



**Statement by**  
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**Peoples' Affairs**  
**On behalf of the Government of Belize**

**90<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against**  
**Women (CEDAW)**

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## **Opening Statement:**

**Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Members of the Committee, Excellencies, Representatives of Civil Society, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On behalf of the Government of Belize, I express our profound gratitude for this opportunity to present our combined fifth to ninth periodic reports under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). It is an honour to be here among esteemed representatives dedicated to advancing gender equality and the rights of women globally.

This occasion marks a significant moment for Belize as we reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the principles enshrined in CEDAW. Belize is a proud member of the global community striving to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, ensuring their full and equal participation in every facet of our society. I welcome this opportunity to engage in an open and constructive dialogue with the Committee today.

I acknowledge the Chairperson of the Committee, Ms. Ana Peláez Narváez from Spain; Ms Rhoda Reddock, the country rapporteur for Belize and other members of the Committee.

Allow me to introduce the delegation accompanying me today. I am honoured to lead this team as the Head of Delegation, the Honorable Elvia Vega Samos, Minister of State in the Ministry of Human Development, Families, and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs. Joining me are Mr. Dylan Williams, Director of Policy and Planning at the Ministry of Human Development, Families, and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, whose extensive experience in policy development, policy coordination, and gender and GBV programming strengthens our delegation. Additionally, Mrs. Eleanor Murillo, in her capacity as Executive Director of the National Women's Commission, brings leadership from the coordination authority of gender and GBV in Belize. Additionally, allow me to recognize the commitment and dedication of the Belize Team watching via the livestream, as it is 3 am Belize time, this is the kind of dedication that has allow us to progressive realize the outcomes for women and girls in Belize.

Since ratifying CEDAW in 1990, the Convention has been instrumental in guiding Belize's efforts to address laws, policies, and the cultural shifts required to advance gender

equality and equity. Over the years, Belize has made significant strides in aligning national frameworks with CEDAW's standards, through legislative and institutional measures and programmes. Despite challenges, including economic uncertainties and climate-related vulnerabilities, the Government of Belize has prioritized gender equality as a cornerstone of national development. This commitment is reflected in the multi-sectoral collaboration underpinning CEDAW implementation and reporting processes, demonstrating Belize's holistic approach to addressing gender disparities and advancing the rights and opportunities of women and girls. Together, we are resolute in tackling the multifaceted challenges they face.

### *Report Preparation Process*

The drafting of this periodic report was guided by the September 2022 Guidelines issued by the United Nations Office of High Commissioner on Human Rights (UNOHCHR). It also followed the Government of Belize's process for preparing national reports regarding the implementation of conventions, which requires stakeholders' input and Cabinet's approval.

In 2011, the Ministry of Human Development, Families & Indigenous Peoples' Affairs (formerly the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation, and Poverty Alleviation) oversaw the drafting process of the combined report. Stakeholders from 34 governmental agencies, statutory bodies, and NGOs participated in a consultative process through the Family Support and Gender Affairs Department (at the time named Women's Department). The National Women's Commission took the lead in drafting the updated version between October 2022 and February 2023 with input from 40 governmental agencies, statutory bodies, gender focal points, and NGOs through an online qualitative questionnaire, interviews, and three virtual review and validation sessions.

This inclusive process highlights Belize's commitment to a multisectoral approach, crucial for progressively realizing the CEDAW Convention. Engaging diverse stakeholders ensures that gender policies and legislative reforms address the real needs of women and girls, strengthening the foundation for sustainable gender equity.

### ***Achievements and Progress***

Madam Chairperson, since our last review, Belize has achieved several milestones aimed at advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. These achievements are categorized into five critical areas:

#### Legislative Amendments:

Since the last review, Belize has made significant progress in advancing legal protections and rights for women and girls, strengthening its commitment to the CEDAW framework.

Notable legislative advancements include:

- The enactment of the National Women's Commission Act in 2023, which formalized the Commission's role in advancing gender equality and ensuring alignment with CEDAW principles.
- The Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence (Prohibition) Act, currently before Parliament, which addresses gaps in access to justice and enhances protections for survivors of gender-based violence.
- The passage of the Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2024, which raises the legal age of marriage to 18 and prohibits parental consent for minors to marry, aligning with CEDAW's commitment to ending child marriage and advancing the rights and well-being of young women in Belize.
- A revised and stronger Anti-Sexual Harassment Act, which strengthens workplace protections against harassment and ensures safe and equitable environments for women and girls.
- Amendments to the Married Women's Property Act, which secure and expand women's economic rights, particularly regarding property ownership and financial independence.
- The Disabilities Act, which reinforces the rights of women and girls with disabilities, ensuring their full inclusion in all aspects of social, economic, and political life.
- The Cybercrime Act 2021, which includes provisions addressing cyberbullying and online harassment, offering additional legal protections for women and girls in digital spaces.

- The Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2013, which aligns with the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, addressing labor and sex trafficking and forced marriage.
- Belize has acceded to the Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons, reinforcing its commitment to safeguarding the rights and well-being of older women.

