



STATEMENT

BY

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ATTORNEY GENERAL
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**GENERAL DEBATE
OF THE
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**PERMANENT MISSION OF BELIZE
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

On behalf of the Government and people of Belize, with great pleasure I congratulate His Excellency, Sam Kutesa in his capacity as President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly.

Mr. President, I also take this opportunity to register our thanks to his predecessor, our own son of the Caribbean soil, H.E. Mr. John Ashe who performed his role with commendable excellence and leaves a legacy of lasting value to this organization.

Mr. President, your chosen theme, "Delivering on and implementing a transformative post 2015 development agenda" is ambitious, hopeful, and challenging.

Belize commends you on its selection. We will in the succeeding twelve months closely monitor and contribute its crafting and evolution. You posit that this new agenda should and I quote "Promote, sustained and inclusive economic growth, safeguard the future of our planet, and lead to the achievement of sustainable development." And that "the eradication of poverty and hunger will be at its core." Belize views these outcomes as more than aspirational. They are imperatives for us. Failure to attain them will result in dire consequences for our nation and people. They call for a transformative mobilization in our societies at the organic level. For that to happen we must inspire and equip all actors in our societies with the requisite tools to shoulder their responsibilities and partake in the dividends of sustainable economic growth with equity and social justice.

The experiences we have had in seeking to achieve the Millennium Development Goals make us less than sanguine that we will be more successful in achieving the post 2015 development agenda than we were in pursuit of the millennium development goals.

We are mindful that the support which some developed member states had pledged to provide for the pursuit of the MDGs did not materialize in the quantum that was pledged and needed.

Small countries like my own, in the main, are disadvantaged by the lack of resources and human, financial, scientific and technological capacities that are prerequisites for the successful undertaking of such ambitious and complex initiatives. Without cooperation and support to address these needs from the developed member states of this United Nations, other multi-lateral agencies, and very importantly, a reform of the policies of international financial institutions, Belize's attainment of the post 2015 development agenda will be severely stymied.

Looking to the future, Belize welcomes and supports the adoption by the 68th General Assembly of Resolution A/Res/304 "Towards the Establishment of a Multilateral Legal Framework for Sovereign Debt Restructuring Process", and hopes it will lead to a robust multilateral treaty that will increase the efficiency, stability and predictability of the international financial system.

In the wake of the world's financial meltdown in 2008 and the many disasters which have occurred around the world over the last six years, necessitating large outlays of donor funding to assist the victims of such disasters, there are unmistakable and troubling indicia of donor fatigue and a tendency towards isolationism and self-centeredness in our global environment. This trend does not auger well for the financing of the post 2015 development agenda.

Belize nonetheless remains cautiously optimistic. We are encouraged by the pilgrimage to this assembly hall over the past week of world leaders of nations large and small, friends and foes, allies and enemies. Each mounted the same podium. And each in essence voluntarily reaffirmed the conviction of their respective countries that collective action under these UNITED Nations offer our world the only true hope of dealing successfully with the myriad problems presently afflicting mankind; be it climate change, the dreaded Ebola virus, religious fanaticism, or persistent poverty and under development.

Of these maladies, Belize regards climate change as being the most pernicious. While consensus seemed to have been finally reached globally, both as to the causes as well as to the cure for this apocalyptic phenomenon, absent still is the political will of the major emitters to take immediate concerted and decisive action to combat it. Indeed, just like our international community was grievously dilatory in taking prompt collective action to prevent the massacre in Rwanda and to prevent the present spread of the Ebola virus in Africa, in like manner the major emitters are being dilatory in confronting the challenges posed by climate change. It is evident that the threats posed by epidemics, pandemics and terrorism to our planet and to mankind pale into insignificance when compared to the existential threats posed by climate change. Furthermore, it is equally evident that it would not be hyperbole to opine that time is not on our side. Horrendous devastation is already occurring around the world caused by extreme droughts, intense rainfalls, floods, hurricanes, melting snow caps, warming seas and sea level rises and an awful increase in pestilence and diseases.

My own country Belize is already experiencing, inter alia, coral bleaching, coastal erosion and flooding, and it is forecasted that next year the entire country will be visited by severe drought. The cost of mitigating the damage that is already being done to my country and of adaptation to climate change is prohibitive.

Mr. President, it is time for the large competing emitters to put aside suspicion of each other and commit to cap global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. While my country appreciates pledges already made to the Green Climate Fund, the amount of money needed to address global warming is exponentially more.

We do, however, remain optimistic that a robust climate change agreement will be signed in Paris in 2015.

