

Distinguished Co presidents

Fellow Colleagues,

Your excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen

We are here together in this beautiful city to share our experiences, agree to what will hopefully be ambitious steps to scale up our efforts to protect the health of our oceans and to collectively identify actions for the advancement of our 2030 agenda for the Oceans.

We thank our hosts for their excellent hospitality

This conference is being convened at a critical time as nations large and small alike continue to face the existential threat being caused by Climate Change, a once in a century Pandemic, global inflation, disruption of the supply chains, food and energy insecurity and now the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Today we must recognize the need for more definitive collective actions and solutions if we are to ensure the health and functionality of our oceans and the economic recovery and survival of our people.

Now more than ever we must preserve our oceans through targeted protection like overfishing, marine pollution and the destruction of marine habitats.

Already ocean warming is contributing to an unprecedented loss of marine biodiversity.

This threatens these highly unique ecosystems which support the billions of our people who rely on our oceans for their livelihood.

Therefore, we must together tackle the crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, protect natural ecosystems, and restore the immediate and far-reaching decarbonization of the global economy.

COP 26 saw intense deliberations but resulted in “watered down” decisions.

While optimistic promises were made to slash emissions, Governments continue to approve new extraction projects that highly contribute to CO2 emissions now referred to as CARBON BOMBS.

There is a huge disconnect between words and actions.

So, amidst a climate crisis, we are on track to blow up our global carbon budget and trigger even more catastrophic levels of climate events.

Simply put we are about to ignite the carbon bomb

In Belize, we are doing our part to protect the ocean and I am proud to lead a Government that is advancing innovative and ambitious policies to ensure that current and future generations can benefit from its resources.

Belize is also delivering through the world's largest debt restructuring for marine conservation which we announced in partnership with The Nature Conservancy in November 2021.

Consequently, like most small developing states, the realization of these global targets has been constrained by the lack of financing.

Despite global commitments for climate financing and conservation, only a fraction has been made available to the Small Island Developing States, yet billions will be spent on projects directly undermining our target of 2 degrees.

Since November, my Government has delivered on our first two commitments including the expansion of our Marine Protected Areas and the designation of all public lands within the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System World Heritage Site as mangrove reserves.

So while we certainly aren't done yet, I am proud of the progress we have made and I assure you that we will continue this work until we have secured a healthy ocean for all.

As the first country in the Americas to implement a marine bond which we call our Blue Bond, we are proud of our pioneering effort in this regard.

By protecting our natural places and ecosystems we can secure productive and resilient fisheries, grow our nature-based tourism sector, and strengthen our natural

resilience to climate change, a crucial issue for Belize's largely coastal based population.

I wish I could tell you this was easy – it wasn't.

It required difficult financial sacrifices such as wage cuts and cuts in our national budget to successfully convince bondholders that we were willing to do what was necessary to successfully conclude this blue bond deal, but we did it for our people and because we must act to save our ocean.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Oceans and indeed the world, is running out of time.

We must continue to advocate for real change.

We must advance the opportunities in renewable energy.

We cannot continue convening meetings stating the need to protect and sustainably manage our oceans but not taking the necessary actions.

To quote the UN Secretary General Antonio Gutierrez:

“This is a climate emergency. Investment in new fossil fuel infrastructure is moral and economic madness.”

Excellencies Belize has already demonstrated considerable and commendable leadership in our response to Climate Change by identifying key ambitions and

targets for the reductions of emissions and the protection of our coastal and ocean space.

We demand action from those who have put us in this position.

The self-interest of a few cannot come before the interest of the planet.

Wendell Berry, renowned environmental activist and writer stated, “whether we and our politicians know it or not, nature is party to all our deals and decisions, and she has more votes, a longer memory and a sterner sense of justice than we do”.

As leaders we must listen and act in the best interest of those we serve.

I therefore call on everyone to join us to conserve the ocean for Belize and for all of Mother Earth!

Thank You