

STATEMENT BY HON. WILFRED ELRINGTON, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF BELIZE TO THE 67<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Mr. President,

It is my distinct honour to address this Assembly on behalf of the Government and people of Belize.

Allow me Mr. President, to congratulate you on your election as President of this sixty-seventh session. I am confident that you will guide the deliberations of this Assembly in a forthright and skillful manner.

I take this opportunity to reaffirm Belize's unequivocal commitment to the principles, goals and ideals of this United Nations and to pledge our unconditional support for the success of its endeavours. Based upon its performance over the last sixty-seven years we feel confident to opine that whereas the UN is unquestionably imperfect in like manner in which our democracy is imperfect, our UN is also, however, like democracy, the best institution devised by mankind to date that is dedicated exclusively to achieving a safer, more just and prosperous world for all mankind.

Mr. President,

As the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century inexorably evolves, laying bare the fragility and vulnerability of our planet to dangerous global forces, both natural and manmade, which threaten the existence of all living things on our planet, the genius and prescience of the founding fathers in creating this UN is put beyond doubt. It is probably debatable whether in 1945, the imperative for mankind to work together in harmony to ensure the survival of our very planet was appreciated by all nations. It may be questionable, whether it was universally appreciated in 1945, that it was absolutely necessary to have a global institution dedicated to the protection of mankind against man's penchant for causing destruction as well as against nature's destructive elements and forces. Today, however, the need for the UN is not only manifest to everyone but there are clarion calls for it to do more and for it to be more inclusive, representative and democratic. Calls to which Belize adds its voice!

Mr. President,

My country, Belize, gained its independence largely in consequence of a resolution of this United Nations calling upon the United Kingdom to grant us our independence by the end of 1981, thereby bringing to an end more than one hundred years of colonial domination. But whereas we attained our political independence in September of 1981, our sovereignty over our homeland is still being threatened by a territorial claim dating back to post-1940s, by our neighbor, Guatemala.

We therefore find the theme for this 67<sup>th</sup> session's debate a timely and fitting one; namely, "bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means." Happily, I can today inform this august body that both the Governments of Guatemala and Belize have agreed to a recommendation of the Secretary General of the Organization of American States to allow the Guatemalan claim to be adjudicated upon by the International Court of Justice if that is the will of the citizens of our respective countries expressed in simultaneous referenda to be held on October 6, 2013.

The resolution of the territorial differendum between Belize and Guatemala will not only consolidate our sovereignty and territorial integrity but it will also enhance the peace and security of our sub-region and conduce to the strengthening and deepening of our regional integration process. Mr. President, Belizeans are a peace loving people. We abhor conflict. We believe in the rule of law. And, we have faith in this United Nations.

Mr. President,

With almost half the population under the age of 25 and about 37% under the age of 18, our nation's future and destiny is inextricably tied to the welfare of our children and youth. And in order for them to attain to their full potential, they must be properly nurtured and fed, with balanced nutritious meals. They must be safely and comfortably housed and they must be properly educated and trained, with their education and training commencing from the time they are in the cradle. They must be trained and educated especially in science and technology. They must be trained to think creatively, to be fiercely competitive, to be industrious and to be prudent in the management of their resources. Our Government is convinced that it is only with this type of training and development that our citizens will be able to compete successfully in the world market and generate the wealth that is requisite to transform our society into a truly developed nation. If we fail the youth and children of this world today, we are setting ourselves up to fail in our common future.

With a view to attaining the aforementioned development objectives our government has initiated some ambitious comprehensive pro-poor policies.

For example, our government is committed to a programme to ensure that low income Belizean families do not have to face the difficult choice of whether to send their children to school or to buy food. Already, qualifying families in the underserved rural or urban areas can rely on our conditional cash transfer programme and our food pantry programme. We provide education subsidies to families of children attending secondary school. We continue to emphasize and expand early childhood education and to improve access to alternative education. And, we are investing in improving the quality of health care to which our citizens have access.

Mr. President,

As a small state which took its place among the nations of the world only 31 years ago Belize is experiencing all the growing pains that naturally afflict the young. Furthermore our situation is aggravated by the fact that we are populated by fewer than three hundred and fifty thousand persons who trace their origin from all over the globe and who are consequently multiethnic, multi-faith, multilingual and multicultural.

With such a diverse population the urgency for social cohesion cannot be overstated. When we add to this mix the challenges which today confront us all, occasioned by natural disasters such as climate change and by man-made ones such as the world financial collapse and transnational criminal activity, it becomes readily apparent that it is wholly beyond the capacity of any one government to discharge its obligation towards its citizens solely through national initiatives and devices and solely with domestic resources.

