Draft Concept Note - NHRI Project Launch and Sensitization Sessions, Belize

Subject to Partner Confirmation

Event: Official launch of the EU-funded project "Advancing Human Rights in Belize: Establishing a National Human Rights Institution" (NHRI Project) and national sensitization sessions on the establishment of a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) in Belize aligned with the Paris Principles

Dates and venue: 24-26 November 2026, Belmopan, Belize (venue to be confirmed)

Convened by: Government of Belize, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade (MFA) and the Office of the Ombudsman, with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Belize Country Office as lead implementing agency.

Technical partners: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Network of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights of the Americas (RINDHCA), Governance, Rule of law and Peacebuilding (UNDP).

Purpose: To formally launch the NHRI Project and to build understanding of and national ownership over, the transition from the current Office of the Ombudsman to a NHRI established in accordance with the Paris Principles, among the National Assembly, Government, civil society, academia, the private sector and the media, before drafting of the NHRI legislation begins.

Background

Belize accepted recommendations to establish an NHRI in line with the Paris Principles in its 2018 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and again in 2024, when 14 of the 127 recommendations it accepted concerned the NHRI. The Office of the Ombudsman, established under the Ombudsman Act (Cap. 5) in 1999, investigates complaints of maladministration and abuse of power by public authorities, but its mandate, guarantees of independence and resources fall short of what the Paris Principles require. Cabinet has approved transforming the Office of the Ombudsman into a Paris Principles-compliant NHRI by amending the Ombudsman Act.

The EU-funded project "Advancing Human Rights in Belize: Establishing a National Human Rights Institution", led by UNDP with OHCHR and RINDHCA as technical partners, supports this transformation over three years. Under Activity 1.1.1, it provides for induction and advocacy sessions with the National Assembly, Government, civil society, academia and the media to build understanding and national ownership before the Cabinet Paper, legislative drafting and the national consultations planned for December 2026 - February 2027. These sessions are the first of the two planned under the project and will open with its official launch.

Objectives

The sessions aim to officially launch the NHRI Project and build the understanding and ownership needed to support legislation establishing a Paris Principles-compliant NHRI. Specifically, they will:

1. Secure and publicly demonstrate high-level Government commitment to the NHRI.

2. Build a shared understanding among parliamentarians, Government officials and other stakeholders of what an NHRI is, how it differs from the Office of the Ombudsman, the Paris Principles and GANHRI accreditation.
3. Gather early views from each stakeholder group on key design questions for the amendment of the Ombudsman Act.
4. Identify national champions, including a Parliamentary champion, to support the legislative process and the national consultations.

Expected Results

1. The NHRI Project is officially launched with public commitment from the Government, the EU and the UN.
2. Members of both Houses of the National Assembly, senior Government officials, civil society, academia, the private sector and the media are sensitized on the NHRI and the Paris Principles, contributing to the Year 1 target of 50 stakeholders sensitized (indicator 1.1.1).
3. Stakeholder views on key design questions are compiled to inform the Cabinet Paper, the drafting instructions and the national consultations.
4. National champions identified and next steps agreed with the NHRI Establishment Committee.

Methodology and Format

The mission opens with a high-level launch, followed by separate sessions for each stakeholder group so that content and discussion can be tailored to their role in the process. Each session follows the structure of the RINDHCA sensitization materials, adapted to the audience:

1. Where Belize stands: the Office of the Ombudsman, the UPR recommendations, the Cabinet decision and the project.
2. What an NHRI is and how it differs from an Ombudsman.
3. The Paris Principles minimum standards and GANHRI accreditation.
4. The role of the audience in the legislative process and the future work of the NHRI.
5. Discussion of key design questions.

The sensitization sessions will draw upon the complementary expertise of UNDP, OHCHR and RINDHCA, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office of the Ombudsman and the Attorney General's Ministry. Technical contributions will be coordinated among partners, building upon the sensitization materials developed by RINDHCA and the specialized expertise of OHCHR on international human rights standards, the Paris Principles and accreditation. UNDP, as the lead implementing agency, will facilitate overall coordination, logistics, stakeholder engagement and documentation of the sessions. The specific presentation roles and participation modalities will be jointly agreed upon during the preparatory phase. National speakers would represent MFA, the Attorney General's Ministry, and the Office of the Ombudsman. At least half of each session will be kept for discussion, and a UNDP rapporteur will record the main views raised and attendance by sex, type of stakeholder and district.

Agenda

The timing of the Senate and House sessions will be adjusted to the National Assembly's sitting calendar, and speakers remain to be confirmed.

