



HAUT-COMMISSARIAT AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME • OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
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Excellency,

I have been following the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Belize and welcome the constructive engagement of your Government during the 31st session of the UPR Working Group in November 2018.

As the final outcome report on the review of Belize has been recently adopted by the Human Rights Council at its 40th session, I would like to take this opportunity to follow up on a number of areas raised in the two reports that my Office had prepared for the review of Belize – the Compilation of United Nations information and the Summary of Stakeholders' submissions – which I consider in need of particular attention over the next four and a half years until the next cycle of the UPR. In identifying those areas, I have also considered the statements and/or recommendations made by 46 delegations, the presentation and responses made by the delegation of Belize and the actions taken by your Government to implement the 63 recommendations it had accepted during the second cycle of the UPR. The aforementioned areas cover a range of issues and appear in the Annex to this letter.

I am encouraged by the commitment of Belize to further strengthen its national human rights protection framework through the establishment of a national human rights institution in line with the Paris Principles. I welcome the interest expressed by Belize to receive support in this regard and confirm that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is ready to provide technical assistance through its Regional Office for Central America.

I encourage Belize to develop a comprehensive national human rights action plan in order to achieve concrete results in the areas highlighted in the Annex to this letter and to facilitate the preparations for Belize's fourth cycle of the UPR. My advice to Member States is to develop and implement national action plans in close consultation and cooperation with all stakeholders, in particular civil society organizations, and, where necessary, the support of international organizations, including OHCHR and other United Nations entities, under the leadership of the United Nations Resident Coordinator.

H.E. Mr. Wilfred Peter Elrington
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Belize

I encourage Belize to establish a national mechanism for comprehensive reporting and follow-up in relation to recommendations received from all international and regional human rights mechanisms and treaty obligations, and linking this to the Sustainable Development Goals. I strongly recommend the use of the practical guide that my Office released on this topic, which is available at:

http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/HR_PUB_16_1_NMRF_PracticalGuide.pdf.

Please kindly note that I am sharing my advice with all Member States as they go through the third cycle of the UPR with a view to assisting them with the implementation of the recommendations, following the review. An important measure that can contribute positively to follow-up action is voluntary mid-term reporting. Therefore, I strongly encourage all Member States to submit a voluntary mid-term report two years after the adoption of the UPR outcome report. In this regard, I encourage Belize to consider submitting a mid-term report on follow-up to the third cycle of the review, by 2021.

As stated by the Secretary-General in his 2017 report on the work of the Organization (A/72/1, paragraph 98): *"The Human Rights Council's universal periodic review process is now entering a new cycle, with every Member State scheduled for a third round of scrutiny. We will work to strengthen the relevance, precision and impact of the Council's recommendations, including by providing better support to Member States in implementation, stronger collaboration with United Nations country teams and the establishment of national mechanisms for human rights reporting and follow-up to link the universal periodic review to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals."*

I look forward to discussing with you ways in which my Office may assist Belize in relation to the areas identified in this letter and its Annex.

Please, accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.



Michelle Bachelet
High Commissioner for Human Rights

cc: H.E. Mr. Patrick Andrews
Chief Executive Officer
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Belize

Annex

Scope of international obligations and cooperation with international human rights mechanisms and bodies

- Ratification of the human rights instruments to which Belize is not yet party, namely the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the two Optional Protocols to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure; the Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) of the International Labour Organisation.
- Ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.
- Strengthening cooperation with international human rights mechanisms, by submitting pending reports to treaty bodies on the implementation of ratified treaties and extending a standing invitation to all Special Procedures mandate holders of the Human Rights Council.

National human rights framework

- Strengthening the national human rights framework through the establishment of a national human rights institution in compliance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles).
- Establishment of a national mechanism for reporting and follow-up, open to the participation of civil society and mandated to coordinate and prepare reports, engage with international and regional human rights mechanisms, and coordinate national follow-up and implementation of the recommendations emanating from them.

Implementation of international human rights obligations, taking into account applicable international humanitarian law

A. Cross-cutting issues

Equality and non-discrimination

- Adoption of further measures to fight all forms of discrimination, including comprehensive legislation addressing discrimination against different groups.
- Strengthening efforts to combat discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, including through the revision of relevant legislation; the development of policies and educational initiatives aimed at eliminating discriminatory practices; the prompt and effective investigation and sanction of acts of discrimination and violence; and the establishment of an efficient, effective and accessible system for redress.

