

STATEMENT
40th SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
CONSIDERATION OF THE OUTCOME OF
THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW OF BELIZE
14-15 March 2019

Mr. President,
Members of the Human Rights Council,
Distinguished delegates,

I. Introduction

Belize is pleased to be here to present its response to the recommendations received as part of its third Universal Periodic Review. Last November Belize's delegation, headed by the Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Patrick Andrews, participated in a very constructive dialogue when we appeared before the UPR Working Group for our review. I wish to take this opportunity to thank all the states that participated in this process. I also wish to thank the Working Group and the Troika: Ecuador, Nigeria, and Qatar for their most helpful contributions.

Mr. President,

Allow me to reiterate the Government of Belize's continued commitment to promoting and protecting the human rights of all in Belize. The Government has long had a human rights-based approach to development, deeply embedding them in the fabric of our society. We are convinced that there is an inextricable link between national development and human rights. We have witnessed how improving the human rights situation in our country contributes to advancing national development, as well as to the realization of the international sustainable development agenda. It is in this spirit that we continue to value our participation within the UPR mechanism, regarding it as an important tool to promote and protect human rights around the world.

II: Recommendations - General

Mr. President,

Turning now to the recommendations arising from the Review of Belize. Last November, my delegation received 124 recommendations on several important issues. At the conclusion of our review, my delegation immediately accepted 98 recommendations or close to 80% of the total recommendations received. We were able to readily accept these recommendations as we considered the majority aligned with existing policies and processes of which the Government has undertaken or is in the process of implementing. Other recommendations were accepted as they clearly built on supported recommendations from our previous UPR cycles- demonstrating Belize's progress and its commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights.

While we acknowledge that all recommendations received were given in the spirit of helping to promote human rights in our jurisdiction, we noted 20 recommendations, in part or in whole, after thoughtful consideration. Belize nevertheless supports the spirit in which several of these recommendations were made. We also reserved our position on 6 recommendations, so as to enable us to carefully consider them through consultations at the national level.

After careful consideration of these recommendations, I am pleased to indicate that the Government of Belize has decided to accept a further 2 recommendations. Belize now has accepted a total of 100 recommendations.

The Government noted an additional 3 recommendations, and rejected 1 recommendation, as it was based on inaccurate information, as explained in the addendum document.

III: Recommendations – Accepted by Belize

Mr. President,

While time will not permit me to elaborate on each recommendation, I wish to highlight some that the Government of Belize has accepted and is committed to working on. I will now proceed to share some of these based on their thematic focus.

National Human Rights Framework

Mr. President, The Government of Belize has acknowledged the need for an Independent Human Rights Institution, in line with the Paris Principles. This is why we accepted close to all recommendations on this issue.

As explained in our national report, while Belize does not have a single overarching national human rights institution, it does have several specialized human rights institutions that focus on the implementation of specific conventions including those relating to the rights of children, women, the elderly, and those living with HIV. Additionally, there is the Office of the Ombudsman to receive and investigate complaints in relation to any public authority.

Mr. President, The Government is currently working on undertaking a feasibility study for the establishment of a National Human Rights Institution in accordance with the Paris Principles. Belize continues to dialogue with its partners, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on the matter.

Equality and Non-Discrimination

Mr. President, Belize accepted the majority of recommendations concerning equality and non-discrimination. Our Constitution guarantees the protection of every person in Belize from any type of discrimination. As we informed in our

national report, the Supreme Court recently upheld the constitutional guarantee of non-discrimination by striking down Section 53 of the Criminal Code, which criminalized consensual sexual intercourse between two adults of the same sex.

In order to directly address issues related to discrimination, including against LGBTI individuals, the Government is in the process of developing an Anti-Discrimination Bill that is intended to address non-discrimination in a comprehensive manner.

Mr. President, Belize will continue to work on measures to fight all forms of discrimination, including those based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Prohibition of all forms of Slavery, Trafficking

Mr. President, Belize accepted all recommendations concerning trafficking in persons. Our Trafficking in Persons Prohibition Act was revised in 2013 to assist in addressing the issue of trafficking in persons by increasing the penalties and establishing an Anti-trafficking in Persons (ATIPs) Council. We continue our ongoing efforts in public education and training of front line stakeholders in victim identification and referral. Furthermore, in 2017 the Executive directed a number of measures aimed at improving the prosecution of human trafficking cases.

Gender Discrimination- Women

Mr. President, A large number of the recommendations received relate to discrimination against women, and Belize accepted the majority of these. The Government of Belize has long been advancing its work on the implementation of our National Policy on Gender Equality adopted in March of 2013. Furthermore, Belize's National Women's Commission (NWC) established the National Gender and Gender-based Violence Committee and the District Gender-based Violence Committees as an integrated, multifaceted, multi-sectorial response to addressing all forms of gender issues with respect to the five priority areas of Health, Education, Wealth and Employment, Power and Decision-making, and Gender-Based Violence (GBV).

We are committed to continue our efforts to combat violence against women, including, *inter alia*, through the drafting of updated national implementation plans on Gender-Based Violence, the cross-sectional training of front-line officers, national surveillance systems, and strengthened psychosocial support to women and survivors.

Right to Education, Health, Development

Mr. President, A number of states called on Belize to continue its work in the fields of education, health and development. We accepted all of these recommendations, as we recognize that there's always more that can be done in these sectors. The Government continues its investments in expanding access to education, health care, and strengthening its social protection system.

Mr. President,

These are only but a few examples of how the Government of Belize has already implemented, or is in the process of implementing, the accepted recommendations. We recognize that these recommendations will contribute to the strengthening of our human rights framework and deepen our government's rights-based approach to development.

IV: Recommendations – Noted by Belize

Mr. President,

Allow me now to turn to the 23 recommendations the Government has noted. While we have not supported recommendations relating to extending standing invitations to special procedures mandate holders, Belize continues to express its openness to considering such invitations on a case-by-case basis. On the recommendations relating to the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR and the abolition of the death penalty, Belize reiterates that it has reported no use of the death penalty for close to 35 years now, even though it still remains in our law books.

Many of the other noted recommendations continue to be the subject of further necessary national consultation, as in some instances they would require Constitutional and legislative amendments, while others have financial implications.

V: Closing

Mr. President,

As I close, let me underscore the Government of Belize's continued commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and to the UPR mechanism, notwithstanding the limited financial, technical, and human resource constraints it faces. Belize remains fully committed to its reporting obligations, and takes this opportunity to inform that it has prioritized reporting this year on other human rights treaties, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICMW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Mr. President, The Government of Belize will continue to work steadily in the implementation of the new commitments it has made through the UPR progress. Our role as Governments to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights for all is assisted greatly by the international community through processes such as the UPR. For small states like Belize, the assistance of the international community and the UN agencies continue to be an important source of capacity building and support. We take this opportunity to thank the staff of the Office of

the High Commissioner for Human Rights here in Geneva for their invaluable guidance and assistance.

Mr. President, Members of the Human Rights Council, Distinguished Delegates, thank you for the opportunity to deliver these remarks. We look forward to our next constructive engagement at the Human Rights Council.

I thank you.