Presentation on Belize's engagement with human rights treaty bodies, including the country's experience with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund regional workshop, June 4, 2026, Bridgetown, Barbados

A. Belize's engagement with human rights treaty bodies

1) The Government of Belize (GOB) values its engagement with the human rights treaty body ecosystem and recognizes the vital important of these mechanisms in strengthening national human rights policies, legislation, and implementation efforts. For developing countries with limited financial and human resources, engagement with treaty bodies can at times be challenging; however, it remains an important and worthwhile process. In many instances, a single technical officer may be responsible for multiple major portfolios and reporting obligations simultaneously, which can result in delays or gaps in follow-up. Nevertheless, the reporting process and subsequent recommendations often serve as an important mechanism for bringing key issues into national focus and sustaining policy attention.

2) GOB has found that treaty body recommendations frequently complement and build upon recommendations emerging from the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, thereby reinforcing national priorities and encouraging greater coherence across the broader human rights agenda. We also value the diverse technical expertise of treaty body members, whose perspectives often provide useful insights and approaches.

3) GOB remains deeply appreciative of the support received throughout the reporting and engagement process. In particular, the Commonwealth has remained a key partner in supporting preparatory efforts, coordination, and capacity-building initiatives. At the national level, we continue to strengthen inter-institutional coordination and collaboration among ministries and agencies involved in reporting and follow-up processes, through ad-hoc committees as required.

4) Simultaneously, financial constraints continue to present practical difficulties, particularly with respect to ensuring broad and adequately representative delegations during treaty body dialogues. In the case of Belize's engagement with CEDAW, discussions covered a wide range of areas including: health, security, legal reform, and education. However, resource limitations meant that not all relevant sectors could be represented within the delegation. This can affect a state's ability to fully respond to issues raised and to adequately convey the unique national context and realities faced by small developing countries.

5) In this regard, Belize would welcome continued discussion on how the treaty body system might further support greater inclusivity and accessibility for small states with limited resources. Consideration could perhaps be given to more flexible or shared-cost approaches for participation, or to periodic in-country engagements that would allow treaty bodies to better appreciate national circumstances firsthand and foster deeper dialogue with local stakeholders and institutions. Such approaches could further strengthen mutual understanding, enhance

implementation, and reinforce the cooperative spirit underpinning the international human rights system.

B. Belize's experience with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) – In broad strokes

1) As a brief introduction, CEDAW was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979. It is essentially a comprehensive framework for advancing women's rights and achieving gender equality; often referred to as the international bill of rights for women.

2) In 1990, 11 years later, Belize signed and ratified CEDAW. Then 12 years after that, in 2002, Belize acceded to the CEDAW Optional Protocol for individual communication and investigation procedure.

3) Three (3) years later, in 2005, Belize submitted a combined 3rd and 4th periodic report to the CEDAW Committee; and received concluding comments by said Committee in 2007, which recommended that Belize submit its combined 5th and 6th periodic report by 2011. Although a state report was submitted in 2012, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) did not accept said report pending revisions, updates and resubmission.

4) Eleven (11) years later, in 2023, the 5th-9th report was successfully submitted; then in 2024 a high-level delegation including the then Minister of State went before the Committee of Experts to respond to additional questions.

5) The Committee concluding observation and Report included 48 thematic areas for improvement, including: the constitution and other legislation, health, education, the national gender machinery, gender-based violence, employment, economic empowerment of women, and data collection and analysis.

6) Key concluding observations which have been accepted and are currently being worked on by Belize, include: a) ensuring that the national machinery for the advancement of women is funded from the regular budget in order to gradually reduce dependence on donor funding, b) incorporation of gender and intersectional perspectives in all laws and policies of the State to ensure gender mainstreaming across all ministries and branches of government, which is ongoing, and c) ensuring the equal participation and meaningful consultation of Indigenous women including Mayan, Creole, and Garifuna women in the planning, implementation and monitoring of policies that affect them.

7) Ultimately, Belize commits to build a gender-responsive governance framework which ensures that the rights and needs of women are systematically integrated into national development priorities; as it recognizes the nexus between women's empowerment and the economic development of the State.

C. Various pertinent topics (concise)

1) International Cooperation Council (ICC) – The GOB recently established an ICC within the Foreign Ministry which helps the Ministry to track development assistance from bilateral, regional and multilateral sources by thematic areas of focus, for instance women's economic empowerment, which helps with planning, accountability and transparency.

2) National Human Rights Institute (NHRI) – In order to become compliant with the Paris Principles, the GOB is currently considering the strengthening of the Office of the Ombudsman's Office so that it can serve as the country's NHRI; thus, "killing two birds with one stone".

3) Cultivating champions of human rights globally – Kudos was given to the Human Rights Council (HRC), the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund and other treaty bodies for cultivating champions of human rights globally. This was a long-term endeavour which sought to build a culture of respect for international human rights law (IHRL) and compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL): domestically, regionally and internationally.

4) Common Core Document (CCD): A long winding road – The GOB has not yet submitted its CCD which is approximately 20 years over-due; nonetheless, it has not allowed "the good to be the enemy of the perfect" and has faithfully submitted other treaty specific reports, as required. However, on the bright side the GOB was nearing completion of its first-ever CCD which was expected to be submitted in 2026.

5) Closing thought – I believe that we are the generation that will make the world a better place than we found it.

END.

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