Mr. President, the developmental and security needs of nations large and small in this era of globalization have hastened the imperative of regional integration. Indeed it is virtually impossible for any nation to function successfully on its own today in any sphere of activity. In the case of Belize, the measure of development and security which we have enjoyed over the past thirty-three years since the gaining of our Independence must be credited in large part to the good relations which we have had and continue to have with our partners in the various regional integration groupings to which we belong and to the excellent cooperation programmes which we share with our bi-lateral and multi-lateral partners, prominent among which are the various agencies of the United Nations. However, even as we acknowledge with gratitude the tremendous contributions of our partners to our nation's security and development, our government is ever mindful that the primary responsibility for our nation's security and development rests and remains with our government and people.

In this conviction, and given our limited resources, our government has had to prioritize its areas of intervention. It has concentrated on the provision of the basic needs of our nation namely, security, housing, education, health, employment and wealth generation. Highest on this list of priorities is the need to safeguard the security and territorial integrity of our country. Successive Belizean governments have invested heavily in efforts to bring about a peaceful resolution to the Guatemalan territorial claim over our country. Our government is unalterably wedded to the resolution of this claim peacefully by adjudication at the International Court of Justice. We have enlisted the support of all our international friends and partners for that decision and the Guatemalan government is also committed, through the Special Agreement of 2008, to the resolution of the claim by the International Court of Justice.

We are convinced that any kind of international conflict, wars and rumours of wars can only bring grief, cause pain, hardship and devastation. That is why we keep working assiduously with our neighbours in the region to cement friendly, peaceful, collaborative and productive relations in order to achieve development for our people.

Belize is very pleased by the recent designation by the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) of our entire region as a Zone of

Peace. We also welcome your own call Mr. President for the intensification of efforts towards the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Domestically, Belize has enjoyed uninterrupted peace and harmony for the last thirty-three years. Our government acts with alacrity and sensitivity to diffuse any situation which has the potential for civil strife and disorder and we invest substantially on our security forces both on capacity building as well as on equipment and transportation.

In our quest for wealth generation, job creation and the attainment of sustainable development, Belize is pursuing, inter alia, the prescriptions articulated in our Horizon 2030 national development plan. In that regard our government is working in close concert with economic development experts from the IMF, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and other institutions.

Among the initiatives we are pursuing is a comprehensive programme of infrastructure works throughout our country which includes the upgrading and expanding of major highways; the paving of streets in cities and towns, the installation of new drains in flood prone areas and the construction and upgrading of sporting stadiums and recreational community buildings. These programmes are being executed at a total cost of one hundred million dollars.

Thanks to the collaboration of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the tremendous support we receive through the Petrocaribe initiative, our Government has been able to invest in infrastructure and social programmes that benefit all the people of Belize.

Our government is cognizant of the importance of good infrastructure to our economic development. Belize is a major exporter of primary products. All our agri-products are transported by roads from the farms to the factories and then to the sea ports for export. The aquaculture products and petroleum products we produce are also transported by road to our seaports for exports. All our archaeological sites and many of our tourist resorts are also only accessible by roads.

It is the expectation of our government that with the enhancement of our network of streets and roads our country will become more attractive to both residents and foreigners, be they tourist or investors and that this will conduce to a rapid expansion in productivity, economic growth and wealth generation.

With a view to ensuring that as many Belizean workers as possible obtain employment in the infrastructure work being carried out, government has requested all contractors who successfully bid for the works, to utilize manual labour wherever it is feasible so to do. These works are providing employment for many Belizean youth both male and female.

As a further initiative to stimulate economic development, our government inaugurated the very first National Bank one year ago. The bank started out modestly. It commenced operations by providing loans primarily to finance the acquisition of homes for middle-class Belizeans. Though limited in its offerings, the bank's establishment has resulted in an immediate and dramatic reduction of interest rates being charged by commercial banks in the country on similar loans. This is a goal which our government had tried for many years to achieve without success. The new bank is rapidly building up its customer base and has now started to accept deposits. The prospect for young employed Belizeans to own their own homes at affordable mortgages is now greatly increased. Very many Belizeans are already landed property owners thanks to an ongoing programme by successive governments to make land available to them at very minimal costs.

Our government is also aggressively promoting foreign direct investment. We especially in business process outsourcing (BPOs). We have successfully attracted investment in petroleum extraction, call centers, agribusiness, renewable energy and tourism.

On our Independence Day September 21st 1981, Belize inherited an education system that was designed to educate citizens for the needs of a remote colonial outpost in the industrial age, whose primary economic activity was the export of timber and sugar. We have since been making strenuous efforts to transform that system into one capable of satisfying the needs of an independent nation in this the twenty first century information age. This is proving to be a task fraught with great difficulty. It is also an exceedingly expensive one. Our government presently spends 26% of our national budget on the education sector. But that is not nearly enough to cover the cost of the training and education needs of our young nation. We appreciate, however, that the quality of our workforce will be a great determinant in our future development. And that we must therefore do all in our power to make our workforce the very best it can be regardless of the cost and without heeding the sacrifices we may have to make.

