Child Rights References in the Universal Periodic Review

Summary:
A compilation of extracts featuring child-rights issues from the reports submitted to the first Universal Periodic Review. There are extracts from the 'National Report', the 'Compilation of UN Information' and the 'Summary of Stakeholder's Information'. Also included is the 'Final Report' and 'Conclusions and Recommendations' from the Review.

Belize - 5th Session - 2009
5th May 2009, 10am to 1pm

State National Report

20. A wide range of fundamental rights is enshrined in Belize’s Constitution and in the laws of Belize. Some legislations specifically implements provisions of international treaties such as the Genocide Act, the Refugees Act, the International Child Abduction Act, International Labour Organizations Convention Act, the Belize Red Cross Society Act and the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act. The United Nations Resolutions and Convention (Enforcement) Act provides generally for the enforcement in Belize of United Nations resolutions. The following is a compilation of legislation that have been enacted to protect the fundamental human rights and freedoms of individuals in Belize:
Widows’ and Children’s Pensions – Chapter 32
Education Act – Chapter 36
Juvenile Offenders – Chapter 119
Families and Children Act – Chapter 173
International Child Abduction – Chapter 177


22. Belize is also a party to the major international conventions relating to trafficking in persons, smuggling of migrants, status of refugees, international labour organization conventions, the Hague Conventions on inter-country adoption and child abduction, the Inter-American conventions on the return of children and adoption of minors as well as other international humanitarian law treaties such as the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their protocols.

28. The Women’s Issues Network (WIN) is an umbrella organization for NGOs working in the area of women and children’s issues. WIN has been very active in promoting women’s rights, and raising awareness about gender based violence and HIV/AIDS. In 2007 WIN presented a Shadow Report on the implementation of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The National Women’s Commission is a quasi governmental agency charged solely with promoting, monitoring and evaluating compliance with CEDAW and other national, regional and international obligations regarding women including Belem do Para Convention.

29. The National Committee for Families and Children (NCFC) is a statutory agency legally mandated under the Families and Children’s Act to promote, monitor and evaluate Belize's compliance with its national and international commitments to children. The NCFC is the major coordinating and advisory body to the government on families and children's issues. The work of the NCFC is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and Belize's commitment to the implementation of the outcome of the twenty seventh special session of the General Assembly on children entitled A World Fit for Children, the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the Dakar Framework for Action adopted at the World Education Forum and the Beijing Rules.
41. Belize was among the first countries to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child in May 1990. Since then Belize has also ratified the two optional protocols: Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography in addition to other Inter American Conventions relating to the rights of the child. The National Committee for Families and Children is tasked with monitoring compliance of the CRC obligations and engages in its own programme of work in the areas of advocacy, public education, legal reform and monitoring and evaluation.

42. In 1998 the Families and Children’s Act was passed to incorporate specific provisions of the CRC in domestic legislation. Amendments to other legislation are required to give full effect to the CRC. The age of criminal responsibility for instance has been increased from the age of 9 to 12 years and the age of marriage with parental consent from 14 to 16 years. The Penal Reform (Alternative to Sentencing) Act allows for non-custodial sentences for young and first time offenders. However, other gaps have been identified and plans are in place to make the required amendments. Stakeholder consultations are currently ongoing on proposed amendments to the Criminal Code, Juvenile Offenders Act and other pieces of legislation aimed at better protecting the rights of abused children and children who come in conflict with the law.

43. Significant work has been done to raise public awareness among children, families and the general public of the CRC. NCFC in particular has sustained and facilitated a radio show, Kid O’ Rama, which is for children, by children to raise awareness on children rights and to encourage the participation of children in the promotion thereof.

44. A National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents 2004-2015 has been adopted which outlines the priority areas for the advancement of child rights and development in six key areas: education, health, child protection, HIV/AIDS, family and culture. The NPA has the endorsement of both political parties ensuring its continuity should government administration change during the period 2004-2015.

45. The NCFC on an ongoing basis monitors and evaluates the implementation, by the stakeholders and duty bearers, of the National Plan. The National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents is now in its fifth year of implementation and the NCFC has engaged a consultancy to undertake an assessment of the state of implementation and to identify areas of concerns where adjustments or interventions are required.

46. The NCFC has made some targeted intervention in southern Belize including, the piloting, with assistance from the International Labour Organization, a successful project in the Toledo District, which has seen the transition child labourers into the formal education system. NCFC also has a Roving Caregivers Programme which deploys trained caregivers into southern villages to help parents provide early childhood learning.

