to Enhance National Development”***

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