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**STATEMENT**

**BY**

**THE HONOURABLE WILFRED P. ELRINGTON  
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**AT THE**

**GENERAL DEBATE  
OF THE  
SEVENTY-THIRD SESSION OF  
THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

*SATURDAY, 29 SEPTEMBER 2018*

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**PERMANENT MISSION OF BELIZE  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

Madame President  
Heads of State and Delegations  
Distinguished Ministers  
Excellencies

At the outset I wish to express the sympathies of the Government and people of Belize with the Government and people of Indonesia in view of the devastating earthquake and tsunami which killed over 400 persons.

At the same, I wish to also express Belize's solidarity with Barbados which is recovery from Tropical Storm Kirk and with countries of the Eastern Caribbean which were affected by an earthquake – all over the last few days.

Madame President,

This year marks the 37th anniversary of Belize's independence.

Belizeans have now enjoyed almost four uninterrupted decades of freedom, peace and democracy in a sovereign independent nation.

During that period our leaders succeeded in making modest gains in our nation's quest for sustainable development. They did so notwithstanding the fact that our country has been the subject of a live territorial claim, a poisoned colonial legacy, which pre-dates our grant of independence by approximately one half century.

Because of that claim, our nation's birth was protracted and fraught with difficulty. All Belizeans who are seized of the history of our journey to independence greatly credit the United Nations for it. And rightly so. It was resolution 1514 of this General Assembly passed on the 14 December 1960, which paved the way for all colonial peoples to be able to transition to Independence. Belize is a beneficiary of that seminal resolution and of subsequent UN resolutions passed between the period 1971 to 1980 which mandated the British to grant it early independence.

On 21 September 1981, Belize achieved its independence and no sooner than it had done so, the United Nations welcomed our fledgling democracy as a Member, affirming its sovereignty and its territorial integrity.

Thirty-seven years hence, Guatemala still maintains a territorial claim to our country.

The opportunity to have the Guatemalan claim resolved at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) eluded the British government for upward of eighty years. Belizeans themselves will soon decide whether the opportunity to bring to a definitive settlement a claim, which has long sown fear in the hearts of all Belizeans and which has hamstrung our nation's development potential, will in fact be seized.

The significance of the Guatemalan referendum, which ratified the decision of their Government in 2008 to cause their claim to my country to be adjudicated by the ICJ, should not be lost. For in carrying out the referendum, Guatemala gave effect to their obligation under the Special Agreement that both our countries signed in good faith. At the same time, there is still a pending issue for us to agree on. In continuing that spirit of good faith, we urge Guatemala to agree on a procedure or protocol for confidence building measures on the Sarstoon River, our southern boundary with Guatemala, to facilitate the management of incidents of the kind that gave rise to heightened tensions in 2015 and 2016 between our two countries.

Belizeans are on the cusp of a truly rare and felicitous moment in our nation's history. Our voting public, in the finest democratic fashion, is now seized of a once in a lifetime opportunity, to determine the fate of our country. The Government of Belize has appointed April 10, 2019 as the date for the national referendum. All registered voters will be entitled to cast their ballots signaling either their consent or rejection to having the Guatemalan claim resolved once and for all by the ICJ. In preparation for that first historic plebiscite our government has embarked upon a national wide public awareness campaign to ensure that all Belizeans are fully informed about the nature of the claim and why it should be referred to the ICJ for resolution.

Simultaneously with efforts to end the Guatemalan claim and thereby enhance our national security, our government continues to discharge its core duty to promote economic development, job creation, education and healthcare to our citizens. To that end we are striving mightily to implement our Growth and Sustainable Development Strategy, which is fully aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals. In this endeavor the UN Development System is partnering with us through the Multi Country Sustainable Development Framework.

We are also working assiduously to address the scourge of poverty, which persistently afflicts our citizenry. Current statistics reveal that some 43% of Belizeans live below the poverty line with 16% experiencing extreme poverty.

The interventions to treat with this problem include three new programmes, which specifically target indigent families. In addition to furnishing beneficiaries with financial benefits, direct economic, social and psychological support are also provided, as well as job readiness courses, to prepare beneficiaries for gainful employment. Under a Food Pantry program basic food baskets are provided at subsidized rates to poor families as well.

Madame President

An alarming knowledge gap is rapidly widening between the few fortunate Belizeans who are well educated, skilled and poised to succeed in a fiercely competitive, knowledge based, twenty first century environment and the many who are being left behind without the skills and wherewithal to obtain employment, or to create their own, or even to engage legitimately or meaningfully in civic life. It is indispensable to Belize's development, prosperity, security and

democracy that we urgently seek to close this knowledge gap, and ensure that all our youth are equipped to successfully to face the myriad challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

To that end and with a view to increasing access to education, Government is building 35 new schools. Consequent upon the initiation of a high school subsidy grant there is now a discernible improvement in rates of transition from primary to secondary school for students identified as having academic or socioeconomic challenges. All students in the districts and rural areas of the country with the highest incidence of poverty automatically qualify for that subsidy. And, this year, Government is expanding the reach of the subsidy with the intention of minimizing the disparity in enrollment and achievement between students coming from rural areas and those hailing from urban ones.

In addition Government is taking new measures to assist youths at risk of coming into the contact with the law. We have recently launched the Belize Youth Challenge Program. This program concentrates on teaching youths discipline, personal administration and teamwork, and skills in technical and vocational areas. It also encourages them to become responsible, patriotic and productive citizens.

With a view to enhancing the delivery of health services Government is exploring the construction of a modern hospital in the Toledo District.