53. Culture is also being integrated within the Belizian educational system through intercultural bilingual education (IBE) programmes. There are three pioneering IBE schools which have integrated culture into their curriculum: the Guilisi Garifuna School and La Escuela Garifuna located in Dangriga, Stann Creek District, teach Garifuna traditions and language; the Tumul K’in Centre of Learning provides inter cultural education based on Mayan tradition, knowledge and philosophy.

67. Young inmates are segregated from the rest of the adult prison population in their own facility. The facility presently houses two large buildings—one used for housing or sleeping quarters, and the other building used for feeding or conducting family visits. A third building contains four classrooms.

68. The inmate population includes both remanded and convicted prisoners. The prison staff assigned to the facility are trained in rehabilitation and qualified to offer counselling to individual inmates. The young inmates have a daily schedule of activities that involve academic and vocational classes; support in Personal and Spiritual Development; life skills, sports, physical training exercises, personal hygiene, recreation, time management, evening devotion followed by local news and counselling activities.

72. In 2001 the Government of Belize initiated its Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) programme to reduce the risk of HIV/AIDS infected mother passing the virus on to their newborns. The PMTCT has been integrated within the public health prenatal clinics countrywide to enhance its impact. In 2007 for instance of the 2766 women receiving antenatal care, 54 tested positive for HIV/AIDS and were able to receive prophylactic antiretroviral therapy. In 2008 only two cases were reported countrywide as a result of vertical transmission highlighting the success of the programme.

76. The 2007 Mid Year Population Estimates indicated that 49.5 per cent of Belize’s population is 19 years old or younger and 65 per cent is under 30 years old. While net enrolment in primary education is relatively high, less that 50 per cent of children transition to high school. Youth unemployment is particularly high and above the national average. According to the Statistical Institute of Belize, there are 81,900 young people between the ages of 15 – 29 years in Belize. This sub-population is 28 per cent of the total population. Of this number, 40,000 or 57 per cent are in school. Of the remaining number, 22,500 (32 per cent) are employed and the other 7,500 (11 per cent) are unemployed (SIB figures). Simultaneously, at risk youth have fallen victim to a life of crime, violence and gangs. Government has responded vigorously with the operationalization of the Youth for the Future and the Conscious Youth Development Programme to the need to engage young people positively to build a good, productive citizenry.
77. There is also civil society involvement in creating positive and safe recreational opportunities for young people. The My Neighbours and Me provides peer coordinated development activities for children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The 4H organization operates twelve clubs across Belize equipping at-risk Belizean youths with skills in agriculture, food processing, building technology, and most recently tourism development. Other NGOs also working with young people in Belize include the Youth Enhancement Services, the Young Women’s Christian Association, and the Belize Family Life Association.

78. In 2005, the Youth for the Future (YFF) was established under the auspices of the Ministry of Youth to coordinate youth programmes nationwide in three main areas: violence reduction and HIV/AIDS Education and awareness, youth governance and job creation and enterprise. YFF has impacted the lives of thousands of Belizean youth through HIV/AIDS awareness sessions, job skills training and so forth.

79. In 2008, Government re-activated the Conscious Youth Development Program (CYDP) which is aimed at offering at risk youth and young people already involved in gangs an alternative lifestyle. The institution’s focus covers five main areas: conflict resolution, life skills development, job creation, socialization-communication and educational programs. For 2008, the CYDP has impacted or provided intervention for some two thousand one hundred and twenty-seven (2,127) clients.

80. Belize recognizes that youth development is critical to overall national development. Active measures are being taken to engage young people in a meaningful participatory manner.

96. In Belize, there is no Act which deals particularly with persons with disabilities. However, the Belize Constitution Act, the Domestic Violence Act, the Families and Children Act and the Education Act address issues relating to persons with disabilities.

97. The Ministry of Education has tasked schools to integrate children with disabilities into regular classrooms wherever possible.

98. The Special Education Unit at the Ministry of Education plays a pivotal role in creating educational opportunities for children with disabilities. Its role is to oversee the integration and education of all children with special educational needs in the country of Belize. The unit works in partnership with school personnel, families, religious, government and non-governmental organizations to develop inclusive school communities which nurture and appreciate diverse learning needs of all students. A curriculum has been developed for teacher training in special education at the University of Belize and workshops are given by the unit when requested by principals, school managers and district officers.

99. The unit collaborates with the Belize Council for the Visually Impaired, to support blind and low vision children in schools country wide. Teachers are advised on strategies that can effectively integrate the visually impaired child in regular classes. School books are converted to large print and Braille by the Belize Council for the Visually Impaired with the assistance of volunteers who scan and edit textbooks.

