



**Statement by the Hon. Francis Fonseca, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade,
Education, Culture, Science and Technology of Belize
General Debate
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Mr. President,

The self-determination of a people is sacrosanct.

It is because of the exercise of that right to self-determination that each nation enjoys the privilege of sitting in this Hall.

Our nations exist by the will of our people, by virtue of their right to determine their political status and pursue their economic, cultural, and social development.

To borrow words from Nelson Mandela, [our people] *are the real makers of history; their participation in every decision about the future is the only guarantee of true democracy and freedom.*

If we look at the challenges that our people confront today, we must ask whether that sacrosanct principle of self-determination is in fact secure?

Mr. President,

Belize is a member of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), one of 39 countries that have been on the front lines of the climate crisis.

The genesis of this crisis lies with the industrialized nations. Its perpetuation and acceleration rests with the wider membership of the Group of 20 (G20). Currently, the

Check against delivery

G20 accounts for some 80 percent of global emissions. AOSIS Members contribute less than **one** percent of global emissions.

This is a tale of two worlds; but we only have one planet to share.

The extent to which G20 economies are advancing, and contributing to global economic output and world trade is impressive and promising for their people. It is important that their growth should be calibrated to a world where SIDS also have a secure future. This is still possible, but it is urgent.

As SIDS, our people's livelihoods have long depended on traditional sectors such as agriculture, fisheries and tourism which are climate sensitive. Opportunities for diversification have been limited given our size, population, and location.

Climate change is forcing us to break with tradition and to transition despite the limited options to do so. Each step forward is met with yet another hurdle to overcome and, with increasing probability we face the likelihood of setbacks as climate change impacts worsen. The costs are multiplying, fiscal space is shrinking, and the opportunities to equitably share in global prosperity are diminishing.

The right of SIDS to define their own future must be protected and secured.

The severe impacts of sea level rise have irreversible consequences for SIDS.

Our people have gone beyond their duty to protect and preserve our environment, yet some are being forced to relocate from their homelands. To this, we reiterate that no matter the physical changes that climate change may bring to our territory, our sovereignty and our right to self-determination remain intact.

Mr. President,

The perpetual suffering of a people can never just be a matter of national concern.

The United Nations rose up from the ashes of war, to restore “faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.”

All members of the United Nations have a duty to give effect to these words.

Conflicts should not be allowed to fester. The war in Ukraine is now two years running and we are concerned that the end is still not near.

Haiti has seized our attention once again. For Belize, the international response must be enduring for long lasting peace and security of our sister country.

We are working through the Caribbean Community to reinforce and strengthen Haiti, and we commend the Haitian people in their resolve to define their own pathway forward. We are pleased to be contributing personnel to the Multinational Security Support Mission (MSS).

Belize is extremely worried that up to now the international community has not fully delivered on its commitments for the MSS nor the UN Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for Haiti. This jeopardizes all the efforts towards establishing political stability but more than that puts the future of Haiti at substantial risk.

Mr. President,

Cuba should no longer be subject to an unjust and illegal economic embargo imposed by the United States. It is imperative that Cuba be removed from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. This arbitrary and unilateral designation has created an unnecessary barrier to global cooperation, constructive engagement, and the promotion of peace and stability in our region.

Mr. President,

Belize rejects the continued denial of self-determination of the Palestinian people and calls for the eradication of the system of colonial domination and apartheid being imposed upon them. As Belize stated to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the recent Advisory Opinion, “Israel cannot be permitted to continue flouting one of the most fundamental principles of international law with impunity. Impunity breeds inhumanity.”

Just two weeks ago, this Assembly approved a resolution proposed by Palestine affirming the ICJ’s advisory opinion and called on Members to act to re-enforce the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination.

The war, the oppression and the inhumanity must end.

Mr. President,

Taiwan is a nation that espouses democracy, development, and innovation. The challenges we are tackling as an international community requires Taiwan’s full inclusion and participation in the international system. Belize calls for this to be done immediately.

The people of Western Sahara should be granted their long overdue referendum to decide their own future. Belize continues its repeated call for the UN and the international community to take the necessary steps to allow the Sahrawi people to finally exercise their right to self-determination.

Mr. President,

I submit to you and this Assembly that the foundation of “leaving no one behind” requires that we actively promote and protect the right of self-determination in its most basic form, in the context of peace and security. Now we must also do so in the context of sustainable development.

