



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Concluding observations on the combined fifth to ninth periodic reports of Belize*

1. The Committee considered the combined fifth to ninth periodic reports of Belize ([CEDAW/C/BLZ/5-9](#)) at its 2130th and 2131st meetings (see [CEDAW/C/SR.2130](#) and [CEDAW/C/SR.2131](#)), held on 11 February 2025. The list of issues and questions raised by the pre-sessional working group is contained in [CEDAW/C/BLZ/Q/5-9](#), and the responses of Belize are contained in [CEDAW/C/BLZ/RQ/5-9](#).¹

A. Introduction

2. The Committee appreciates the submission by the State Party of its combined fifth to ninth periodic reports, albeit with a 12-year delay.² The Committee also appreciates the State Party's written replies ([CEDAW/C/BLZ/RQ/5-9](#)) to the list of issues and questions raised by the pre-sessional working group, the oral presentation by the delegation and the further clarifications provided in response to the questions posed orally by the Committee during the dialogue.

3. The Committee commends the State Party on its high-level delegation, which was headed by Elvia Vega Samos, Minister of State in the Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous People's Affairs. The delegation also included other representatives from the Ministry, as well as from the National Women's Commission.

B. Positive aspects

4. The Committee welcomes the progress achieved since the consideration in 2007 of the State Party's combined third and fourth periodic reports ([CEDAW/C/BLZ/3-4](#)) in undertaking legislative reforms, in particular the adoption of the following:

* Adopted by the Committee at its ninetieth session (3–21 February 2025).

¹ Not included in concluding observations on State Party reports prepared on the basis of a list of issues prior to reporting.

² Decision made during the sixty-ninth session to include reference, if relevant, to delays in submitting reports that are equal to or longer than four years.



- (a) Anti-Sexual Harassment Act, in 2024;
- (b) Disabilities Act, in 2024;
- (c) Marriage (Amendment) Act, raising the minimum age of marriage to 18 years, without exceptions, in 2024;
- (d) National Women's Commission Act, in 2023;
- (e) Domestic and intimate partner violence (prohibition) bill, in 2023;
- (f) Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act, which domesticated the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Crime, in 2013;
- (g) Amendments to the Criminal Code to increase penalties for sexual crimes committed against children, in 2013;
- (h) Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act, in 2013;
- (i) Domestic Violence Act (DVA) Revised Edition, in 2011;
- (j) Labour Act Revised Edition, in 2011.

5. The Committee welcomes the State Party's efforts to improve its institutional and policy framework aimed at accelerating the elimination of discrimination against women and promoting gender equality, such as the adoption and establishment of the following:

- (a) Revised National Gender Policy 2024 to 2030, in 2024;
- (b) Waiver of duties and taxes on female sanitary products, in 2023;
- (c) Amnesty programme 2022–2023, benefiting women migrants and asylum-seekers, in 2022;
- (d) Women's Parliamentary Caucus, in 2022;
- (e) National HIV, sexually transmitted infections and tuberculosis strategic plan 2021–2025, in 2021;
- (f) Anti-Trafficking in Persons Strategic Plan of Action 2021–2023, in 2021;
- (g) National Climate Change Gender Action Plan 2022–2027, in 2022, and the National Climate Change Office, in 2021;
- (h) Road Map to End Child Marriage and Early Unions in Belize, in 2020;
- (i) Women, Peace and Security Agenda, in 2020;
- (j) Women's Agenda of "Plan Belize", in 2020;
- (k) Model Guidelines for Sexual Offence Cases, in 2017;
- (l) Belize Crime Observatory, in 2016.

6. The Committee welcomes the fact that, in the period since the consideration of the previous report, the State Party has ratified or acceded to the following international and regional instruments:

- (a) Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons, in 2024;
- (b) International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, in 2015;
- (c) 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, in 2015;

- (d) International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in 2015;
- (e) Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, in 2015;
- (f) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in 2011;
- (g) Accession to the Caribbean Court of Justice, in 2010.

C. Sustainable Development Goals

7. The Committee welcomes the international support for the Sustainable Development Goals and calls for the realization of *de jure* (legal) and *de facto* (substantive) gender equality, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, throughout the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Committee recalls the importance of Goal 5 and of the mainstreaming of the principles of equality and non-discrimination throughout all 17 Goals. It urges the State Party to recognize women as the driving force of the sustainable development of the State Party and to adopt relevant policies and strategies to that effect.

D. Parliament

8. The Committee stresses the crucial role of the legislative power in ensuring the full implementation of the Convention (see [A/65/38](#), part two, annex VI). It invites the National Assembly of Belize to take the necessary steps regarding the implementation of the present concluding observations between now and the submission of the next periodic report under the Convention.

E. Principal areas of concern and recommendations

Withdrawal of declaration upon accession to the Convention

9. The Committee acknowledges the information provided by the State Party on its robust laws and national mechanisms to address women's human rights. It is nevertheless concerned that the State Party maintains its declaration under article 10 of the Optional Protocol opting out of the confidential inquiry procedure.