100. Services for children with disabilities are addressed indirectly in the Maternal and Child Health Program in the Ministry of Health. CARE-Belize, a non-government organisation, provides community based rehabilitation services to children ages birth to 6 years. Special services for children with disabilities are available when visiting specialists hold annual clinics and select candidates for treatment abroad.

102. The Government of Belize is committed to ensuring that every Belizean has an opportunity to assert the right to an education. Successive governments have made education a priority area for development, allocating as much as 25 percent of their budgets thereto.

103. Primary education in Belize is generally free though there are some associated costs such as acquiring the necessary uniforms, fees charged by the school and until 2008 textbooks. In 2008 Government launched a programme to provide free textbooks to all primary school students nationwide. In 1993 the Government began providing grants to all grant-aided secondary schools in Belize to cover the costs of tuition of secondary school students.

104. In the current budget the Government of Belize made some important provisions to ensure access to education including $3 million in scholarship grants for the first year of high school, $1.5 million in scholarship grants for tertiary education, $2 million for the supply of textbooks to primary school students, an increase of $1.5 million to the University of Belize and $3 million for the completion of the enhancement of the Technical, Vocation and Education Training Project.

105. Education is compulsory for any person who is between five years and fourteen years of age. The Education Act of the laws of Belize prescribes a parental duty to ensure that a child of compulsory school age who has not completed primary school regularly attends school. Under the same act, the Chief Education Officer is empowered to issue a “School Attendance Order” requiring a parent to cause a child to become a registered pupil at a school. The Act further provides for penalties for non compliance. For the purpose of the enforcement of the Act, an adequate number of School Attendance Officers are assigned to a Truancy Unit.

106. Significant challenges remain in the Belize education system, particularly the completion and transition rates. 10 per cent of children entering primary school do not finish, the secondary school net enrolment rate in 2005-2006 was 45.3 per cent of which 59.7 per cent completed the secondary school curriculum. Thus efforts in the areas of truancy and in making education accessible are important. Government will also take active measures to ensure that a quality education being provided, such as conducting quality assurance inspections by the Ministry of Education and requiring schools to plan for, implement and monitor school improvement.

**OHCHR Compilation of UN information**

2. In 2005, the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) welcomed the adoption in 2003 of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act, which provides special protection for children, and the subsequent establishment of a special Task Force to give greater effect to the implementation of the Act.
3. CRC noted with appreciation Belize’s proposals to reform the Criminal Code and the Evidence Act, and the review of the laws of Belize completed in 2003 by the National Committee for Families and Children. It recommended that Belize continue to strengthen its efforts to ensure full conformity of its domestic law with the Convention, for instance by enacting a comprehensive children’s code.

6. As of 6 March 2009, Belize does not have a national human rights institution accredited by the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (ICC). In 2005, CRC welcomed the establishment in 1999 of an independent Ombudsman, but noted that this body was not properly equipped either in terms of its mandate and its human and financial resources to deal with complaints filed by or on behalf of children. The Committee welcomed information that the National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents in Belize 2004-2015 (NPA) calls for exploration of the establishment of an ombudsperson for children.

7. CRC noted with appreciation the adoption of the NPA and the establishment of a Monitoring and Evaluation Subcommittee of the National Committee for Families and Children to monitor its progress. However, UNICEF noted low implementation rates of the NPA because of inadequate resources, poor governance and disproportionate service provision between urban and rural areas. CRC recommended that Belize provide adequate resources for the full and effective implementation of the NPA, and that it take all necessary measures to ensure a rights-based, open, consultative and participatory process for its implementation. CRC - Combined third and fourth report overdue since 2007

11. In 2005, CRC expressed concern at the persistent discrimination faced by girls, migrant children, minority and indigenous children, and children with disabilities, living in poverty, affected by HIV/AIDS, living in rural areas, as well as pregnant students and teenage mothers in schools. It recommended that Belize increase its efforts to adopt appropriate legislation, to ensure the implementation of existing laws guaranteeing the principle of non-discrimination, and to adopt a proactive and comprehensive strategy to eliminate discrimination on any grounds, particularly against all vulnerable groups of children.

13. CRC noted Belize’s efforts to combat sexual exploitation of children such as the “Stamp Out Child Abuse” campaign. However, it expressed concern about child pornography and trafficking of children and drew attention to existing risk factors, such as the growing tourism. It recommended that Belize take all necessary measures to effectively prevent, and protect all children from, trafficking, sexual exploitation and child pornography, including through implementing the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act, and to provide the recently established Task Force with adequate resources.

