

**Statement of Hon. John Briceño, Prime Minister of Belize
76th Session of the General Assembly – General Debate
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LET'S GO FORWARD TOGETHER

Mr President, congratulations on being elected President of the General Assembly.

It is a great pleasure to see a representative of a fellow Small Island Developing State presiding over the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly.

For a small island and low-lying coastal State like Belize, which three days ago celebrated forty years of political Independence, the world today is hostile and precarious.

No one can deny that the planet is getting hotter.

The facts are that July 2021 was the hottest month ever.

Each of the last four decades has been successively warmer than any decade that preceded it since 1850.

Global temperature is now 1.2 degrees warmer.

Sea levels are rising.

The fact is that global average sea level has risen faster since 1900 than over any preceding century in the last 3000 years.

Since 1900 droughts are unprecedented and have become more frequent and last longer.

Severe weather events are more frequent and devastating.

The last twenty years have seen the number of major floods more than double, while the incidence of storms grew from 1,457 to 2,034.

Mother nature is rebelling.

She is reacting to our destructive tendencies, and our refusal to take urgent corrective action.

We can do better.

And now Mr. President, our capacity to survive is being tested by the unrelenting COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID brought the Belizean economy to its knees.

Unemployment reached 30 percent as thousands of Belizeans lost their jobs.

GDP declined by 14 percent.

Our debt ballooned to 130 percent of GDP.

Many businesses were shuttered.

The poverty rate increased to 60 percent.

The impact of the pandemic has been swift, dramatic and devastating.

The human toll has been deadly.

Already 399 Belizeans lost their lives to COVID-19; we have a fatality rate of 2.05 percent.

Thousands have been hospitalized so far.

Our health facilities are overwhelmed as they were unprepared for the surge in admission of critical patients.

This is not unique to Belize.

To confront the urgency of the pandemic, Governments across the globe reallocated funds to meet desperate needs.

Loans originally committed for development and climate change, were diverted to cover emergency health needs and to mitigate the impact on the unemployed.

Massive additional borrowings became the new normal as lockdowns were extended.

The Common Framework and Debt Service Suspension Initiative failed to offer forbearance to most middle-income SIDS, including Belize, who were ineligible despite our debt unsustainability.

At the same time, most of our countries had no recourse to concessionary financing to fund the immediate health response.

El compromiso de Belice a la conservación es ambicioso.

Reconocemos que nuestra deuda es insostenible y la vamos a ligar directamente a la conservación.

Vamos a intercambiar millones de dólares en deuda para compromisos importantes en conservación del mar.

Esperamos que 30 por ciento de nuestra zona económica exclusiva sera designada como area protegida antes del 2026; mucho antes del año 2030.

Aun mas estableceremos un fondo para la conservación maritima en perpetuidad.

En este área orgullosamente estaremos en la vanguardia debido a nuestro amor a la naturaleza y respeto por el medio ambiente.

With the advent of the vaccine, Government self-financed its acquisition from COVAX and concurrently reached out to bilateral partners to solicit vaccine donations.

It was vaccines from our south south partners which allowed Government to roll out our national vaccination programme.

Mr President, the immediate global response was slow and inadequate to the scale and depth of the health crisis.

Disruption of supply chains made access to the much-needed COVID-19 therapeutics, diagnostics and PPEs beyond the reach of many developing countries.

Vaccine hoarding has reduced access to COVID-19 vaccines for developing countries, undermining COVAX and leading to deep and threatening inequalities.

Eighty percent of vaccines administered worldwide have been in high and upper middle income countries.

Only 0.4 percent of doses have been administered in low-income countries.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the region worst hit by the pandemic, only about a fifth of the population has received vaccines.

A pesar de las inequidades inmorales, los países que tienen un grado mas alto de vacunacion, están a punto de administrar inyecciones de refuerzo a sus poblaciones que ya están vacunados.

No solamente es injusto, simplemente es lamentable.