B. Civil and political rights

Right to life, liberty and security of person

- Abolition of the death penalty for all crimes.
- Strengthening measures to prevent cases of excessive use of force, arbitrary detention and other abuses by law enforcement officials, including through human rights training, and promptly investigating all complaints for such actions and bringing those responsible to justice.
- Establishment of a national preventive mechanism against torture in accordance with the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Administration of justice, including impunity, and the rule of law

- Strengthening the justice system, including through a permanent professional training programme on human rights for judges and lawyers.

Fundamental freedoms

- Decriminalization of defamation.
- Increasing efforts to guarantee the full enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression and to peaceful assembly, including by strengthening the protection of human rights defenders against violence and threats.

Prohibition of all forms of slavery

- Enhancing measures to combat trafficking in persons, in particular by bringing to justice those responsible of such crime; providing adequate training for officials with responsibilities on trafficking in persons; ensuring adequate protection, assistance and redress to victims; and enhancing the system for the collection of data on trafficking in persons.

C. Economic, social and cultural rights

Right to work and to just and favourable conditions of work

- Ensuring that laws, in particular the Trade Unions Act, the 2003 Equal Pay Act, the 2011 Labour (Amendment) Act and the Summary Jurisdiction (Offences) Ordinance, are in full compliance with international law, including relevant Conventions of the International Labour Organization.

Right to health

- Improvement of health services in rural areas and indigenous communities.
- Ensuring full access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education and services.

- Revision of legislation to decriminalize abortion in all circumstances and to ensure safe, legal and effective access to it in all cases foreseen by international human rights standards.

Right to education

- Ensuring the effective implementation of the right to education, including through the enactment of specific legislation on access to education.
- Intensification of efforts to implement educational programmes designed to ensure universal primary education for all and to reduce school dropout and repetition rates in primary and secondary school.

D. Rights of specific persons or groups

Women

- Further strengthening the implementation of the policy framework on gender equality, including the National Policy on Gender Equality, and intensifying efforts to ensure gender parity at all levels of political and public life.
- Continuation of efforts to combat all forms of violence against women, including through the full implementation of the Domestic Violence Act and of the National Gender-based Violence Plan of Action 2017-2020; appropriate training for law enforcement, educators and medical personnel; effective support for victims; and the establishment of the Sexual Offenders Registry.

Children

- Further strengthening measures to guarantee access to civil registration services, especially in rural areas.
- Amendment of legislation to explicitly prohibit all forms of corporal punishment of children in all settings.
- Intensification of measures to combat child labour, including by ensuring a full ban on the employment of all children under 14 years of age and increasing efforts to protect children below the age of 18 against the worst forms of child labour.
- Taking further measures to combat forced child marriage through the revision of the legislation that allows marriage at the age of 16.

Persons with disabilities

- Ensuring conformity in law and practice with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Indigenous peoples

- Taking further measures to fully apply the 2015 Consent Order by the Caribbean Court of Justice in the case *Maya Leaders Alliance et al. v. The Attorney General of Belize*.

- Strengthening the legislative framework on the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples and adopting legislation requiring free, prior and informed consent from indigenous peoples on matters affecting them.
- Protection of Maya property and other rights arising from customary land tenure through the development of legislative, administrative or other measures to delimit, demarcate, title and protect Maya land, and through the prevention of any interference with these rights.

Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers

- Undertaking a comprehensive revision of the migration and asylum legislation, including the Immigration Act of 2000, to decriminalize irregular migration, align the legislation with human rights obligations and international standards emanating from the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, and remove any discriminatory provision on any grounds.
- Adoption of alternative measures to detention of irregular migrants and ensuring that administrative detention on the basis of migration is an exceptional measure which is carried out for the shortest time possible and in full compliance with relevant international standards.
- Comprehensive review of the asylum adjudication process in order to provide for a longer period to apply for asylum, and allocation of additional financial and human resources to support the Refugees Department.

Stateless persons

- Adoption of comprehensive legislation on statelessness establishing, inter alia, a statelessness determination procedure to identify and guarantee the rights of stateless persons.