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OPENING STATEMENT
25th SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
CONSIDERATION OF THE OUTCOME OF
THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW OF BELIZE
March 20, 2014

Mr. President,
Distinguished Members of the Human Rights Council,
Observer delegations,

Mr. President,

Permit me at the outset to congratulate you on your election as President of the Human Rights Council, as well as to congratulate the Bureau. My delegation is confident that you will skillfully and competently guide the work of this 25th Session.

I wish also to thank the Working Group of the Council and the Troika: Brazil, Germany and Maldives who worked with my delegation last October during the Second Universal Periodic Review of Belize. My delegation also wishes to thank the staff of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights here in Geneva, whose guidance and support has been invaluable.

Mr. President,

Belize is pleased to return to this hall for consideration and adoption of the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of Belize, contained in document A/HRC/25/13 and A/HRC/25/13.Add1 which are before the plenary today.

Before I discuss briefly the recommendations of the Working Group, I wish to reiterate the commitment of the Government of Belize to promoting and protecting the human rights of all Belizeans. Indeed the Government of Belize views human rights as fundamental to our development, our democracy and our very way of life. It is for this reason that my Government approaches the Universal Periodic Review of Belize seriously and with the frankness and sense of commitment that is indispensable to making the Review meaningful.

For Belize, the UPR is not just the process that has taken place in this chamber. The Government of Belize has taken an inclusive and consultative approach to the UPR at the national level as well. From the preparation of the Report, to its finalization at home; from the outcome of the Review in October to our consideration of how to treat with the pending recommendations -- we have at every stage involved and engaged with a wide cross section of stakeholders from other government Ministries and agencies to civil society and our citizens.

While the Government of Belize is fully committed to its singular role as the duty bearer, the active and informed engagement of Belizeans in the assessment of Government's efforts and its role is equally important to ensure that human rights is meaningful in the daily lives of Belizeans.

Mr. President,

Turning now to the recommendations arising from the Review of Belize. Last October my delegation received 103 recommendations at the conclusion of the Review of Belize. As we indicated in October: all recommendations we have received were very constructive and clearly given with the intention of assisting us to strengthen our human rights frameworks and guarantee the enjoyment of all human rights by all Belizeans.

It may be recalled that at the conclusion of the Review of Belize on 31 October 2013, my delegation indicated right away that we were able to accept 59 of the recommendations or 57% of the total recommendations received. Of these 59, we regard 26 as already being implemented. The recommendations supported by Belize related to issues such as racial discrimination, equity and non discrimination, child labour, juvenile justice, the right to health and to education, the rights of migrants and of persons with disabilities, women's rights and addressing violence against women, preventing and combating trafficking in persons, expanding the scope of international human rights treaty obligations and strengthening institutional infrastructure and policy measures. There were also a number of recommendations we accepted relating to the right to development and poverty reduction.

We are of the view that these recommendations will contribute to the strengthening of our human rights framework and deepen government's rights based approach to development. Since the Review of Belize in October, the Government has decided to make further investments in expanding access to education, health care and strengthening of the social protection system by enlarging the scope of the National Health Insurance scheme to include northern Belize, increasing the beneficiaries of the conditional cash transfer and food pantry programmes and expanding education subsidies for high school students. These concrete actions on the part of Government will serve to advance our efforts in guaranteeing the right to education, to health and to development.

We reserved our position on 44 of the recommendations, indicating then that while we found sympathy with the spirit in which these 44 recommendations were made, these required further consultations at the national level.

Mr. President,

In the four months since the Review of Belize, my Government has reflected thoughtfully on all of the recommendations received and in particular on the 44 recommendations on which we reserved our position.

I am pleased to indicate now that the Government of Belize has decided to accept a further 6

recommendations, in whole or in part. Therefore now Belize has accepted a total of 65 recommendations. Belize will thus move towards ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance as well as the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. These intended actions on the part of Government will expand the human rights framework at home. I should also note at this juncture that Belize has recently launched its internal process for preparation of our Initial Report to the Human Rights Committee in respect of the implementation of the ICCPR.

