



**Statement by Hon. Eamon Courtenay
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Immigration of Belize
General Debate
78th Session of the UN General Assembly
23 September 2023**

Mr. President,

It is with immense pride that Belize offers its heartiest congratulations to you as a CARICOM national unanimously elected to preside over the 78th Session of this General Assembly.

The theme for our General Debate: “Rebuilding trust and reigniting global solidarity— is timely.

When we act in good faith, when we respect the rule of law, when we embrace our responsibility to act in the common interest of humankind, when we foster unity for a larger purpose - we manifest these principles.

Trust and solidarity are foundational to multilateralism.

Regrettably, trust and solidarity are in diminishing supply at a time when the capacity of Planet Earth to sustain human life is in grave peril.

Mr. President,

The 0.7% ODA/GNI target first agreed in 1970 has never been met. By one estimate this failure has resulted in \$6.5 trillion in undelivered aid to developing countries.

At COP 15, developed countries committed to mobilize \$100 billion per year by 2020 for climate action. That commitment has yet to be met. Consequently US\$ 381.6 billion in public climate finance has been foregone.

The commitment made in 2015 in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda to phase out fossil fuel subsidies has been completely ignored. According to the IMF, fossil-fuel subsidies surged to a record \$7 trillion last year.

Despite their strident calls for respecting human rights, the Global North remains outside the Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers; deaths and inhumane treatment of migrants at the southern borders of the Western world continue with impunity.

The hoarding of COVID-19 vaccines by developed countries and their continuing refusal to waive intellectual property rights for COVID-19 vaccines, caused prolong suffering in the developing world, with some countries still below global vaccine targets.

Mistrust is widespread. Solemn promises are routinely broken. Narrow nationalism and insularity have displaced global solidarity.

Mr. President, the situation is critical.

Only 12% of the SDGs are on track for achievement. For the first time, the Human Development Index declined globally for two years in a row, placing greater burdens on the most vulnerable.

Poverty and food insecurity are rising. Hunger is at levels not seen since 2005; a major regression.

High inflation has returned.

The global average temperatures for the last three months were the highest on record. Yet G-20 countries, who are responsible for 80% of greenhouse gas emissions, are failing in their duty to drastically curb their emissions. 1.5 alive is slipping from our grasp.

The development financing gap is widening, putting development out of reach for low income and vulnerable countries. Our governments face a callous choice between scylla and charybdis, expensive debt payments or acquiring even more expensive debt to invest in development and resilience.

More than half of the world's top 50 most climate vulnerable countries are home to 40% of people living in extreme poverty. But as they represent only 2.5% of the global economy, their debt distress falls through the global financial cracks.

Paradoxically, accompanying the progressive erosion of trust and solidarity is the inclination to further dig in,

to deny the science,

to dismiss the perspective of others,

to retreat into likeminded spaces and
to stoke more division.

The spaces for dialogue and cooperation are closing. Polarisation and fragmentation are trending.

Mr. President,

Too much is at stake:

our existence and our prosperity

our way of life and our future

Mr. President, Belize proposes three broad actions which are urgent and necessary to restore trust and foster solidarity.

1. Reform

We are living now with the tragic consequences of twentieth century multilateral institutions and their governing mechanisms that are ill-suited for the crises of the twenty-first century.

Urgent reform of the international financial architecture is imperative. The objectives and policies of international financial institutions must be better aligned with our climate and development goals. The eligibility criteria, which currently exclude some vulnerable countries from access to development finance must be reformed to take account of vulnerabilities. The governance of IFIs must be broadened to include the voices of developing countries. Decisions for us cannot be made without us.

The upcoming annual meetings in Marrakech, the realization of the MDB vision emanating from the Paris Summit, the Bridgetown Initiative and the prototype multidimensional vulnerability index,

are all real reforms that would reinvigorate genuine trust in the international financial system. We must seize the day.

Events of the last decade have shown how ineffective the UN Security Council is and the dangerous vacuum which arises therefrom. Threats to international peace and security demand an effective Council, one that is inclusive with equitable representation that reflects today's global dynamics. The inability of the Council to act in the face of the illegal Russian War against Ukraine exemplifies the Council's impotence. Reform of the Council is urgent, and Belize calls for the commencement of text-based negotiations in this Session.

2. Honouring Commitments Made

Unmet commitments, insufficient to meet growing needs, have contributed to the huge financing gap we face today, to the stalling of the climate and development agendas and to the deepening of current crises.

By course correcting immediately, we can begin to restore the trust and solidarity and get us on track to achieving the Paris goals and the SDGs.

We are all on the road to climate perdition. The Global Stocktake, to be concluded at COP28, is the unmissable opportunity to agree solutions to address the perilous gaps in implementation, accelerate climate action, and ramp up ambition.

The just concluded SDG Summit revealed the dire reality. The refusal of developed countries to, so far, raise the ambition on the means of implementation is disappointing. This must change. The 4th International Conference on Financing for Development is an important opportunity to forge a new financing pact for sustainable development.

While the implementation of the SDGs occurs at local level, and governments bear primary responsibility for national development; we should be clear: achieving SDGs is the shared responsibility of all countries alike. The SDGs are a bulwark against conflict and insecurity, the pull of migration and social instability.

