CARIBBEAN COURT OF JUSTICE
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CCJ HOLDS THAT SECOND MINISTER'S FIAT GRANT CANNOT PASS VALID TITLE AND IS VOID IN BELIZE

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. On Thursday, 26 November 2026, the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ/Court) delivered judgment in *Rudolph Ramirez and Julius Zabaneh v Attorney General of Belize and Minister of Natural Resources* [2026] CCJ 17 (AJ) (BZ). The appeal concerned whether a second Minister's Fiat Grant issued to Mr Rudolph Ramirez over the same parcel of land could pass a valid title to that land. The CCJ dismissed the appeal, agreeing with the Court of Appeal of Belize that the second Fiat Grant was void.

In 2008, Mr Ramirez was given a parcel of land by an instrument called a Minister's Fiat Grant. However, the land had already been transferred in 2005 by a previous Minister's Fiat Grant to Paumen's Pleasure Cove Lodge Limited. In 2019, after Mr Ramirez had applied to the Minister for the error to be corrected, the 2008 grant was cancelled and the same land was re-issued to him by a new Minister's Fiat Grant. Mr Ramirez then transferred his interest in the land to Mr Julius Zabaneh.

Mr Ramirez and Mr Zabaneh sought to enforce the 2019 contract between the Minister and Mr Ramirez for the purchase of the land, but the Government of Belize contended that this claim was no longer valid since it arose from the 2008 contract. The Appellants applied to strike out the defence, claiming that the 2019 grant affirmed the contract and constituted another breach of the contract. In 2023, the trial judge struck out the defence, ordered Mr Ramirez to surrender the 2019 grant, and awarded him and Mr Zabaneh damages for breach of contract representing the market value of the land. In 2024, the trial judge awarded BZ$2,085,068.08 as damages, with interest and costs.

Mr Ramirez and Mr Zabaneh appealed the decision to the Court of Appeal, alleging that the trial judge had made errors in assessing the market value of the land and awarding interest. The Government filed a Notice to Vary the 2024 award of the trial judge to declare that the 2019 grant was null and void, and that Mr Ramirez be repaid the purchase price. The Court of Appeal dismissed the appeal and granted the Government the variation sought.

Mr Ramirez and Mr Zabaneh appealed to the CCJ to overturn the decision of the Court of Appeal. The Appellants claimed that the Court of Appeal was wrong to entertain the Notice to Vary, to find that the 2019 grant was void, and to conclude that they were not entitled to damages. In the lead judgment authored

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by The Honourable Mme Justice Chantal Ononaiwu, the CCJ found that the Court of Appeal was correct to consider the Notice to Vary, because to justly determine the appeal on its merits, it needed to address the entitlement of Mr Ramirez and Mr Zabaneh to damages equal to the market value of the land.

The CCJ also held that the Court of Appeal was correct to find that the 2019 grant was void. A Minister's Fiat Grant can pass title over national lands. Once a Minister's Fiat Grant is issued with respect to a parcel of land, that land is no longer national land, and the Minister has no authority to make any subsequent Fiat Grant in respect of that land. Since the land in this case had already been transferred by Fiat Grant to Paumen's Pleasure Cove, it was impossible to perform the contract between Mr Ramirez and the Minister for the purchase of the land.

Therefore, the CCJ agreed with the Court of Appeal that Mr Ramirez and Mr Zabaneh were not entitled to damages for breach of contract, and that the purchase price should be repaid to Mr Ramirez. Costs were awarded to the Government.

The Court emphasised the importance of the Government maintaining accurate records of grants of national lands so that prospective purchasers of national lands could search those records and discover in a timely manner whether a grant had already been issued for a parcel of land. The Court also noted that where it is discovered that a second Minister's Fiat Grant was issued over the same parcel of land, the Government cannot correct the error by cancelling that fiat and reissuing a new fiat over that land. An effective remedy would need to be pursued.

The Honourable Mr Justice Peter Jamadar, in a concurring opinion, highlighted the State's obligation to provide an effective remedy to persons who sought in good faith to purchase land from someone to whom a second Minister's Fiat Grant was erroneously issued. He noted that State errors may impact the fundamental rights of such persons, and he suggested that the State needs to act positively and correctively to protect such rights.

The matter was heard by the Honourable Mr Justice Winston Anderson, CCJ President, the Honourable Justices Rajnauth-Lee, Jamadar, Ononaiwu, and Eboe-Osuji. The Rt Honourable Dean O. Barrow SC, Ms Naima Barrow, and Mr William Lindo appeared for the Appellants. Mr Eamon H. Courtenay SC and Ms Samantha Matute appeared for the Respondents.

The full judgment of the Court and a judgment summary are available on the Court's website at www.ccj.org.

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About the Caribbean Court of Justice

The Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) was inaugurated in Port of Spain, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on 16 April 2005 and presently has a Bench of seven judges presided over by CCJ President, the Honourable Mr Justice Winston Anderson. The CCJ has an Original and an Appellate Jurisdiction and is effectively, therefore, two courts in one. In its Original Jurisdiction, it is an international court with exclusive jurisdiction to interpret and apply the rules set out in the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas (RTC) and to decide disputes arising under it. The RTC established the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME). In its Original Jurisdiction, the CCJ is critical to the CSME and all 12 Member States which belong to the CSME (including their citizens, businesses, and governments) can access the Court's Original Jurisdiction to protect their rights under the RTC. In its

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Appellate Jurisdiction, the CCJ is the final court of appeal for criminal and civil matters for those countries in the Caribbean that alter their national Constitutions to enable the CCJ to perform that role. At present, five states access the Court in its Appellate Jurisdiction, these being Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Guyana and Saint Lucia. However, by signing and ratifying the Agreement Establishing the Caribbean Court of Justice, Member States of the Community have demonstrated a commitment to making the CCJ their final court of appeal. The Court is the realisation of a vision of our ancestors, an expression of independence and a signal of the region's coming of age.

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