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To: All Media

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**INFORMATION COMMISSIONER GUTIERREZ INVITES PUBLIC
TO ATTEND FREE ICIC WEBINAR:
*State Secrecy***

Hamilton, Bermuda. Information Commissioner Gitanjali Gutierrez wishes to advise all Bermudians and residents that the next session in the series of free public webinars hosted by the International Conference of Information Commissioners (ICIC) will be on Wednesday, 27 October 2021 at 11:00am AT.

The topic is *State Secrecy*. This session is part of a series of free open webinars available to all members of the public as online webinars, streaming live on the [ICIC's YouTube Channel](#).

Commissioner Gutierrez states “Despite the growth of public access to information laws around the world, there is still one area that is highly contentious: state secrets. In Bermuda, a key purpose of the PATI Act is to eliminate unnecessary secrecy with regard to information held by public authorities. Prior to the PATI Act, it may have been common for government and other public authorities to hold information in secret as a matter of practice or habit. Now that the PATI Act is law and applies to all public authorities, the public can now request access to this information through PATI requests. Laws like the PATI Act are often the only mechanism to gain access to information that governments categorize as ‘state secrets’, such as national security activities that constitute torture under international law or surveillance initiatives whose general details are disclosed to the public. This ICIC webinar on state secrecy should offer a lively discussion from an international perspective of when secrecy may very well still be appropriate, and when it can no longer be justified in a modern democracy. As the purposes of the PATI Act make clear, unnecessary and excessive secrecy can undermine effective and efficient policy making. If all stakeholders in public decisions are not fully informed, the public may find that government officials and public decision-makers are not held accountable for the outcomes of their decisions and actions. Meaningful and engaging debates happen when all parties are informed and empowered by the same information public decision makers use to make their decisions on behalf of the public.”

The overall theme for this series of webinars is *Access to Information for a Changing World – Using Technology to Promote Inclusion*. Each session will bring together experts and professionals from around the world to discuss specific themes around transparency and access to information. The ICIC’s webpage states that “The webinars aim to provide participants with dialogue and reflection on some of the most important topics related to the right of access to information. It will be marked by appreciating the diversity of opinions and points of view, with representatives from academia, the public sector and the private sector. More than offering unilaterally the transmission of information or knowledge, the event will seek to encourage dialogue, discussion and the development of critical reasoning, being free and open to all and all those interested in the proposed themes.”

The recording of this session, as well as the remaining sessions for 2021, will be available on the [ICIC’s YouTube Channel](#). The free webinars are offered on the last Wednesday of every month. The full schedule of webinars for 2021 and viewing details are available on www.informationcommissioners.org.

Editor’s Notes:

The ICO is an independent public office responsible for promoting the use of and overseeing compliance with the Public Access to Information (PATI) Act 2010. The PATI Act gives the public a right to access records held by public authorities, subject to listed exemptions and administrative grounds for denial of access. Individuals who are dissatisfied with the response of a public authority may seek a review by the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner shall investigate and the decisions by the Information Commissioner are legally binding. The ICO can be reached by visiting our offices at Maxwell Roberts Building, 4th Floor, One Church Street, Hamilton, or by calling 543-3700 or emailing info@ico.bm.

Further information about the ICO is available at www.ico.bm.

The International Conference of Information Commissioners (ICIC) is a permanent network established in March 2019, which connects member Information Commissioners to foster the protection and the promotion of access to public information as a fundamental pillar to social, economic and democratic governance.

Further information about the ICIC is available at www.informationcommissioners.org.