3. Justice

Mr. President, trust and solidarity can only thrive where there is justice.

Reparatory Justice

The terrible injustice and the poisoned legacy of native genocide, slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade cannot continue to be ignored or to be the subject only of academic discussions. Descendants of slaves continue to struggle with persistent racial discrimination, marginalization and generational trauma. The consequences of slavery for our countries manifest today through underdevelopment, poverty and structural inequities.

CARICOM has put forward a 10-point plan which addresses the core of reparatory justice as we see it.

Reparatory justice is essential to any redemption from a historical wrong that is so indelible that it can never be fully remedied but must be reckoned with.

To the governments of European countries, that enabled this evil, we say the time for redemption, reparation and respect is here and we demand it!

Climate Justice

The decades long call for climate justice must be answered.

Small island developing states, like Belize, are the most vulnerable to climate change. Our countries are reaching the limits of adaptive capacity and already incurring loss and damage – and will continue to do so. Yet those whose economic prosperity and wealth have been based on climate destroying activities are attempting to evade their historic responsibilities by lowering ambition on climate action, backsliding on implementation of their obligations and refusing to deliver on climate finance.

This blatant injustice is compounded by the reality that to invest in resilience, to respond and recover from climate induced disasters, we must borrow from the very same wealthy countries.

Developed countries must urgently double adaptation financing and better align that financing to our growing needs. They must close the emissions and implementations gaps to keep 1.5 within reach. The Loss and Damage Fund must be operationalized and capitalized at COP 28. We need adequate resources for just transitions to sustain our low carbon economies, and to further decouple our energy, transport and electrical systems from high polluting activities.

Justice for countries in special situations

Mr. President, too many of our Member States continue to be oppressed by systematic but entirely repairable injustices.

The ambivalence of the international community and the UN itself in response to the desperate call from Haiti for assistance is unconscionable. The Haitian people are suffering from unimaginable violence, human rights violations and a humanitarian disaster.

The CARICOM Eminent Persons Group is working to facilitate political consensus building that will be essential to Haiti's recovery. A broad-based political compact is urgently needed to transition to constitutional governance.

Belize commends the offer of Kenya to lead a multinational force to provide security assistance to Haiti. Belize will join with other CARICOM countries in contributing to the multinational force, once the appropriate framework is in place.

Belize calls for the full funding of the Haiti Humanitarian Response Plan and a strong Security Council resolution to support the mobilization of the multinational security force.

Tempus fugit!

Belize repeats its call for the immediate lifting of the illegal, immoral and unjust commercial, financial and economic blockade imposed on Cuba. The designation of Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism by the USA is evil and pernicious. We deplore it, we condemn it, and we call for its immediate removal. In the post-Cold War, the U.S.' policy has no other objective but to cruelly punish ordinary Cubans and stifle their sustainable development aspirations.

Indeed, the increasing imposition of unilateral coercive measures against Venezuela and other developing countries is both illegal and a significant obstacle to development.

For more than half a century the international community and the UN have failed to deliver a peaceful and secure state for the Palestinian people. Consequently, the people of Palestine continue to suffer the indignities of illegal occupation and Israeli apartheid. I reiterate Belize's full support for the realisation of an independent Palestinian state, within its 1967 borders, with all attendant rights, including the recognition of East Jerusalem as its capital and the right of return.

The continued exclusion of Taiwan from the international community is inconsistent with the realities of today's world. Taiwan is a vibrant, democratic country with the willingness and capacity to contribute to addressing global challenges. Belize calls for Taiwan's full inclusion in the international system.

Regrettably, Russia's war against Ukraine continues with devastating effects especially on civilians. We condemn the attempt to redraw international borders by force. This war must end. The price is too high. It is time for peace.

Mr. President, the international community must right the wrongs, unceasingly and unnecessarily perpetuated against these countries. Doing so would serve immeasurably toward rebuilding trust and solidarity among our community of nations.

Mr. President,

As Belize and Guatemala continue to pursue the peaceful, just and final resolution of Guatemala's Claim to Belizean territory before the International Court of Justice, illegal incursions by Guatemalans continue. Recently, Guatemalan military forces illegally entered Belizean waters and unlawfully removed Belizean flags placed on Belizean soil. Deforestation, cattle ranching, and cultivation of illegal drugs by Guatemalans continue in remote and protected areas of Belize. These activities are contrary to international law and good neighbourliness.

Concluding a Sarstoon Protocol to avoid unnecessary incidents in our southern and maritime space remains outstanding but necessary.

Mr. President,

Solidarity originates from the Latin, *solidum*, meaning to hold a debt together.

All the Member States of these United Nations hold a debt together: a debt to each other, a debt to our planet, a debt to leave a better world for future generations.

By rebuilding trust and solidarity, we can advance the robust international cooperation that is indispensable for rescuing people and planet.

In the words of the father of our nation, Rt. Honourable George Cadle Price, I quote:

"Creation was not finished at the dawn of this earth, but creation continues, and we have a lot to do to make the world a better place."