We have adopted a rescue plan to steer the SDGs back on course. We have a Pact for the Future. We must use every opportunity to put in place the systems and financing necessary to turbocharge our sustainable development and climate goals. In this effort, we must ensure equal opportunity for all to share in global prosperity. We must raise collective ambition and invest in all our people to empower them to rise.

Mr. President,

The Declaration on Sea Level Rise and Statehood adopted by the Leaders of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) on 23rd September affirms that the sovereignty or statehood of small island developing states cannot be challenged under any circumstances of climate change-related sea level rise. We invite all UN Member States to support the implementation of this Declaration and to use it as the basis of international cooperation.

To further guarantee that SIDS will be spared the gravest climate threats, global warming must be limited to well below 1.5 degrees Celsius. Belize urges the G20 to enhance their emission reduction targets to achieve this temperature limit.

For SIDS, adaptation is imperative, and loss and damage associated with climate change is inevitable. The new climate finance goal to be decided in Baku must contain specific recommendations for minimum allocation to SIDS in relation to grant-based and concessional finance for adaptation and grants for loss and damage. It must also give effect to the provisions of the Paris Agreement which require enhanced access for SIDS and LDCs to climate finance. Finally, it must support the urgent capitalization of the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage.

Mr. President,

With the adoption of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS, the UN must now ensure its implementation.

SIDS must be at the table in global economic and international financial institutions. The multidimensional vulnerability index should be incorporated into existing practices and policies for debt sustainability and development support to expand SIDS' access to effective development finance.

Mr. President,

Belize is moving ahead. We are on a transformative development trajectory.

We have dramatically improved our credit profile through the Belize Blue Bond Project, a debt for marine conservation swap. We are reforming and modernizing our legislative and policy frameworks for investments and activating our orange and blue economies including beyond our national jurisdiction.

In partnership with the United States of America, we have signed a five-year USD125 million grant agreement with the Millennium Challenge Corporation intended to help reduce poverty in Belize by addressing the country's energy and education sectors.

We are making targeted investments to ensure that every child has access to quality education and opportunities. One key example is the Belize Education Upliftment Project- *Together we rise*, which provides half of Belizean secondary school students with the resources they need to succeed—including free tuition, uniforms, school supplies, and healthy meals. Belize has extended the compulsory school age to 16 years, to improve school retention rates and increase the likelihood of transitioning to higher education. We are working tirelessly to expand vocational training, digital access, and life skills development, ensuring that young people are prepared for the evolving job market and capable of driving innovation in sectors such as agriculture, climate change, and technology.

We are aggressively closing the digital divide as technology holds the promise of progress. But we depend on multilateral efforts to ensure that all nations, regardless of size or wealth, have the infrastructure and capacity to participate in the digital economy.

Education and capacity building alone are not enough. Addressing inequalities and fostering inclusion are equally critical to achieving lasting change.

The achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is central to this effort. Belize has made important progress in this area, marked by the recent launch of its Revised National Gender Policy 2024-2030, which aims to end discrimination and violence against women while promoting their full participation in all aspects of society- social, economic, and political.

Belize continues its work to ensure that every Belizean has access to high quality, affordable and efficient health care services. By January 2025, we will achieve full national health insurance coverage. We are also strengthening our mental health support systems with the goal of improving and expanding access to quality care, addressing the stigma surrounding mental health, and enhancing outreach programs, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Mr. President,

Belize is committed to the final settlement of Guatemala's territorial insular and maritime claim. We welcome Guatemala's stated commitment to respecting and abiding by the ruling of the International Court of Justice. At the political level, we are actively engaged with Guatemala to strengthen our bilateral relationship. A definitive solution will bring greater opportunities for both of our nations in the areas of trade, investment, and cooperation.

Mr. President,

Belize reaffirms its commitment to the United Nations as the central platform for coordinated global action.

But its decision-making processes need to be more inclusive, more responsive, and representative. Its institutions cannot be held back by the world as it was eighty years ago. Reform is urgent and necessary to reflect the world as it is.

Mr. President,

The youth of today have given us a clear, undeniable mandate. They demand action, accountability, and a future where they are heard, seen and respected. We ignore them at our own peril. We must not fail them. It is our responsibility to heed their calls for

change. We must deliver on our commitments and build a world that present and future generations deserve.

Thank you.