These legal reforms mark a continued and strengthened commitment by Belize to uphold and enhance the rights of women, ensuring comprehensive protections and fostering gender equity in all spheres of life.

## **2. Institutional Strengthening:**

A strong institutional framework is essential for the effective implementation of gender policies and programs. Since the last review, Belize has undertaken significant reforms to enhance institutional capacity, improve data-driven decision-making, and strengthen collaboration between governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to ensure sustained progress in advancing women's rights.

- Expanding Belize's global engagement on gender and social development, Belize has actively participated on the ECOSOC Commission on Social Development (CoSD) and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), reinforcing its commitment to advancing social protection, gender equality, and inclusive development at the international level.
- The National Gender Policy 2024–2030 represents a landmark achievement in Belize's ongoing efforts to promote gender equality. The policy provides a comprehensive framework addressing gender-responsive healthcare, education, economic empowerment, institutional strengthening, women's leadership, and the elimination of gender-based violence. This policy builds upon previous efforts, replacing an earlier version that has since expired, and reaffirms the Government's commitment to a gender-equitable society.
- The National Women's Commission has been restructured to enhance its capacity to implement gender-related initiatives and ensure sustained progress in advancing women's rights.

- The Government of Belize, through the Ministry of Human Development, Families, and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, has expanded the scope of the Women and Family Support Department to the Family Support and Gender Affairs Department. This restructuring demonstrates the government's commitment to gender equity and equality by ensuring a more comprehensive approach to addressing gender-related issues and providing holistic support for women and families.
- To further strengthen women's economic participation, Belize has established the Economic Empowerment Unit within the Family Support and Gender Affairs Department, which enhances financial independence through skills training, access to microfinance, and employment opportunities.
- Strengthening Gender Mainstreaming within Government, Belize actively engages in the Gender Focal Point (GFP) Committee, a key mechanism that ensures gender perspectives are integrated across policies, programs, and decision-making processes within government institutions.
- Guiding national gender priorities, the Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs Gender Roadmap serves as a strategic framework to address disparities in leadership, education, and economic participation, complemented by Gender Advocates who drive awareness and policy action at all levels.
- Enhancing GBV response through a coordinated approach, Belize has developed and implemented GBV Multisectoral Protocols alongside the GBV Referral Mechanism and Pathway, improving collaboration among law enforcement, healthcare providers, legal aid services, and social support agencies. These efforts have streamlined survivor support services, ensuring more timely and effective interventions.
- Recognizing institutions that champion gender equality, Belize has introduced the Gender Equality and Diversity Seal, a certification program promoting gender-sensitive policies, inclusive workplaces, and equal opportunities.
- Enhancing support for survivors of violence, the expansion and strengthening of GBV hotlines now provide 24/7 crisis assistance, with accessibility via the two main providers using multiple modality such as regular calls, SMS, and WhatsApp.

- Strengthening GBV Data Collection and Analysis, Belize has advanced efforts to improve GBV data collection, coordination, and reporting efficiency through the Integrated Data Collection and Reporting System (IDCRS). Additionally, the development of National Gender and GBV Indicators and a comprehensive review of existing data systems for potential inter-operability are key steps toward ensuring more integrated, evidence-based decision-making and policy responses to gender-based violence.
- In collaboration with the Belize Crime Observatory, an annual report on violence against women and girls, including domestic violence, sexual violence, and femicide, has been institutionalized to guide evidence-based policymaking.

### *3. Women in Leadership and Public Life:*

Ensuring women's full participation in leadership is essential for gender equality and sustainable development. Since our last review, Belize continues to make progress in increasing women's representation in leadership across various sectors, strengthening governance, and fostering inclusive policies. Promoting gender parity remains a national priority, with efforts focused on empowering women and ensuring equal opportunities in public life.

- Women now account for 22% of Belize's National Assembly, the highest representation in our history. The establishment of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus in 2023 is a powerful step forward in creating an inclusive and equitable legislative environment. The caucus acts as a formal platform to discuss gender-related issues, addressing legislative gaps, advocating for policy changes, and promoting women's leadership.
- While Belize continues to make strides in gender equality, the need for additional resources remains critical—especially for behaviour change strategies that tackle deep-rooted social norms and attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality and gender-based violence.
- Training programs under the Engaging Men and Boys initiative have fostered community dialogues and challenged harmful gender norms, supporting women's participation in leadership roles.

- Belize's judiciary is a model of gender inclusivity, with women leading major judicial and prosecutorial offices, including the naming of an acting female Chief Justice in 2019 and the appointment of a female Chief Justice in 2022 to lead the helm of the justice sector in Belize.

#### *4. Economic Empowerment:*

Achieving economic empowerment for women is vital for fostering financial independence, reducing poverty, and promoting sustainable development. Since our last review, Belize has intensified its efforts to enhance women's economic participation through targeted initiatives and policy reforms.