10. The Committee reiterates its recommendation ([CEDAW/C/BLZ/CO/4](#), para. 35) that the State Party remove its declaration under article 10 of the Optional Protocol regarding the competence of the Committee under articles 8 and 9.

Constitutional and legislative framework

11. The Committee notes positively that the State Party is revising its domestic legal framework to align it with the Convention and other international human rights treaties. However, it notes with concern the lack of comprehensive legislation to address intersecting forms of discrimination against women and:

- (a) That the Constitution of Belize does not explicitly prohibit discrimination on grounds of gender and ethnicity and that it includes derogatory terms such as "unsound mind" and "vagrant";
- (b) The delay in the approval of the Equal Opportunities Bill, reportedly owing to the opposition from conservative and religious groups;

(c) That the Immigration Act (2000), which dates back to the colonial era, includes discriminatory references to “prostitutes”, “homosexuals” and derogatory language against persons with disabilities such as “idiot”, “insane”, “mentally deficient” and “dumb”;

(d) The retention of the death penalty, even if the State Party has maintained a de facto moratorium on executions since 1985.

12. The Committee recommends that the State Party:

(a) **Amend its Constitution to explicitly prohibit discrimination on grounds of gender and ethnicity, repeal all derogatory terms that discriminate against women and replace them with internationally agreed and inclusive language;**

(b) **Adopt comprehensive legislation addressing direct, indirect and intersecting discrimination in the public and private spheres in accordance with articles 1 and 2 of the Convention. Such legislation should include procedures for legal gender recognition and allowing for change of gender markers in official documentation;**

(c) **Repeal all sections of the Immigration Act that discriminate against women in prostitution, women with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) women and intersex persons, and conduct a comprehensive legislative review to remove any discriminatory provisions and language;**

(d) **Abolish the death penalty and, pending such abolition, issue a formal moratorium on the death penalty.**

Women’s access to justice

13. The Committee is concerned about the limited access to free legal aid, in particular for rural women, Creole, Garifuna and Maya women, Indigenous and Afrodescendent women, refugee and migrant women, women with disabilities and LGBT women and intersex persons.

14. The Committee recommends that the State Party remove barriers to women’s access to justice and develop legal and institutional frameworks on legal aid and public defence that are accessible, effective and responsive to the needs of women, in particular, disadvantaged groups of women, such as Creole, Garifuna and Maya women, Indigenous and Afrodescendent women, refugee and migrant women, women with disabilities and LGBT women and intersex persons.

National machinery for the advancement of women

15. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) The high dependence on donor funding of the national machinery for the advancement of women and the lack of a long-term strategy to ensure its sustainability;

(b) The undue burden placed on the National Women’s Commission as the main body in charge of coordinating the implementation of laws and policies related to women’s human rights and gender equality in the State Party, the lack of gender mainstreaming and the lack of integration of an intersectional perspective across all public institutions and ministries;

(c) The lack of an intersectional perspective in the National Gender Policy;

(d) The underrepresentation of Indigenous women and other marginalized groups of women in the development and evaluation of policies that affect them.

16. Recalling its previous concluding observations ([CEDAW/C/BLZ/CO/4](#), paras. 14 and 16), the Committee recommends that the State Party:

(a) Ensure that the national machinery for the advancement of women is funded from the regular budget, gradually reducing its dependence on donor funding, that it develop mechanisms and indicators to monitor how international assistance and development cooperation contribute to the realization of women's human rights, and that it ensure transparency and accountability in development cooperation;

(b) Incorporate gender and intersectional perspectives in all laws and policies of the State Party, ensure gender mainstreaming across all ministries and branches of government, and provide the National Women's Commission with adequate human, technical and financial resources to carry out its coordination role on gender equality;

(c) Integrate an intersectional perspective in the National Gender Policy;

(d) Ensure the equal participation and meaningful consultation of Indigenous women, including Creole, Garifuna and Maya women in the planning, implementation and monitoring of policies that affect them.

National human rights institution

17. The Committee notes the appointment of a new Ombudsman, in 2023, and welcomes the commitment of the State Party to create a national human rights institution. However, it notes with concern:

(a) That the State Party does not have a national human rights institution pursuant to the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles; see General Assembly resolution [48/134](#), annex);

(b) The absence of data on women's access to the Ombudsman and on the capacity of the Ombudsman to receive complaints from women.

18. The Committee recommends that the State Party:

(a) Avail itself of technical assistance from OHCHR to expedite the establishment of an independent national human rights institution, in accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles; see General Assembly resolution [48/134](#), annex), and provide it with adequate human, technical and financial resources and a broad mandate to protect and promote women's rights and gender equality;

(b) Ensure that the national human rights institution will have offices and specialized services available for women, including Indigenous women, Creole, Garifuna and Maya women and all disadvantaged groups of women in urban, rural and Indigenous areas.

Gender stereotypes

19. The Committee notes with concern that the State Party has not addressed the link between gender stereotypes, gender-based discrimination and violence against women and girls.

