

Embattled ex-ambassador remains Co-agent at ICJ

With just one month remaining before the deadline for Belize's submission of its counter-memorial to the ICJ in response to Guatemala's 500-page memorial in which it outlines its claim to Belizean territory, embattled Co-agent at the ICJ, Alexis Rosado, who has been charged with rape, remains an active member of Belize's ICJ team. PM Briceño told reporters, "I support his [the Minister of Foreign Affairs'] recommendation that we need to use him at this time because we are right there going to court."

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Belize-Guatemala relations, his years of experience as a diplomat, and his key role in drafting, and directing research for, Belize's counter-memorial in response to Guatemala's submitted document. On June 8, less than a month from now, the team from Belize is expected to submit the final draft of the document to the international court, and recently, it was reported that Rosado has been actively involved in strategy sessions of the country's ICJ team and the final scrutiny of the counter-memorial, despite his legal troubles.

Following Rosado's arraignment on Wednesday, April 20, in the Belmopan Magistrate's Court, where sexual assault and rape charges were brought against him in connection with the allegations of a woman in her twenties that he had engaged in illicit sexual relations with her since she was 13, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Immigration had issued a press release which stated,

"At the direction of the Ministry, Ambassador Rosado has relinquished his diplomatic postings overseas." At that point, almost all Belizeans had concluded that he would no longer be a part of the ICJ team at The Hague. The Sunday, April 24 edition of the AMANDALA had in fact stated, after noting the adjournment of Rosado's case until July 6, 2022, that Rosado would "likely be obliged to stay in the country until the case concludes".

It had even appeared that Prime Minister Briceño had confirmed the removal of Rosado from his post as Co-agent when he had told local reporters that the removal of Rosado would have "absolutely no" effect on the drafting of our counter-memorial.

He had stated, "Alexis Rosado played a very, very important role—a senior role—in the work we've been doing in preparing our case to the ICJ, but as Co-agents, what they do is they collate, they put all of the papers together. We have different attorneys dealing with the different issues and then they put it

together and present it to the ICJ."

The Prime Minister had further noted, "Fortunately, we don't have one, we have two Co-agents, meaning that there is more than one. The other Co-agent is Ambassador Assad Shoman, a senior ambassador when it comes to—and probably the most knowledgeable person when it comes to—the issue of the Belize-Guatemala dispute. So no, it will not in any way affect us."

However, when reports surfaced this week that Ambassador Rosado had this week been acting as Co-agent at a strategy session in the United Kingdom, during which efforts were made to finalize Belize's counter-memorial, and after Foreign Affairs Minister Hon. Eamon Courtenay indicated via text to a local media house that "Ambassador Rosado remains a Co-agent for Belize for the ICJ case and is in London working on finalizing Belize's counter-memorial," the Prime Minister made comments to reporters that marked a huge shift from the views he had expressed at the end of April regarding Rosado's role.

The PM suggested this week that removing Rosado at this 11th hour in the proceeding could be detrimental for Belize.

"Right now we have something that is an existential threat to our country, which is the case between Belize and Guatemala. He has been working as one of our co-agents. Along with Assad Shoman, I would say he is one of the most knowledgeable persons when it comes to the Belize-Guatemala [dispute]. I am certain the Foreign Minister has a reason he kept him there and simply is we are right at the point where we are preparing our counter-memorial to present to the ICJ. Now, God forbid, we did not use his expertise and because we did not use his expertise and we go to court and there is some mix up and we pay the consequences by losing a portion of Belize." Prime Minister Briceño said.

He went on to say, "Every family in this country, I believe ninety-nine percent of the families in this country have had some case of abuse within the family. In most instances it is a family friend or family member. So, that kind of abuse is heinous and we need to do everything possible to go after the perpetrator, and Alexis Rosado is no exception. But, before we get to that point that has to be determined whether he is innocent or guilty. Our system says you are innocent until you are determined you are guilty. So, what did we do? We immediately removed him from Brussels, where he was representing us as our ambassador."

Objections to Rosado's continued role as Co-agent have come from many quarters and have been made by persons who argue that any other public officer facing such charges would have been placed on interdiction. And while the PM agrees that no exceptions should be made for Rosado in the prosecution of this case against him, he holds a differing view when considering Rosado's expertise and his contribution to Belize's case at the ICJ.

"We want to make sure we have the

best possible case at this time. And Alexis has dedicated his life to public service and to this issue of Belize-Guatemala, and the Foreign Minister believes at this time, and I support him with that, his recommendation that we need to use him at this time because we are right there going to court. It is not like it happened a year ago when we have time to be able to regroup and try to see what we can do. This is going to court in June. And right now, our Foreign Minister should have been in London, where we're finalizing the document, the comb-through before it goes to court," he said.