15. The 2005 CCA report noted the persistence of corporal punishment of children, including within schools and families. In 2005, deeply concerned about the situation and that the provisions of the Criminal Code and the Education Act legitimize its use. CRC urged Belize to critically review its legislation with a view to abolishing the use of force for the purpose of correction and to introduce new laws prohibiting all forms of corporal punishment of children in the family and within all institutions. It also urged the Government to strengthen public education and social mobilization campaigns on non-violent forms of discipline and child-rearing, with the participation of children, in order to change public attitudes to corporal punishment.

16. Gravely concerned at the growing number of cases of murders, violence in the streets, domestic violence and sexual abuse of minors, especially girls, CRC recommended that Belize conduct investigations and bring perpetrators to justice. It also recommended that the Government introduce awareness campaigns, ensure due adherence to all relevant procedures regarding the management of child abuse cases, and that victims have access to adequate counselling.

17. CRC also noted with concern that Belize’s sex offence legislation is discriminatory, leaving boys without equal legal protection from sexual assault and abuse. Observing that section 47 of the Criminal Code concerning prostitution only covers cases where the child in question is a female, an ILO Committee of Experts in 2008 asked the Government to indicate the measures taken or envisaged to secure the prohibition of the use, procuring or offering of boys under 18 for prostitution.

18. In 2005, CRC reiterated its serious concern at the low minimum legal age of criminal responsibility and the large number of children in detention. It was deeply concerned that children as young as 9 can be sentenced to life imprisonment without provision for parole. It recommended that Belize establish a system of juvenile justice that fully integrates the provisions and principles of the Convention and other relevant international standards. Furthermore, it recommended that the Government raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility, urgently review legislation concerning life imprisonment of children, ensure that detained persons under the age of 18 are separated from adults, and improve procedures of arrest and conditions of detention for juveniles.

20. In 2005 CRC expressed deep concern about the practice of early marriage, and the low minimum age for marriage (14 years with parental consent). CEDAW noted with concern that a man who has sexual relations with a girl under the age of 16 can, with the consent of her parents, marry her without being prosecuted for carnal knowledge. Both CEDAW and CRC recommended that Belize raise the minimum age of marriage .

27. In 2008, the ILO Committee of Experts asked the Government to provide further details concerning cases detected by the authorized officers of the worst forms of child labour, and on measures taken, such as the number of prosecutions. Furthermore the Committee noted the information provided by the Government in its second periodic report to CRC that, following the increasing reports on the sexual and labour exploitation of children within the Corozal commercial free zone, the Ministry of Labour placed a labour officer within the zone in order to monitor such problems in 2002. The Committee requested the Government to provide information on the outcome of the inspections and investigations carried out by the labour officer in the Corozal commercial free zone.

28. In 2005, CRC remained concerned at the high rate of working children in Belize and the negative consequences of the exploitation of child labour, such as school dropouts, and the negative effects on health of harmful and hazardous work. It noted with particular concern the high number of child rural workers and regretted the lack of adequate data on child labour in the country. It recommended that Belize
ensure the full implementation of the child labour provisions, including the provision of non-formal education and training, in order to ensure the development of children to their full potential, and that it take all necessary measures to prevent child labour, including in rural areas.

30. CRC was concerned at the persistent high rate of children living in poverty, especially in rural areas. UNICEF noted that close to 40 per cent of children lived in poverty, and this reached as high as 84.5 per cent in the poorest districts and among the ethnic Mayan population. CRC recommended that Belize take all necessary measures to provide support and material assistance to economically disadvantaged families and to guarantee the right of children to an adequate standard of living.

31. CRC was also concerned at the regional disparities in accessibility to health services, the high number of infant deaths and regional differences in this respect, the situation of malnutrition among infants and children, the lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation in the rural and most remote areas, and the low prevalence of breastfeeding. It recommended that Belize prioritize the allocations of financial and human resources to the health sector to ensure equal access to quality health care by children in all areas of the country. It recommended that the Government continue its efforts to improve prenatal care and the nutritional status of infants and children, and ensure access to safe drinking water. CRC also recommended that Belize strengthen its efforts to implement the National Breastfeeding Policy.