For this reason the Belize government has fully embraced the multilateral system and our co-operation partners around the world. We are partnering with them in many fields including economic, social, environmental and humanitarian in our perennial quest to better secure and develop all our citizens to their fullest potential.

In this regard Mr. President the United Nations funds and programmes and related agencies such as UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNESCO, the FAO, UNODC, and the WHO, among others, are working tirelessly with countries like Belize to fulfill the decisions of the international community and to support the efforts to meet the aspirations of our people. We avail ourselves of this opportunity to thank all our development partners for the tremendous contribution which they make daily to the security and development of our country and people.

We know however that more can be done and indeed must be done to raise our ambitions in delivering for the poor, for the needy and for the vulnerable.

It is therefore urgent that we must move toward shaping a post 2015 development agenda which reflects our equal stake in a common future, which addresses the concerns of the wealthy and strong and which meets the needs of the poor and the vulnerable.

Mr. President,

Belize remains fully supportive of all regional initiatives. We have sought and obtained membership in the OAS, CARICOM, SICA and CELAC. We work closely in all these sub-regional groupings on the issues of concern to us such as climate change, security and economic development. And here we feel constrained to point out that the impact of climate change on our region has been direct and devastating, compelling us to join forces with our CARICOM partners and with the wider Alliance of Small Island States to advance our interests in the climate change negotiation process. In that connection, Belize is proud of its contribution in being the host to the Caribbean Community Climate Change Center, which is tasked by CARICOM to provide technical and scientific advice to inform our sub-region's policy positions in executing adaptation and mitigation projects in our sub-region

and raising awareness of the deleterious impact of climate change in our respective countries. We thank the staff of that institution for the sterling work it is doing.

Mr. President, with respect to the nefarious enterprises of transnational trafficking in humans, drugs and arms, Belize subscribes to the view that a regional response is imperative to combat these pernicious scourges. Our countries are not the markets for these illicit commodities. Our countries do not benefit from the immense profits generated by these criminal enterprises. Yet we bear the tremendous burden of having to divert scarce resources badly needed for development to combat the activities of these merchants of death and destruction. Indeed our countries are overwhelmed by the grim tasks which now befall us of having to mend the shattered lives of our youth and of mourning their untimely deaths. It is for this reason that Belize is committed to the implementation of the Central America Regional Security Strategy, and to working with our partners to ensure that the Strategy has the level of support necessary to guarantee that it is effective.

Mr. President,

Our region, Central America and the Caribbean, has been labeled among the most violent regions of the world, with homicide rates that have reached crisis levels occasioned largely by the use of small arms and light weapons. But almost all small arms and light weapons found in our region start out as legally manufactured and legally traded arms. And every member of this UN is involved in some measure in this trade which we believe is of dubious value to mankind as a whole.

It is therefore with deep regret that we note that despite what appeared to be an emerging consensus and despite the underlying global urgency for a multilateral response the conclusion of an Arms Trade Treaty has so far been beyond the reach of the international community. It is urgent in our view that we redouble our efforts to break the gridlock and reach the compromise necessary to arrive at a consensus on an Arms Trade Treaty as early as possible.

Mr. President,

The States of Latin America and the Caribbean are almost all in our view wrongly and unjustly classified as middle income countries, a generic classification which masks the varied challenges our countries continue to face arising from poverty, high levels of income inequality, economic vulnerabilities and debt. As a consequence all our countries have been calling for a change in paradigm so that the classification of countries as middle-income countries no longer guides development cooperation. We urge all our development partners to please heed this call and to redress this matter.

Mr. President,

Finally we would like to echo the call of other members of this august institution who advocate for the lifting of the economic embargo against Cuba, which continues to fetter the development of that sister Caribbean nation and its people.

Also Belize notes and joins those positive voices that support Taiwan and therefore we urge Taiwan's full participation in the United Nations.

We ask also that urgent attention must be given to the concerns of the people of Israel and of Palestine whose legitimate expectation to live peaceful, fruitful lives continues to be frustrated. And we stand in solidarity with the citizens of the Middle East, particularly those in Syria, in their quest for those democratic freedoms to which we all aspire.

Mr. President,

As we move ahead, to take on the new challenges that will emerge in this sixty-seventh session, as we redouble our efforts to address the longstanding problems our world faces and as we renew our faith in the multilateral system, the role of this Assembly and of our UN organization will become increasingly more critical and relevant as this is the only chamber that is universal in character which commands legitimacy and authority. The entire world looks to the UN to solve the multitudinous problems which beset mankind. In the circumstances the United Nations is simply just too big to fail in the discharge of its singular obligation to safeguard the safety and wellbeing of humankind and planet earth.

I thank you.