To that end our government is engaged in a number of initiatives aimed at training and educating our population. Among those is a comprehensive teacher training and certification programme. We are resolved to have only teachers trained in pedagogy and in the various subject areas which they are expected to teach in our classrooms. Simultaneously we are assiduously expanding our education coverage from the pre-primary to the tertiary levels.

Indeed, more young people today than at any other time in the history of our nation can afford to obtain an education and can find space in an educational institution near to their homes. We are also placing increasing emphasis on vocational and technical education and training and on the teaching of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. We are in the planning stage of a new

Institute of Science and Technology and we are expanding the presence of Centers for Employment Training across the country.

Because we only possess two young universities we make strenuous efforts to gain access to universities and other advanced educational institutions abroad for those of our students who successfully attain the matriculation requirements for entry into those institutions. We have been very successful in this initiative. The vast majority of our students attend those foreign institutions on scholarships, thanks to the generosity of our cooperation partners. Every Belizean student male and female who attains the requisite matriculation requirement has an equal opportunity to win a scholarship. Current data indicate that our female students are much more successful at winning scholarships than their male counterparts. Our initiatives in the education sector are conducting significantly to the increase in the competence of our workforce at every level, thereby enabling it to produce goods and services that can compete in the world markets. In order to continue these strenuous efforts, we will need the continued support of the UN and its formidable network.

Belize currently spends over 13 percent of the national budget on the health sector. We seek to develop and maintain a healthy and productive population. To that end our government is expanding school feeding programmes country wide as well as programmes which allow parents of low income families to purchase food items at concessionary rates. We know that regular balanced meals are vital to the health of our population and that it is much less expensive to keep our population healthy than it is to cure it when it is ill. We continue to strengthen our primary health care network. We continuously upgrade facilities in our hospital and clinics with modern diagnostic equipment. Our flagship public hospital is now benefitting from significant technological upgrade. We also recently inaugurated a brand new neo natal wing to that hospital. For the first time in our country's history a state of the art facility to cater exclusively for the health needs of our physically challenged children has been built. This facility is the brainchild of the wife of our Prime Minister who serves as Special Envoy for Women and Children. She spearheaded both the raising of the finances for its construction and the supervision of its construction.

We take this opportunity also, to applaud the efforts of our Special Envoy who, just a few days ago, hosted one of the largest gatherings of First Ladies and Spouses of Heads of State and Government on the subject of Women and Girl's empowerment. This special event is a universal call to action on women and girls' financial health based on the Beijing Platform for Action. We call on all governments and international organizations to support this cause.

We expanded the coverage of our health insurance scheme in the last budget year. And, through our cooperation agreement with the Republic of Cuba we are

significantly increasing the number of our health care personnel. Indeed, only some three weeks ago we welcomed a contingent of some thirty five newly trained doctors, the largest contingent of doctors ever to return to our country in a single year.

Our citizens are our nation's most valuable resource. We are resolved to invest in them, to enhance their competences and to ameliorate the quality of life of each and every one of them

Mr. President, the victims of global strife and global tragedies are invariably the human being. This United Nations was founded on the determination that no other generation would have to suffer the scourge of war, which we all know brings nothing but sorrow to all mankind. Our compact is to promote and protect fundamental human rights and the dignity and worth of the human person - all human persons, in equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.

Mr. President, the Ebola virus is increasing exponentially. While disappointed that international health agencies did not respond more vigorously to the Ebola outbreak many months ago. Belize welcomes the Secretary General's "UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response".

Belize adopts without reservation the call by St. Vincent and the Grenadines for the Republic of Taiwan to be permitted to participate in the specialized agencies of the United Nations. In this modern day and age it is incomprehensible that we should want to deny ourselves the benefit of their expertise in dealing with global issues.

If we are to remain true to the principle of inclusion as enshrined in our Charter and as being promoted in the post 2015 development agenda we must continue to advocate for the right of the Sahrawi people for self-determination.

We are also seriously concerned by the indiscriminate death and destruction recently meted out to innocent Palestinian civilians, especially helpless women and children in Gaza. We reiterate our support for the coexistence of the State of Israel and the State of Palestine in peace and security in their respective pre-1967 international borders as recognized by the international community.

Mr. President, Belize is convinced that any discussion of a future development agenda must include the removal of unilateral harmful practices that stifle and stagnate development, wherever this occurs. In this respect, we join the rest of the international community in calling for an end to the anachronistic embargo against Cuba.

Mr. President, Belize recognizes that foremost among our development priorities is to ensure the sustainability of the environment in keeping with our flagship

status as a haven for democracy, promotion and protection of human rights and environmental conservation.

We embrace the principle that economic growth should not come at any cost, but that neither should our people have to forego development to protect the natural environment. We firmly believe that it is a false dichotomy to pit development against the environment. That is why we fully welcome and embrace the principle of sustainable development. Our future and the world's depend on the entire world embracing the sustainable development approach.

I thank you, Mr. President.