35. CRC remained concerned about the concrete shortcomings in the birth registration system, and the consequences of non-registration on access by children to education, health and other services. It recommended that Belize implement an efficient and free birth registration system, with particular attention to immigrant parents and parents whose children were born out of wedlock. Concerned at the large number of children who do not have birth registration documents and who consequently cannot claim nationality and social benefits, CEDAW called upon Belize to expedite and facilitate the process of registration of children without documentation and issue them with birth certificates and identity documents.

36. The 2005 CCA report stated that access to basic education services was high, with net enrolment in primary education over 90 per cent. However, it noted that rates of dropout, grade repetition and failure remain high, and that, despite a total 43 per cent secondary school enrolment rate, only one in four poor adolescents continue on to secondary school.

37. CRC expressed its concern at the high rate of illiteracy and regional disparities in this respect. It noted Belize’s efforts to reduce the high rate of school dropouts, but regretted the deficiencies in the implementation of these initiatives. It remained concerned about the fact that parents are sometimes charged additional fees, thereby creating financial obstacles and denying many children access to education. CRC was also concerned about the quality of education and the insufficient teacher training, particularly in the most remote areas of the country.

38. CEDAW expressed concern about the persistence of social barriers that impede women’s education and are reflected in the early dropout rate of girls from school and the lack of measures to ensure that teenage mothers stay in or return to school. In 2005, CRC expressed its grave concern that Belize does not have a policy to prevent and combat the school-based practices of educational exclusion of pregnant students and teenager mothers. UNICEF highlighted that the expulsion of pregnant girls continues in schools managed by religious organizations. CEDAW recommended that Belize implement measures to ensure equal rights of girls and young women to all levels of education, to retain girls in school and to put in place monitoring mechanisms to track girls’ access to and achievement levels in education.

40. CRC expressed concern about the widespread poverty among children belonging to minorities and indigenous peoples and the limited enjoyment of their rights, particularly concerning their access to social and health services, and education. It recommended that Belize strengthen its efforts to improve the equal enjoyment of all rights of children belonging to minorities and indigenous peoples, in particular, by prioritizing effective measures to reduce poverty among them. It also recommended that the Government take measures to promote respect for the views of children, especially girls, belonging to minorities and indigenous peoples and facilitate their participation in all matters affecting them.

43. CRC noted with appreciation the efforts made by Belize to better safeguard the right of the child to require a nationality. Notwithstanding the positive steps taken by Belize, it was concerned at the high number of immigrant children without any legal status or documentation residing in the territory of Belize. It recommended that Belize continue its efforts to promote and facilitate the proper registration of all undocumented immigrant children and provide them with the legal status they need.

51. CRC recommended that Belize seek technical assistance from, among others, UNICEF and WHO, for the implementation of the National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents 106 and for the implementation of the National Breastfeeding Policy. It recommended that the Government seek assistance from UNICEF regarding the abolition of corporal punishment, and from UNICEF and UNAIDS, regarding prevention of HIV/AIDS. It also recommended that Belize seek assistance from UNICEF and UNESCO in order to reduce illiteracy. Furthermore, CRC recommended that Belize strengthen its cooperation with ILO and its International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour.

52. UNICEF noted that the 2007-2011 UNICEF Country Programme and Action Plan (CPAP) is designed to support the Government by focusing on nutrition, child survival, safe motherhood, quality education, HIV, positive adolescent development and violence and disaster preparedness and response.

**OHCHR Summary of stakeholders’ information**

7. JS1 indicated that prejudice and social stigma are a part of the daily experience of young gay and transgender persons in the education system, a situation which would also affect people living with HIV/AIDS. It also indicated that many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender/transsexual (LGBT) persons face tremendous psychological and emotional problems, prejudice and marginalization from
society, their families and communities when they reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity. JS1 recommended opening a
dialogue on culture and human rights to guarantee that no human rights violations will be perpetrated against anyone—including LGBT
persons—under the name of culture or tradition.

9. The Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (GIECPC) indicated that Section 39 of the Criminal Code allows
the use of “justifiable force” for the purposes of correction by those with authority over children under 16; Section 6 of the Summary
Jurisdiction (Offences) Act confirms “the right of the parent, teacher or other person having the lawful control or charge of a child or
young person to administer punishment to him”; Section 2 of the Families and Children (Child Abuse) (Reporting) Regulations (1999)
states that “reasonable disciplinary measures” do not constitute abuse if they are administered “reasonably and in
moderation, and do not cause physical, psychological or emotional harm or injury to the child”, but this is not interpreted as prohibiting
all corporal punishment.