It is worth noting that Rosado was Ambassador of Belize to the Republic of Guatemala during the previous UDP administration and was also non-resident Ambassador to Costa Rica, Honduras and Panama. When he was reassigned by the Briceño administration, following the November 2020 elections, to serve in Belgium, as the Ambassador-designate to the European Union, and the Organization of African, Caribbean, and Pacific States, the United Democratic Party had publicly objected to the move, stating that the transfer would "substantially compromise his ability to focus on his duties as a Co-Agent" of Belize in the preparation of a legal defense of the country at the ICJ.

As Co-agent alongside chief agent Assad Shoman and a team consisting of Senior Counsel Sam Wordsworth QC, Dr. Ben Juratowith QC and Mathias Forteau; Junior Counsel Amy Sander, Philippa Webb and Kate Parlett; Support Counsel Catherine Drummond and Jamie Trinidad; and Hydrographer/Geographer Robin Cleverly, Ambassador Rosado has played a critical role in directing the research that provided the framework for Belize's counter-memorial, which is a response to the memorial submitted by Guatemala last year.

After Guatemala had submitted its memorial to the ICJ, the government of Belize had stated on a GoB website, "Today, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs received Guatemala's Memorial in relation to Guatemala's Territorial, Insular and Maritime Claim to Belizean territory which it filed at the International Court of Justice, in accordance with the Court's order of 22 April 2020 extending the date for such submission following Guatemala's request for extension, citing delays resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Guatemalan Memorial states what Guatemala is claiming in terms of continental land, islands and seas, and the legal grounds for such claims. It consists of one volume of 500 pages, 462 Annexes, 8 Maps and 24 Figures. The Court's order of 22 April 2020 also extended until 8 June 2022 the time for the filing of Belize's Counter-Memorial. The Belize Office of the Agent to the ICJ, in collaboration with the international team of experts, is already at work in preparing Belize's Counter Memorial which will resolutely reject Guatemala's Claim and strongly assert Belize's claim to all its territory, islands and seas in accordance with international law."

IMF: Fuel price stabilization ..

While the IMF has commended Belize for its economic growth, it also advised that the Government's measures for fuel price stabilization should only be temporary. Prime Minister Hon. John Briceño, however, says his focus is on the people, not the numbers.

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balance (the difference between its revenue and its expenditure) is expected to decline to 0.1 percent of GDP this fiscal year, as a result of the Government's recently implemented measures for mitigating fuel price increases.

For the country's primary balance to stabilize at near 0.6 percent of GDP for fiscal years 2023 to 2032, the IMF stated that Belize would need "a passive scenario with no additional measures."

It also noted that for Belize to restore its debt sustainability and increase its primary balance, the fuel subsidies and other measures such as the fuel stabilization fund, all of which were implemented to mitigate the rise in fuel prices, should be temporary.

In response to the report, however, Prime Minister Hon. John Briceño told local media that while the IMF is focused on the numbers, the Government's aim is reducing poverty through economic growth—something which would have been stifled by the skyrocketing fuel prices.

"The IMF looks at numbers. We look at people. We're here to try our very best to make the lives of our citizens better. And if that means that we have to get the IMF upset, well, so be it. We need to be able to see what we can do. We have every confidence that with what we're doing and continuing to push the growth of the economy, that the primary balance, we hope that it can be able to improve by the end of the year," he stated.

The Prime Minister also highlighted the fact that while the IMF's report early last year was largely negative, it eventually ended up praising the country for its

economic rebound.

In addition to emphasizing Belize's economic recovery over the past year, the IMF report also commended the country for its novel Blue Bond initiative, which it referred to as a "debt for marine protection swap" deal with The Nature Conservancy.

"Jaime Guajardo, the IMF's mission chief for Belize, said the deal is of tremendous benefit to the country and contributes to the authorities' objectives of restoring debt sustainability, promoting sustainable development, and enhancing resilience to natural disasters and climate change," wrote the IMF's Nicholas Owen.

Through the Blue Bond arrangement, Belize has been lent funds by a subsidiary of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in order to buy back its previous Superbond—a debt of US \$553 million—at a discounted price of 55 cents per dollar. In exchange, Belize has committed to spending US \$4.2 million annually on marine conservation until the year 2041. It has also committed to expanding its Biodiversity Protection Zones, which include coral reefs, mangroves, and fish spawning sites, from 16 percent of its ocean area to 20 percent by the year 2026. Additionally, the country established an endowment fund of US \$23.5 million to fund marine conservation after 2041.

"These initiatives will also support the authorities' efforts to strengthen resilience to natural disasters and climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions," said the IMF.

According to the report, the Blue Bond reduced public debt by 12 percent of GDP in 2021 and will also enhance the protection of the marine environment going forward.