The Government of Belize has decided that it is not able to support 11 of the recommendations in part or in whole -- many of these were overlapping. These are clearly indicated in A/HRC/25/13/Add.1.

While the Government of Belize has not supported recommendations relating to extending standing invitations to special procedures mandate holders, Belize is open to considering such invitations on a case by case basis. Indeed last year Belize acceded to the request from the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children. The Special Rapporteur undertook her visit to Belize last December.

In relation to the recommendations relating to the Second Option Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and to the abolition of the death penalty, the Government of Belize is not able to support these recommendations, considering that the death penalty is a valid part of the laws of Belize. Notwithstanding it should be noted that the death penalty has not been utilized in our jurisdiction for almost 30 years.

Similarly, Belize is not able to support the recommendations relating to the minimum age of marriage, which had been increased to 16 years with parental consent and with due regard to cultural factors this would require extensive national consultations to raise even further.

The Government of Belize has decided to "note" 29 of the recommendations. These are clearly indicated in A/HRC/25/13/Add.1. Government gave thorough and thoughtful consideration to these 29 recommendations relating to about 6 themes. Belize supports the spirit in which several of these recommendations were made.

We are of the view that many require further national consultations, and others have financial implications that merit further consideration such as for example those recommendations regarding the establishment of new institutions, still others are *sub judice* such as those recommendations relating to decriminalization of the same sex activity, and a few are of such a nature that complex implementation measures are entailed -- such as those recommendations requiring Constitutional amendments.

Belize will continue to keep these 29 recommendations under review.

The continuous involvement of Belizeans in a national level dialogue on human rights is

essential to the evolution in national thinking that may lead to expanding the scope of human rights, to implementing the recommendations received during the UPR process, and to fortifying a culture of human rights:

Mr. President,

Belize remains committed to fulfilling its international human rights treaty obligations and to ensuring that the human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in our Constitution are guaranteed to every citizen. Government will continue to work to strengthen our specialized human rights institutions including the National Women's Commission, the National Committee for Families and Children, the National Council on Aging, and the National AIDS Commission -- as well as the Office of the Ombudsman and legal aid office.

The rights based approach to development, which is fully evident in our National Report, will continue to guide Government's efforts to ensure that human rights is realized in all its dimensions: legal, social, political and economic.

Mr. President,

At the national level, the UPR process has served as a catalyst for national stocktaking, reflection, dialogue and self-assessment on the effectiveness of national human rights institutions. At the global level, the UPR is a useful tool to engage in an open dialogue to share experiences and recommendations in the context of mutual assessment. However, another layer to the process is necessary, one that allows for firm exchanges of technical assistance and cooperation to support the efforts of developing countries, especially small states like Belize.

The frustrating capacity constraints we face as a small state inhibit our best intentions in areas such as timely reporting to treaty bodies. The assistance of the international community and the UN agencies is important in this regard in building capacity in treaty implementation and reporting, and in mainstreaming human rights education; this would be an added value to this UPR process.

In closing Mr. President, I want to reiterate the commitment of the Government of Belize to the international human rights system and to the promotion and protection of human rights in Belize. Belize has enshrined the basic fundamental freedoms in our Constitution, the highest law in our land. The preamble to the Belize Constitution opens by affirming and I quote "that the Nation of Belize shall be founded on the principles which acknowledgefaith in human rights and fundamental freedoms, the position of family in a society of free men and free institutions, the dignity of the human person and the equal and inalienable rights with which all members of the human family are endowed"

The Government of Belize will continue to make every effort to ensure that human rights are deeply embedded in the social, political and cultural fabric of our society. In addition to the civil and political rights we have established a solid foundation for economic, cultural and social

rights, as indicated in our National Report.

My delegation commends the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of Belize, contained in document A/HRC/25/13 and A/HRC/25/13.Add1 to the Council.

I thank you.

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