10. GIECPC noted that corporal punishment is lawful in schools under sections 24 and 27 of the Education Act and para. XVIII 79 of
the Primary Education Rules, that the Ministry of Education drafted new Education Rules which did not allow for corporal punishment
in 1999, but this was reversed in the Education Rules in 2000, with prohibition again under discussion in the context of drafting new
education rules. GIECPC reported that a survey of 939 school students concerning absenteeism and child-friendly primary schools by
the Human Rights Commission of Belize (NGO) found that 39 per cent of children identified violent behaviour,
including corporal punishment by teachers, as the aspect of school children liked the least.

11. GIECPC reported that corporal punishment is unlawful as a sentence for crime in the penal system, and it is prohibited as a
disciplinary measure in the “Youth Hostel” detention centre under the Social Services Agencies (Operators of Residential Care Facilities
for Children) Registration, Licensing and Minimum Operating Requirements Regulations of 2004. It is nevertheless lawful in other
penal institutions under the Prison Rules (2000) and the delegation of parental authority to those given custody of young offenders in the
Juvenile Offenders Act (1936).

12. JS1 indicated that Section 71 (1) of the Belize Criminal Code defines rape as the carnal knowledge of a female of any age without
her consent, assuming that males cannot be raped and leaving raped men without recourse to the law. It also noted that Section 47(1) of
the Criminal Code reads that “every person who carnally knows a female child under the age of fourteen years, with or without her
consent, shall on conviction on indictment be imprisoned for a term which shall not be less than twelve years, but which may extend to
imprisonment for life.”

13. JS1 reported that people younger than 16 cannot access HIV/AIDS VCT services without parental consent. This would violate the
right to privacy and in the end the right to health of young people, particularly of those having same-sex relationships and young woman
having pre- marital sex, as they might choose not to access the services in order to avoid being punished by their parents if they reveal
their sexual behaviour. JS1 recommended the requirement of parental consent for providing counselling and testing services to people
less than 16 years of age be eliminated.

14. JS1 indicated that sex education is being integrated in the primary and secondary curricula as part of a program called the Health and
Family Life Education formulated by the Ministry of Education, with teachers having been trained and Health and Family Life
Education Officers having been hired to incorporate basic sex education into the curriculum. However, JS1 indicated that Catholic and
evangelical schools, which run over an estimated 60 per cent of the country’s schools, have not adequately contributed, given that girls
are expelled when pregnant and female teachers are fired for having a baby out of wedlock, while the former Catholic Bishop has also
spoken against condom use. It recommended that Belize review the current curricula on Health and Family Life Education in
consultation with civil society organizations, the academia, teachers and student unions. It also recommended design and
implementation of public awareness and education campaigns on sexuality strategically aimed at young people who might be left out of
the sexuality education provided by Government-run schools either because of they attend religious schools or because they have been
marginalized by the education system.

Final Outcome

11. Four quasi-governmental bodies have been established to ensure compliance with human rights commitments to key vulnerable
populations: the National Committee for Families and Children (NCFC), the National Women’s Commission (NWC), the National AIDS
Commission (NAC) and the National Council on Aging (NCA). Additionally, the National Human Development Advisory Committee, a
multisectoral committee comprised of government and civil society representatives, provides policy advice to the Government taking
into account sustainable development and other human rights issues.

18. NCFC has spearheaded the development and implementation of the National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents 2004-
2015. The Plan of Action, which focuses on education, health, child protection, HIV/AIDS, family and culture, enjoys bipartisan
political support.

19. The Government has increased the age of marriage with parental consent from 14 to 16 years and the age of criminal responsibility
from 9 to 11 years, following recommendations from the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women.

20. The Government has appointed a Special Envoy for Children to work in tandem with NCFC and the various stakeholders in
safeguarding the rights of children.

21. The Government has established a permanent, multi-sectoral Anti-Trafficking in Persons Committee. The Committee emphasizes
prevention and maintains a widely accessible public awareness campaign on human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of
children. It invests in providing protective services for victims and works on strengthening national prosecutorial capacity. The
23. There are other challenges reflected in the national report as priorities, including HIV/AIDS, youth development, good governance, persons with disabilities and education.

34. Algeria encouraged the authorities to persevere in their approach establishing interdependence between human rights and development. It emphasized the need for assistance from the international community to strengthen the capacity of Belize to meet the challenges it faces. It recommended (a) that the improvement of the situation of certain vulnerable groups, especially women and children, be given priority; (b) that Belize step up programmes aimed at eradicating poverty and improving social indicators, including in health and education; (c) that the institutional and legal authorities work towards completing the process already under way for accession to major international instruments of human rights; and (d) that Belize consider the possibility of establishing a national human rights institution in conformity with the Paris Principles.