Day 1 – Tuesday, 24 November 2026: Government session. Location: Belmopan

Time	Session	Content	Speakers
08:30-09:00	Registration		
09:00-9:30	Welcome and opening	Welcome by the UNDP Deputy Resident Representative Remarks by the EU and OHCHR Keynote by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade	
9:30-10:00	Introduction	Overview of the project	*UNDP Belize CO*
10:00-10:20	Coffee Break	Group photo	
10:20-10:50	Government session: the NHRI and the Paris Principles	What is an NHRI? (Mandate, benefits, how NHRIs work with Government.)	*Habiba Osman, Malawi Human Rights Commission*
		Paris Principles and accreditation	*OHCHR – Cynthia Radert/Jay Coombs* *GANHRI/RINDCHA*
10:50-11:20	Government session: from decision to legislation	Belize's commitments to establish an NHRI What will the new NHRI look like (what is the difference between an Ombuds Office and a	*Attorney General*

Time	Session	Content	Speakers
		full-fledged, Paris Principles-compliant NHRI?) The legislative pathway and amendment of the Ombudsman Act	
11:20-11:50	Stakeholder Dialogue	Open Q & A Sample prompting question: - What are the entry points for collaboration between your institution and an NHRI?	
11:50-12:00	Closing Remarks		
12:00	Lunch (to-go)		

Day 2 – Wednesday, 25 November 2026:

Venue: National Assembly of Belize, Belmopan

Venue: Office of the Ombudsman, Belmopan

Time	Session	Content and speakers	Speakers
09:00-11:30	Senate	Welcome	President of the Senate EU
		Overview of the project	UNDP Belize
		What is an NHRI	RINDHCA UNDP
		Break	

Time	Session	Content and speakers	Speakers
		Belize's commitment to establish an NHRI	MoFA
		The role of the legislature	Attorney General
		Dialogue with Senators	AGM and MoFA Senate champion: Janelle Chanona
11:30-13:00	Lunch		
13:00-15:00	House of Representatives	Welcome	Speaker of the House EU
		Overview of the project	UNDP Belize
		What is an NHRI	RINDHCA UNDP
		Break	
		Belize's commitment to establish an NHRI	MoFA
		The role of the legislature	Attorney General
		Dialogue with MPs and call to action – how will your constituents benefit from an NHRI?	Attorney General Hon. Anthony Anthony Sylvester Parliamentary champion

Day 3 – Thursday, 26 November 2026: Civil society, academia, private sector and media

Location: Belize City

09:00-10:30 (TBC)	**Civil society**	**Welcome**	**EU**
		NHRI as an ally for civil society, the Paris Principles and accreditation	OHCHR UNDP
		Discussion: • Identification of priority rights issues • How constituencies should be consulted on the draft bill	

13:30-14:30	Academia and private sector	Welcome	University of Belize
		Overview of the project	
		What is an NHRI?	
		roles for academia and the private sector	
15:00-16:00	Debrief with the NHRI Establishment Committee	Main findings and next steps	MFA, UNDP, OHCHR, EU as observer

Confirmed: **National Assembly staff**

Morning Show Appearances

Date & Time	**Media House**	**Participants**
Monday, November 23rd 2026	Open Your Eyes	Youth representatives, Jay Cooms, Michael Lund
Thursday, November 26th 2026	Love Fm	EU Representative, AGM representative, AGM, Youth representative

Annex: Partners and Participants

Partners and roles

Partner	Role
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade (MFA)	Host on behalf of the Government; keynote at the launch; invitations to Government institutions
Office of the Ombudsman	Key national implementing partner and future NHRI; co-hosts the launch and takes part in a dedicated technical session
Attorney General's Ministry	Presents the legislative pathway and the amendment of the Ombudsman Act
National Assembly	Facilitates the Senate and House sessions through the Offices of the President of the Senate and the Speaker
NHRI Establishment Committee	Members take part in the Government session and the closing debrief
UNDP	Lead implementing agency and main presenter; coordination, logistics and reporting to the EU
OHCHR	Present in country; co-presents on the Paris Principles, accreditation and the legislative process
RINDHCA	Prepared the draft sensitization materials; contributes to the preparation of the sessions remotely
European Union	Funding partner; remarks at the launch and observer in the sessions
University of Belize	Co-hosts the academia, private sector and media session
Belize Network of NGOs (BNN)	Co-convenes the civil society session and mobilizes its members

Participants

Session	Target participants	Estimated number
Official launch	Ministers, the Speaker, the President of the Senate and members of the National Assembly, the Ombudsman, NHRI Committee members, heads of public institutions, diplomatic corps, UN agencies, civil society, Indigenous and academic leaders, media	80-100

Session	Target participants	Estimated number
Government ministries and public institutions	NHRI Committee members (AGM, MFA, Ministry of Human Development, Family Support and Gender Affairs, Office of the Ombudsman, National AIDS Commission, Integrity Commission); Ministry of Public Service, Governance and NEMO; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Home Affairs and the Police Department; National Women's Commission; National Committee for Families and Children; National Council for Ageing; other bodies on the confirmed stakeholder list	30-40
Senate	13 Senators and the President of the Senate, with Senate staff	14-20
House of Representatives	31 elected members and the Speaker, with Clerk's Office staff	32-40
Office of the Ombudsman (technical session)	The Ombudsman and staff	6-10
Civil society	BNN and its members, Human Rights Commission of Belize, PETAL, UNIBAM, HelpAge Belize, BAPDA, Kolbe Foundation, Belize Council of Churches, Humana People to People Belize, National Association of Village Councils; Indigenous organizations (BENIC, National Garifuna Council, National Maya Council, Maya Leaders of Southern Belize); youth organizations (YLAB, Belmopan Active Youths, YWCA, YMCA); women's organizations (POWA, Toledo Maya Women's Council); trade unions (National Trade Union Congress, Belize National Teachers' Union, Public Service Union)	40-50
Academia, private sector and media	University of Belize, ATLIB and other tertiary institutions, the Bar Association, Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Belize Business Bureau, Belize Agro-Productive Sector Group, independent media, journalists and media houses	30-40