ROMAN CATHOLIC CHANCERY OFFICE
146/148 North Front Street
P.O. Box 1823
Belize City, Belize, Central America
Telephone: 501-223-6919
Email: episkopos@btl.net

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Greetings in Our Lord, Savior of Belize.

Our Lord Jesus taught us about mercy by coming to earth to save us. He taught us about mercy when he forgave the adulteress and the tax collectors. Ever since then, the Catholic Church has existed to show God's mercy to the people of the world. Unjust discrimination has always and will always be condemned by the Church. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, for example, that people with homosexual tendencies, "must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard must be avoided" (# 2358). Therefore, we extol the authors of the Equal Opportunity Bill for their desire to eliminate discrimination. In particular our heart goes out to our brothers and sisters who suffer with AIDS. May God heal them, and may we give them every opportunity to find employment and be productive members of society.

We feel that the EOB was rushed. It is a bill of great magnitude and consequence for all the institutions and individuals of the nation. Therefore, we need time, as a country, to fully study the best way to serve the groups protected in the EOB and to come to a nation-wide consensus on this. God forbid that our desire to help the downtrodden would divide us. The bill is perhaps the most controversial in the history of Belize. People of good will oppose it, and others are in favor. We should make haste slowly, do real discernment and build real consensus.

In its current form we cannot support the EOB for the following reasons:

1. The unparalleled power it would give to the Commission and the Tribunal
2. The danger of a pendulum effect. In our efforts to help some who are being discriminated against, we could end up endangering our cherished freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. There is some exception in the EOB made for religious organizations, but none for individual believers with deeply held, Bible-formed beliefs. They would be discriminated against under the EOB.
3. The danger of infringement on parental rights.
4. The novelty of the anthropology behind the EOB. The bill introduces the notion that humanity has three sexes instead of two, the notion that subjective gender identity is more important than one's God given, biological sex and would impose on Belizeans the task of "gender mainstreaming." Although we live in a globalized world these days, these new sexual doctrines do not resonate with us in Belize and may put in danger the family structure ordained by God.
5. Law has a great power to form consciences and opinions. We consider that this bill in its present form would do much to confuse the youth of Belize regarding the sacredness of sexuality and that sex is not first of all a pleasure source but a way toward holy matrimonial union and the conception of children.
6. Endangerment to the sovereignty of Belize. In section 3(h) the EOB opens the door for United Nations Committees and "experts" -- who do not live in Belize and do not understand our values and culture -- to dictate the terms of our laws. This would be a new colonialism.

Again, we laud the effort and the intentions of the framers of the Bill. We share your desire to end unjust discrimination and all injustice. We look forward to working with you toward those ends. Count on our continued prayer for all of you in these challenging times.

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Most Rev. Lawrence S. Nicasio
Bishop of Belize City and Belmopan