40. Mexico asked how Belize would address the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child concerning the fight against trafficking in children and child pornography, child labour and the disciplinary measures applicable to children, within the framework of the consultations carried out by the Government concerning legislative instruments for the protection of children. It recommended Belize (a) to redouble its efforts in favour of the respect of the rights of indigenous peoples, in line with the dispositions contained in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; (b) to accede to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of Persons Living with Disabilities; and (c) to consider adhering to their respective Optional Protocols as soon as possible. It emphasized the need to foster national capacities on human rights, both in technical and standard-setting levels. It encouraged the international community to provide the assistance required by Belize, as well as recommending the country (d) to continue in its pursuit of assistance in these areas.

41. Canada noted that UNICEF and the Committee on the Rights of the Child had expressed concern about the disparities and widespread poverty experienced by indigenous populations. It also noted recent reports alleging occasional excessive use of force by police officers, welcoming the information provided on the Government’s efforts to address this issue. It asked what measures are being undertaken to ensure that those subject to the justice system have adequate legal representation. It noted that Belize does not have a national human rights institution accredited by the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. It recommended that Belize (a) implement the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to prioritize effective measures to reduce poverty amongst indigenous and minority children; (b) strengthen the office of Ombudsman and the police department’s office of internal affairs in order to improve capacity to hear and investigate complaints; (c) provide defendants in all serious criminal processes with an attorney when they cannot afford one by themselves; (d) establish a national human rights institution in accordance with the Paris Principles.

42. Argentina noted that the Criminal Code and the Education Act of Belize allow corporal punishment of children within the family and schools, and recommended (a) considering the adoption of measures commensurate with international standards on the subject and public campaigns about non-violent forms of discipline. It noted that Belize prioritizes combating HIV/AIDS and has comprehensive policies to halt the spread of the disease. However, some reports show that people under 16 cannot access test services without their parents’ consent. It recommended (b) considering the possibility of eliminating this requirement for people under the age of 16. It also recommended (c) considering the ratification of the following international human rights instruments: CESC, which has been signed but not ratified, and the optional protocols to ICCPR, CAT, CPD and CED. On indigenous peoples’ rights, Argentina took note of the information provided on the Mayan communities of Toledo, Santa Cruz and Conejo and asked what additional measures Belize is considering to implement the international standards under the Universal Declaration on Indigenous Rights, particularly with regard to the provision of land.

48. Several initiatives focus on children’s rights and aim at adherence to the concluding observations of Committee on the Rights of the Child. This includes a national plan, developed in partnership with the ILO, on issues of child labour and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. As the result of a recent review on progress made over the past eighteen months, Belize is now seeking to engage NGO partners to consolidate the gains and further advance work in this area.

49. Maldives recognized Belize's efforts to create awareness, protect and educate children, in particular the National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents 2004-2015 adopted with the endorsement of both political parties. It encouraged Belize to seek technical assistance to fully implement this Plan of Action, as was recommended by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. It noted important challenges remain, including, in terms of small States, the limitations on financial and human resources, and capacity-building. It agreed that meeting human rights reporting obligations remains a major challenge for small States, and highlighted the benefits and advantages of preparing a Common Core Document with the information that the State is required to send to each treaty report.

51. Slovenia welcomed the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act in October 2008 and asked what steps the Government has made to fully implement it. It was also concerned about reports that corporal punishment of children within schools as well as in families is lawful and widely practiced, and asked if Belize intends to review its legislation with a view to prohibit all forms of corporal punishment of children. Following the observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Slovenia asked what the Government intended to do to improve the equal enjoyment of all rights of children belonging to minorities and indigenous peoples. It recommended Belize (a) to submit all overdue reports to United Nations human rights conventions’ treaty bodies and to answer to questionnaires sent by Special mandate holders, since no reply was sent to 13 questionnaires within the deadlines in the last years; (b) to fully implement the Domestic Violence Act; (c) to review its legislation in a view to prohibit all forms of corporal punishment of children; (d) to protect Maya customary property rights in accordance with Maya customary laws and land tenure practices in consultation with affected Maya people of the whole Toledo district.
52. Turkey noted the concerns of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and UNICEF on the high rate of children living in poverty especially in rural areas, and on the high number of working children. It thanked the delegation for the responses provided on the revised Strategic Action Plan on Poverty, welcoming its focus on vulnerable groups. It asked for further information on support provided to economically disadvantaged families, particularly in rural areas. It also asked what steps are being taken to protect children from all forms of exploitation and abuse. It recommended the Government (a) to take further steps to guarantee the rights of children to an adequate standard of living and ensure that children from economically disadvantaged background are not exploited or abused. Noting the unemployment rates in the national report and recalling observations by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women that there remains a concentration of women in low-paid sectors of public employment and a considerable wage gap between women and men in Belize, it asked whether any special programme or micro-credit scheme exists to support women's entrepreneurship. It recommended Belize (b) to take targeted measures or affirmative action, where necessary, to ensure active participation of women in the labour market and to close the wage gap between women and men. It further recommended the Government (c) to ratify the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