- Over 1,000 women have received training in business strategy, digital skills, and entrepreneurship through initiatives like the Belize Women's Economic Empowerment Project, which emphasizes resilience-building for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs).
- The Decent Work Country Programme, launched in 2024, focuses on women's economic empowerment through skills training, labour rights awareness, and access to financial resources.
- Programs such as BOOST (Building Opportunities for Our Social Transformation) and BOOST+ address multidimensional poverty and support female-headed households through targeted cash transfers and vocational training.

#### *5. Education and Health:*

Since our last review, Belize has made significant strides in improving education and healthcare systems to promote gender equality and enhance opportunities for women and girls.

- Belize has made strides in integrating gender-sensitive approaches into education, including introducing a Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM) Academy to encourage girls' participation in high-income careers.
- Comprehensive sexuality education has been integrated into the National Health Curriculum to address social norms and promote gender equality.



- Programs targeting school dropout rates among girls due to early pregnancies or child marriage have been initiated, ensuring continuity in education for young mothers.
- Belize has increased access to primary health care by completing the full national coverage of the National Health Insurance as of January 2025, ensuring equitable access to healthcare services for women and girls across all districts.

### ***Challenges and Commitments***

Madam Chairperson, while these achievements demonstrate progress, we recognize that challenges persist. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated pre-existing inequalities, disproportionately affecting women and girls. In response, Belize implemented targeted social protection measures, such as the Belize COVID-19 Cash Transfer Program, benefiting over 21,000 households, and ensuring economic relief reached the most vulnerable.

Belize continues to confront systemic challenges, including:

***Institutional Challenges:*** Like many other countries, Belize faces constraints in adequately staffing and retaining professionals in key gender and social service sectors. The increasing frequency and complexity of social challenges, coupled with high staff turnover, place additional strain on institutions responsible for gender equality and human rights implementation.

***Resource Limitations:*** Insufficient investments and funding gaps hinder the ability to address these challenges sustainably and to implement long-term structural reforms that can systematically alter the trajectory of gender-based issues. Strengthening resource allocation remains crucial for ensuring sustained progress and effective policy execution.

***Gender-Based Violence:*** Despite enhanced legislative frameworks, gender-based violence remains prevalent. In 2023, Belize recorded a 5% increase in domestic violence cases, underscoring the need for strengthened preventative measures and survivor support systems. The National Gender-Based Violence Action Plan and its accompanying Behavioural Change Communication Campaign, "It Ends with Me," aim to challenge harmful norms and reduce violence against women and girls.

**Climate Change:** As a small island developing state, Belize faces disproportionate impacts of climate change, which heightens vulnerabilities for women, particularly in rural and indigenous communities. Our National Climate Change Gender Action Plan addresses these intersecting challenges, promoting resilience and adaptation strategies.

**Intersectional Discrimination:** Indigenous women, women with disabilities, and LGBTQI individuals face compounded barriers to accessing justice, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Belize is committed to addressing these disparities through inclusive policies and programs. Initiatives like the Essential Services Package for Women Subject to Violence ensure holistic support for marginalized groups.

### **Looking Ahead**

The Government of Belize remains steadfast in its dedication to fully realizing gender equality. Our roadmap for the future includes:

- Expanding access to gender-responsive social services, including healthcare and education, with a focus on rural and marginalized populations.
- Enhancing data systems to ensure evidence-based policymaking, including the enhancement and interoperability between data systems, development of research on gender and GBV through surveys and administrative data, and establishment of the IDCERS for gender-based violence.
- Strengthening partnerships with civil society, development partners, and international organizations to scale up interventions addressing the root causes of gender inequality.
- Advocating for removing of cultural and structural barriers that hinder women's full participation in public and private life as well as in the labour force.
- Promoting initiatives targeting young women and girls to foster leadership skills and address harmful cultural norms at an early age.
- Strengthening the legislative framework remains a priority, with the passage of the Families Bill (2025) and other legal advancements to protect families, particularly women and girls. These reforms aim to enhance legal safeguards, improve access to justice, and reinforce social protections, ensuring alignment with international human rights standards.

## ***Acknowledgments***

Madam Chairperson, none of these achievements would have been possible without the collaboration and support of our national and international partners. The Government of Belize extends its gratitude to UN agencies, regional bodies, and civil society organizations for their unwavering commitment to our shared vision.

As we embark on this constructive dialogue, we reaffirm our commitment to the Convention and welcome the Committee's recommendations, which will serve as a guiding framework for our continued efforts.

## ***Conclusion***

In conclusion, Belize recognizes that the journey toward gender equality is ongoing. We approach this dialogue with humility, determination, and a firm resolve to address the challenges before us. Together, let us forge a path that ensures every woman and girl in Belize can live a life free from discrimination, violence, and inequality, empowered to reach her full potential.

The Government of Belize would also like to extend its sincere appreciation to the Commonwealth Small States Office here in Geneva. We especially recognize and highlight the exceptional support from Yashasvi Nain and Phumlani Dlamini, Human Rights Advisers, whose dedication and guidance have been invaluable throughout this process.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson, and distinguished members of the Committee. We look forward to your insights and guidance as we continue this critical work.