

Effective, inclusive, and sustainable multilateral actions to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

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National Address

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Excellencies and Colleagues,

I extend greetings from the people of Belize, and I want to thank the Government and people of Kenya for their warm hospitality, extending thanks also to the United Nations Environmental Programme for their unwavering support and commitment to multilateralism.

I also extend greetings from Honorable Orlando Habet, Minister of Sustainable Development, Climate Change, and Disaster Risk Management, who unfortunately is not able to be with us today due to other national commitments.

Belize is pleased to present and deliver our country's highest commitment and dedication to tackling national, regional, and global environmental issues. The sustainable development of our country remains a top priority in our national development agenda, and it has been mainstreamed in all our national plans, strategies, and policies.

Climate Change is one of the most consequential issues that Belize faces today. This year will mark the 63<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of Hurricane Hattie's passage over Belize City. The hurricane brought a storm surge of 15 feet, killing 300 Belizeans and destroying many parts of the city. Thirty years before that, another hurricane had devastated Belize city killing 3,000 Belizeans. It is because of Belize's vulnerability to extreme events that a new capital city, named Belmopan, was built 50 miles in the interior of the country.

Since then, the direction, magnitude, and velocity of climate-related risks have increased dramatically. Records show that the local average temperature has risen by one degree Celsius in only 60 years! This rise has caused frequent and prolonged episodes of coral bleaching. Over the past 4 years, the Belize Barrier Reef system, which is the second largest in the world and a UNESCO World Heritage site, has endured severe damage that could jeopardize its existence in

the future. Extended periods of high temperatures and droughts continue to severely disrupt crop production, resulting in reduced yields. Flooding and wind damage from hurricanes and tropical storms have caused severe damage to property and agricultural production across the country. All of these impacts increase the likelihood of experiencing more hunger and poverty which will particularly affect the vulnerable populations across the country.

Despite our vulnerability, Belize is committed to doing its fair share in reducing greenhouse gas concentrations to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Two years after the adoption of the convention, Belize began reducing its use of fossil fuels with the installation of the first hydroelectric facility. Since then, the capacity of this facility has tripled, and another hydroelectric facility was built and operationalized. Due to this and many other advancements, I am therefore proud to say that Belize's domestic electric generation is now over 80% from renewable energy sources.

Additionally, Belize continues to be a net carbon sink which is due to its extensively conserved, managed, and enhanced forest resources. Through the implementation of our Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), we have further committed to protecting 12,000 hectares of Mangroves and restoring 4,000 hectares by 2030. The Reduction in Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation is considered a priority due to the environmental and economic benefits that the REDD+ mechanism can provide. This mechanism will lead to the restoration of 1,400 hectares in forest ecosystem inside protected areas, as well as the restoration of 6,000 hectares of degraded and deforested riparian forests. Belize plans to further reduce local emissions by enhancing the use of off and on-grid solar energy systems and by exploring the use of onshore

wind power generation and flexible storage technologies to complement high levels of renewable power sources that are currently in use.

While we are doing all that we can do to address climate change, we recognize that the big emitters are not doing enough. Greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise while ambition to act urgently and decisively on climate change remains low. Belize therefore calls for a full transition away from fossil fuels, in accordance with the mandate given at the 28<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties. There is a need for accelerated action towards the tripling of renewable energy capacity and the doubling of energy efficiency worldwide while providing developing countries with the financial, technological, and capacity-building support needed to facilitate a just and equitable energy transition. Belize welcomes the operationalization of funding arrangements for addressing loss and damage and calls for developed nations to enhance their pledges, far beyond the USD\$661 million that was committed to date. There is an urgent need to enhance the predictability and clarity of climate finance for both adaptation and mitigation actions in Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Considering our special circumstances, we advocate for an increase in the visibility and profile of adaptation and its balance with mitigation, especially through the finalization of the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) and its Framework.

As it relates to Biodiversity, in December 2022 the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted its renewed and ambitious global framework that urges parties to take urgent action to “halt and reverse biodiversity loss to put nature on a path to recovery”. Belize now prepares for the alignment of its National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan with this global framework. The national strategy will align with the ambitious targets of halting species extinction and having zero net forest loss, the reduction of pollution, and the restoration

of degraded ecosystems, among other goals highlighting Belize's commitment to its region and the global community. The adoption of its National Restoration Strategy, which aligns its pledge of the Bonn Challenge committing the country to restoring 130,000 hectares between 2020 and 2030; includes 50,000 hectares slated for forest restoration as well as 80,000 hectares for agro-landscape regeneration. Under the Blue Bond commitments made in 2021, Belize, with the support of its partners is working on the development of the Belize Sustainable Ocean Plan which will inform on the best management approaches to ensure that our social, economic, and biodiversity needs are adequately balanced. This, together with the expansion of Belize's ocean in Biodiversity Protection Zones to 20.5%, and the designation of public lands as Mangrove Reserves, fulfils 3 of the 8 milestones of our Blue Bond Commitments.

In terms of pollution controls, Belize has recently acceded to the Minamata Convention which will greatly support our national actions to protect our population and the environment from anthropogenic emissions and releases of mercury and its compounds. We will increase our national monitoring and reporting obligations, strengthen our national capacity of the effects of mercury on our population, we will strengthen public awareness, and put in place administrative, policy, and legal frameworks to abate pollution associated with mercury.

Belize has received assistance from the GEF Special Programmes to establish a chemicals management unit with my Ministry that will advocate for the enactment of the Integrated Chemicals Management Bill and the draft Industrial Chemicals Regulations, two important and key pieces of legislation that will strengthen our national position on chemicals management. We continue to develop policies, programs, plans, and strategies to address our national issues for example, through the GEF ISLANDS Project we are developing policies and plans to address end-

of-life vehicles, management of E-waste, and plans to improve the hazardous waste cell at our national landfill site. We have prepared a national wastewater policy that considers the circular approach to waste management and established a national Recycler's Association to strengthen our national solid waste management agenda.

We have banned single-use plastics, and we are transitioning to alternatives, but we observe with great concern the delays and seemingly intentional derailing of the INC for the establishment of a global agreement on plastic pollution. Living in a country with wealth untold and having the most pristine marine areas and ecosystem, including the largest living barrier reef in the world; a world heritage site, we are pleading to you all, our esteemed colleagues to find common ground, to generate compromise on the many issues that are affecting the negotiations such as agreeing on the rules of procedures, definitions, scope of the agreement, just to name a few of the many issues.

In summary, we thank again the country of Kenya and the UNEP secretariat for the arrangement of this assembly. We confirm our unwavering commitment to effective, inclusive, and sustainable multilateral actions to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

Thank you all for the time....