Ciertamente el mundo necesita urgentemente volver a comprometerse al multi-lateralismo.

Belize exists today because of the multilateral system.

The support of UN Member States for Belize's territorial integrity and respect for our right to self-determination was critical to the achievement of Belize's independence.

For us the multilateral system is indispensable.

For this reason, Belize supports the Secretary General's thoughtful and forward looking "Our Common Agenda," which sets out a concise plan of action to accelerate the implementation of our agreed goals, including Agenda 2030.

Despite the inclination to retreat towards nationalist tendencies the truth is that whether it is the health or climate crisis — the scale of the challenge, the magnitude of the impact and the urgency of the action required, cannot be met by any one country alone.

Exclusion, inequality and vulnerabilities are also threats to the rich and strong.

Therefore, our common future depends squarely on our solidarity, international cooperation and a strong and effective multilateral system.

We must commit to finding solutions, **together**, to the common problems that we confront. Unbridled uni-lateral-ism must yield to a settled determination to respond to the major problems of our times with social justice.

My country is pursuing along with Guatemala, the final and peaceful resolution of Guatemala's Claim to Belizean territory at the International Court of Justice. In the meantime, the 2005 Agreement on Confidence Building Measures remains in effect, and our bilateral relations continue to be based on mutual goodwill.

We count on Guatemala to remain a constructive partner and rely on the international community to support us in addressing the daily challenges along the border that are inevitable between neighbours.

If the multilateral system is to be our collective lifeline, it must be re-purposed.

I wish to propose 4 areas for the reform and strengthening of the multilateral system:

We call for a **genuine commitment to address the systemic issues** which undermine the achievement of our agreed development goals.

The continued in-eli-gi-bility of SIDS from accessing concessional finance, leaves us in a vicious cycle of disaster or crisis recovery-borrowing leading to unsustainable levels of debt.

This must be disrupted.

A multidimensional vulnerability index is the indispensable tool for restoring rationality to access affordable financing.

We, therefore welcome the work of the UN and other development partners such as the Commonwealth and the Caribbean Development Bank in developing an MVI that does not only consider economic development but also the inherent vulnerabilities of SIDS, scale, geography, and limited natural resources.

We need to adopt an MVI now.

We call upon all the international financial institutions and our development partners to use it. There is no alternative if our countries are to embark on a sustainable and resilient economic development path.

If our multilateral system is to remain credible it must have the **capacity to induce action**. For far too long, too many global problems have been allowed to fester; and become crises.

The entire world is now experiencing the consequences of our inaction: catastrophic droughts, fires, floods and more frequent and intense hurricanes that continue to affect and set back our small, open and dependent economies.

The latest scientific assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change lays the blame firmly on human activity.

Belize, like other SIDS, is on the frontline of a climate crisis for which we are not responsible.

Belize incurs annual losses of close to 4 percent of GDP due to natural disasters.

Therefore, we felt an obligation to put forward an ambitious revised Nationally Determined Contribution.

Belize's NDC covers new targets in both adaptation and mitigation.

It is naturally aligned to both our national development plans and the SDGs.

We have set some ambitious targets, including forest restoration and expansion of mangroves as well as achieving 75 percent of electricity from renewable sources by 2030.

The NDC also pledges to transition to a hybrid and electric public transportation system, increase resilience of coastal communities and strengthen the adaptive capacity of agriculture, health and tourism.

Belize is committed to developing a long-term strategy aligned with achieving net zero global emissions by 2050.

We are doing our part.

We expect the developed countries and major emitters to do their part.

Indeed, ambitious commitments from the G-20 alone, can keep us on the path to limiting global temperature to 1.5 degrees Celcius.

COP 26 is our last best hope to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level.

We call for a ramping up of collective ambition so that by 2030 global emissions are reduced by 50 percent.

Developed countries and those in a position to do so must provide the financial, technical and capacity building support to enable us to fulfill those pledges.

This includes meeting and exceeding the 100-billion-dollar pledge made in Copenhagen twelve years ago.