Madame President,

2019 will mark twenty five years of the United Nations support to the SIDS Agenda.

Belize joins in the call for a renewed commitment to the special case of SIDS and for systematically targeted support to respond to the particular needs of SIDS such as those identified by the Caribbean SIDS in the San Pedro Declaration adopted in Belize in August.

The destructive hurricanes and storms, which ravage the Caribbean year on year, are a constant reminder of the true scale of vulnerability facing SIDS in the Caribbean.

It is hoped that through the implementation of his reform plan, the Secretary General will explore ways in which the UN development system can better accelerate the implementation of the SIDS Agenda.

Our, Government has made resilience building an integral part of its development planning and is implementing its National Climate Resilience Investment Plan to ensure that climate change-related impacts are integrated into national investment planning across all sectors and ministries.

Government has also enacted Mangrove Regulations and instituted an indefinite moratorium on offshore drilling. This marks the first time that a developing country has taken such a major

step to protect its marine resources from oil exploration and extraction. Belize is also banning single use plastics and styrofoam by April 2019.

I'm happy to share that the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO decided to remove the Belize Barrier Reef – the largest in the Western Hemisphere -- from the List of World Heritage in Danger, after taking into account several measures that our government has implemented to ensure its protection and wellbeing.

Madame President,

By dint of geography Belize is located along the path frequented by criminal elements of every ilk as they journey from South to North to traffic their wares. This has had tragic consequences for the peace and safety of Belizeans. Our homicide rates have been dramatically increasing over the last decade, with each year deadlier than the previous. Tackling transnational organised crime in Central America requires a truly cooperative and collaborative approach along with multilateral support. Thankfully, UNICEF, UNDP and UNODC have been important and faithful collaborators with Government in implementing programmes to address underlying social causes as well as building capacity of protective and judicial institutions.

Madame President,

From the foregoing it is pellucid that the United Nations is essential for Belize.

Belize, like other Members of the United Nations is not unaware of its limitations.

But it is not without some measure of anxiety, that we note the fact that some of its core values are under attack sustained while organs that have been painstakingly erected to reinforce the rule of law are being derided and, international legal frameworks are being cast aside in unilateral acts of political expediency.

Paradoxically, however, the criticisms and attacks are being unleashed at a time when the world is most in need of a robust United Nations, as nations large and small are being buffeted by catastrophic occurrences, both natural and man-made, at a pace never before witnessed by humanity. Thus, while we appreciate the need for reform of the UN institutions we are equally mindful of its unique and invaluable role in a world that is becoming increasingly more perilous. Belize fears that if we stand in silence or fail to speak out in its defense and in defense of multilateralism, we risk repeating the tragedies of the past. And we forsake the very values that the United Nations stands for. Indeed we forsake our very responsibility to humanity.

History will measure us by actions not by words.

Madame President,

Belize is supportive of all initiatives to put an end to languishing conflicts across the globe, which conduce to senseless death, destruction and suffering. We echo the cry of Palestinians for an independent state, within its 1967 borders, and with all attendant rights.

We pray that the ICJ will bring a speedy end to Venezuela's claim over Guyana territory. Belize remains firm, unswerving in its support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Guyana. We pray as well that the civil strife in Venezuela will soon be ended.

Belize joins the call for an end to the unilateral, economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba and its people, which is in violation of international law and serves no just purpose. The blockade has failed to pressure the government into submission. Indeed it has had the opposite effect. Leveraging its inexhaustible reserves of patriotism and creativity, Cuba has been able to survive and thrive to a degree that has garnered international recognition; especially for its signal gains in public health, education and the arts. Surely, it is high time, after nearly 58 years, to lift the blockade so that Cuba can reach the highest level of its extraordinary potential.

In a similar spirit of determination, Belize once again reiterates its plea on behalf of the 23 million people of Taiwan for a new approach to the participation of Taiwan in the United Nations system. Taiwan is the 22nd largest economy of the world. It is a vibrant democracy that has fully embraced international norms and standards. Yet, despite global recognition of their successes and despite the readiness of UN Member States to conduct business with this fast growing economy, this institution has cut them off. It has gone so far as to refuse to recognize the legitimacy of Taiwanese passports and so literally cutting off even the Taiwanese tourists from entering its premises as visitors. It uses General Assembly resolution 2758 of 1971 effectively as a political and humanitarian embargo against Taiwan. No such embargo, indeed, has any place in this United Nations.

Madame President,

The successes of the United Nations have never been won by focusing on what divides us.

Had we done so, we would not have achieved a landmark human rights declaration, a transformative development agenda or a constitution for the oceans and seas, and we certainly would not have a framework agreement for collective action on climate change.

Focusing on what unites us can bring us further along to address the gaps in the law of the sea to guarantee that equitability persists even in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

In the same manner, we can in Poland take the final decisions to give full effect to the Paris Agreement and mobilize momentum for the level of ambition and the magnitude of support needed to avoid irreversible adverse impacts of climate change. Belize is ready to commit to

raising our ambition and urge others to join us in 2020 to set the world on the right path to achieve the Paris Agreement goals.

Madame President,

Belize has weathered many trials in our humble defense of what rightly belongs to us. We see our struggle reflected in those of many others who have been denied the full enjoyment of their rights, and the full achievement of their potential. We are however fortified in the belief that right will triumph. That in the end, our shared values of justice and our belief in human dignity, will bring us ever so closer to the solutions the world needs. So we march on, in service of the United Nations, and all the world's peoples, armed with our values, and the enduring hope for peace and security.

Thank you