53. Germany highlighted the ruling of the Belize Supreme Court in favour of some of the Mayan villages regarding their use of their land rights. It recognized the detailed information provided by the delegation and also the difficulties of solving the situation and implementing the Court’s ruling. It asked what the plans are for a way ahead because the non-solution of this issue affects the Toledo District economically as well as socially. It recommended Belize (a) to continue efforts to submit overdue reports requested by the committees of various international conventions to which Belize is a party, and also to seek technical assistance for the establishment of these reports; (b) to change the legislation concerning criminal responsibility of children and to raise the age limit for criminal responsibility to the age of eighteen; (c) to abolish corporal punishment for children.

56. The Czech Republic expressed its appreciation for the responses to the written questions submitted. It welcomed the long-term National Action Plan for Children, and recommended (a) that Belize strengthen efforts towards its full implementation. It also recommend (b) that the age of criminal responsibility, as well as the minimum age for marriage, be increased so that they comply with international standards, and (c) that possible shortcomings in the registration procedure of all newborn children are rectified. In area of protection against torture, it recommended that Belize (d) accede to the CAT-OP and (e) submit its overdue CAT report in early course. In the area of protection of the rights of asylum-seekers, it recommended Belize (f) to review its legislation and practice with a view of ensuring effective access to asylum procedure and upholding of the principle of non-refoulement. With respect to the protection of the right to privacy and non discrimination, it recommended (g) to put and end to any discrimination against same-sex sexual activity between consenting adults, in particular to review any discriminatory legislation, and to adopt measures to promote tolerance in this regard, which would also facilitate more effective educational programmes for the prevention of HIV/AIDS. It recommended that (h) human rights training with regard to the protection of the human rights of vulnerable groups, in particular women, children, indigenous peoples and persons of minority sexual orientation or gender identity, be provided to law enforcement officials, judicial officers and all State officials.

63. The issue of use of corporal punishment on children merits thorough national debate. Nevertheless corporal punishment has already been abolished in children’s institutions. There are rules and regulations for corporal punishment in schools. The Education Act is being reviewed with a view towards full abolition. NGOs have taken an ongoing role in promoting the national dialogue on the abolition of corporal punishment in all spheres.

Conclusion and Recommendations

67. The recommendations formulated during the interactive dialogue have been examined by Belize and the recommendations listed below enjoy the support of Belize:

8. Implement the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to prioritize effective measures to reduce poverty among indigenous and minority children (Canada);

12. Provide human rights training with regard to the protection of vulnerable groups, in particular women, children, indigenous peoples and persons of minority sexual orientation or gender identity to law enforcement officials, judicial officers and all State officials (Czech Republic);

15. Consider the possibility of eliminating the required parents’ consent for HIV testing for minors under the age of 16 (Argentina);

16. Strengthen efforts for the full implementation of the National Action Plan for Children (Czech Republic);

17. Rectify possible shortcomings in the registration procedure for all newborn children (Czech Republic);

25. Give priority to the improvement of the situation of certain vulnerable groups, especially women and children (Algeria)

26. Take further steps to guarantee the right of children to an adequate standard of living and ensure that children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are not exploited or abused (Turkey);

29. Consider the adoption of measures commensurate with international standards on the subject and the launching of public campaigns about non-violent forms of discipline (Argentina);

30. Review its legislation with a view to prohibiting all forms of corporal punishment of children (Slovenia);

68. The following recommendations will be examined by Belize, which will provide responses in due time. The response of Belize to these recommendations will be included in the outcome report adopted by the Human Rights Council at its twelfth session:

2. Increase the age of criminal responsibility and the minimum age for marriage so that they comply with international standards (Czech
Republic); change the legislation to raise the age limit for criminal responsibility to eighteen (Germany);
7. Abolish corporal punishment for children (Germany);