

Belize Statement
to be delivered by H.E. Carlos Fuller
Permanent Representative of Belize to the United Nations
United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the
Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action “Water
for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028
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Mr. President,

This UN Water Conference is occurring, at a most opportune time. It coincides with the release of the IPCC 6th Assessment Report, which outlines in striking terms the serious implications of climate change for the water sector.

The Report notes that global temperatures have risen by 1.1 degrees Celsius since pre-industrial levels; distorting the hydrological cycle and resulting in changes in precipitation regimes. Polar regions are receiving more precipitation, while tropical regions are getting less. Rainfall patterns are becoming more extreme with longer, more severe droughts coupled with more intense rainfall events. This limits infiltration, translates to reduced aquifer recharge and flash flooding, resulting in loss of life, destruction of homes and infrastructure, and inundation of agricultural lands.

Warmer oceans and glacial melt are causing sea levels to rise at an alarming rate. Saline intrusion into coastal aquifers has made water unfit for humans, animals, and agriculture. Warmer air temperatures are taking their toll on reservoirs as there is more loss due to evaporation.

Mr. President,

Belize is classified as water-rich and is moving in the right direction toward achieving SDG 6. However, the outlook is concerning. The warnings of the IPCC report are already manifesting in our national experience.

The effects of climate change on Belize's water sector are visible. Temperatures in Belize have risen by one degree since 1960. Sea levels have risen, resulting in erosion along the entire coastline and offshore cays. Coastal aquifers have been compromised by saline intrusion and sewage. To meet the daily water demand of the tourism sector, saltwater reverse osmosis systems had to be installed to provide

potable water at two of the most popular tourist destinations while at another, water has to be brought in daily by tender until a water distribution system is completed. As our dry season gets longer and more intense, the saline wedge is moving further upstream. The largest bottling company has occasionally had to divert from river extraction to its auxiliary water supply, which is the municipal water supply for Belize City, the largest urban center. This causes a further strain on the water utility that is already struggling to meet the water demand of the growing city.

A major river in the north is now annually compromised during the dry season due to effluents from households, agriculture, and industries which overwhelm the river's natural flushing capacity. Northern Belize forms part of the "dry corridor" in Central America, where perennial annual droughts are crippling agriculture. This is then followed by intense rainfall events that cause further crop losses, threatening our food security.

Despite being water rich, the toll of climate change, the demands of a growing population and a developing nation are threatening the availability of water.

At the national level, government is taking measures to address these problems by: developing a National Adaptation Plan for the water sector with support from the Green Climate Fund; introducing the use of geophysics for aquifer investigation with support from the Interamerican Development Bank; designing the country's first groundwater monitoring network in the Orange Walk district with assistance from UNEP; expanding the surface water monitoring network on the New River with support from the GEF's MesoAmerican Ridge to Reef Project and developing a water quality monitoring program and protocol with support from the Japan Caribbean Climate Change Partnership. Irrigation systems are being deployed in selected areas to mitigate drought events and extended dry periods.

To ensure that the right solutions are employed holistically and efficiently, more data is needed. Our water resources availability and variability data are outdated.

We are not yet monitoring all water catchments with sufficient frequency and accuracy. Groundwater resources are being utilized more intensively compared to our surface water resources. Studies clearly show that in regions with a similar climate, groundwater changes will be more evident within 10 years. We will require a comprehensive water resources assessment that will aid us in better implementation of water resources planning and allocation and develop our water vulnerability profile. Unsustainable water extraction and the discharge of effluents remain among the most critical threats to our freshwater ecosystems.

Mr. President,

The interconnectedness of the water cycle and the global nature of the pressures on water mean that national efforts will be for naught if not buttressed by regional and international cooperation and multilateral approaches.

We also acknowledge that the right to water remains out of reach for far too many people across the world, and that current water challenges put at risk our collective achievement of the SDGs. Technology, data, and science must be at the center of our efforts, at all levels, to achieve a sustainable and just water future.

Therefore, we join the call for enhanced international cooperation and finance, capacity building and transfer of environmentally sound technologies to achieve efficiency in water management.

Thank you.