Additional support must also be provided for the loss and damage being incurred through the extreme and slow onset climatic events we are already experiencing.

Flexibility and responsiveness are critical if our multilateral system is to have relevance at moments of crisis as well as to ensure equity and fairness in global responses.

COVAX, the multilateral mechanism for vaccine distribution has been unable to truly respond to the needs of its subscribers.

The undermining of COVAX through export bans, vaccine hoarding and predatory purchasing has resulted in extreme inequality of access to vaccines.

Of the more than 5.7 billion vaccine doses that have been administered globally, 73 per cent have been given in just 10 countries.

COVAX has had to cut its forecast for distribution of vaccines by 25 percent for 2021.

Belize has no delivery date for its next COVAX shipment.

As the Director General of the WHO said: "the longer vaccine inequity persists, the more the virus will keep circulating and changing, the longer the social and economic disruption will continue, and the higher the chances that more variants will emerge that render vaccines less effective."

The health and recovery of all of us, depend on the ability of our system to rapidly respond to the needs of all countries.

The multilateral system must be more **effective in protecting the rights of all people**.

Too many people remain marginalized and excluded, weakening the social contract, eroding trust in our multilateral system to deliver.

Mr President,

the persistent call of the General Assembly over three decades to end the illegal embargo against the Cuban people has been ignored.

The Cuban people are forced to carve out their sustainable development under the burden of the illegal, unilateral economic, commercial and financial embargo.

The new measures imposed by the past US administration and now continued and widened by the present one during a pandemic are unbelievably cruel and inhumane.

These measures bring suffering to millions of innocent people and do not reflect the good will of the people of the United States of America.

Nevertheless, Cuba has made significant sacrifices to help other peoples of the world, including Belizeans.

Our Palestinian brothers and sisters continue to suffer under an oppressive apartheid and illegal Israeli occupation.

Belize fully supports the aspirations of the Palestinians for an independent state, within its 1967 borders, with all attendant rights, including the recognition of East Jerusalem as its capital and the right of return.

And the Sahawari people are similarly being prevented from exercising their right to self-determination.

We urge the relevant parties and the international community to support them in their efforts.

Belize is also deeply concerned about the situation of Haiti and about the regional and global inaction to offer a genuine and substantive programme of support.

We are alarmed at the inhumane treatment of Haitian refugees who are risking their lives, traversing two continents for a better future.

We therefore, call on the UN to galvanize action of the Member States and its development system to support the development of a Haitian led solution restoring its stability and security.

Our multilateral system must also be inclusive, harnessing the capacity of all States to scale up international cooperation where it is most needed.

Belize has benefited greatly from our diplomatic partnership with Taiwan that is based on the shared values of democracy, freedom, human rights and the rule of law.

Taiwan has provided tremendous assistance to Belize in terms of medical supplies and financial support, so Belize is better equipped in combating COVID-19 and conducting post- Pandemic recovery.

Belize calls for Taiwan's inclusion in the United Nations and its Specialized Agencies, which will not only further enhance global cooperation and partnership, but also manifest the United Nation's enshrined principle of universality.

Mr President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen it is crystal clear that the confluence of crises facing the world can only be addressed through solidarity, international cooperation and multilateral approaches.

Let us not return to this great hall in September 2022 to lament further inaction.

Let us not return next year to again decry uni-lateral-ism, nationalism, and failed collective action.

No, Mr President, we must move forward together!

We can defeat COVID-19 but we can only do so together.

We must save the planet from the irreversible effects of climate change, but only if we act collectively and urgently.

Together, we can reform the world's financial architecture to guarantee debt relief, make available affordable financing, and adopt a multidimensional vulnerability index.

Together, we must lift billions out of poverty and provide affordable housing, education and health care.

Failure is not an option.

We believe in the power of humanity.

In the noble spirit of mankind.

We have confidence that we can, and we will make the world a better place.

The people of Belize, the citizens of the world expect nothing less.

Thank you.