20. The Committee recommends that the State Party adopt comprehensive measures encompassing all key stakeholders and sectors – including all levels of the education system and educational materials – to address the links between gender stereotypes and gender-based violence and to tackle patriarchal

structures and gender stereotypes, harmful cultural practices, including stereotypes against Afrodescendent, Indigenous women, Creole, Garifuna and Maya women and other groups of disadvantaged women. The Committee recommends that the State Party include men and boys in these efforts, to affirm positive masculinity.

Gender-based violence against women

21. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) That insecurity and the proliferation of firearms used by criminal gangs increase the risk of gender-based violence, including femicides, for women, especially when they are perceived to be associated with rival gangs or the security forces;

(b) The high number of women and girl victims of domestic and sexual intimate partner violence;

(c) The lack of accessible services for women survivors of gender-based violence, as well as the lack of information on the funding of State shelters and financial support for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) providing victim support services;

(d) The lack of effective investigations in cases of femicide, which is not specifically criminalized in the State Party;

(e) The lack of disaggregated data on the different types of gender-based violence against women and girls in the State Party.

22. **Recalling its general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, the Committee recommends that the State Party:**

(a) **Control and combat the proliferation of small arms and organized crime, improve women's security and conduct education and gender-informed awareness campaigns to address toxic masculinities;**

(b) **Apply a zero-tolerance policy to all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls, with special attention to women belonging to marginalized groups, implement educational and awareness-raising campaigns to destigmatize women and girl victims of gender-based violence, and protect women who report gender-based violence from reprisals;**

(c) **Provide adequate funding for State shelters and financial support to NGOs providing specialized victim support services including psychosocial counselling and other rehabilitative services to women and girl survivors of gender-based violence, including rural women and asylum-seeking and migrant women;**

(d) **Ensure that all reports of gender-based violence, including femicides, are promptly and thoroughly investigated and perpetrators prosecuted, including ex officio, and adequately sentenced and that victims receive adequate reparations, and amend its Penal Code to specifically criminalize femicide. It also recommends the implementation of multisectoral assessments of femicide cases, to identify failures and opportunities for improvement of institutional responses across agencies and sectors and to prevent future killings;**

(e) **Ensure the systematic collection of comprehensive data on the different forms of gender-based violence in the State Party, including the number of investigations, prosecutions and convictions, the sentences imposed on perpetrators and reparations for victims.**

Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution

23. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) The insufficient human, technical and financial resources allocated to the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Police Unit, the Ministry of Immigration, the Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous People's Affairs, the Social Security Board and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to prevent, address and reduce human trafficking in women and girls;

(b) The low prosecution and conviction rates in cases of trafficking in women and girls, and reports of police collusion with traffickers;

(c) The lack of adequate screening of asylum-seeking and migrant women to ensure their early identification and referral to appropriate services and prevent them from being arrested, criminalized or reported for offences committed as a direct result of their trafficking experience;

(d) The failure to implement comprehensive victim-centred and rights-based policies on trafficking in women and girls, and the limited access of victims to rehabilitation programmes;

(e) That women are disproportionately affected by trafficking for purposes of labour exploitation, the lack of implementation of the national labour recruiter registry and the delay in adopting the migrant worker policy, as well as the insufficient regulation of recruitment agencies.

24. Recalling its general recommendation No. 38 (2020) on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration, the Committee recommends that the State Party:

(a) Allocate sufficient human, technical and financial resources for the comprehensive and efficient implementation of anti-trafficking legal and institutional measures;

(b) Strengthen its prosecutorial and judicial capacity to increase prosecution and sentencing rates in cases of trafficking in women and girls, and strengthen accountability mechanisms to address police collusion with traffickers;

(c) Ensure adequate screening of asylum-seeking and migrant women at risk of trafficking, the early identification and referral of trafficking victims to appropriate services, including legal aid and rehabilitation programmes, that victims are not deported for administrative offences or those directly related to their trafficking experience, and that they have access to international protection and temporary resident permit irrespective of their ability or willingness to cooperate with the prosecution authorities;

(d) Ensure that women and girls victims of trafficking have access to adequately equipped shelters offering specialized support services, including free legal assistance, interpretation, medical treatment, psychosocial counselling, financial support, education, skills training and income-generating opportunities;

(e) Regulate private recruitment agencies, implement the national labour recruiter registry set forth in the Labour Act, and expedite the adoption of the migrant worker policy.

25. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) That sections 4 (1) (ix) and (xxx), and section 18 (1) (c) of the Summary Jurisdiction (Offences) Act criminalize as petty offences wandering and loitering for prostitution and trading of prostitution, punishable with imprisonment or fines;

(b) That trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation in the State Party persists, affecting both national and foreign women and girls, in particular from Central America, and that Maya girls are at an increased risk through the *fichera* practice;

(c) The lack of comprehensive measures to prevent the sexual exploitation of girls, in particular in tourist and border regions.

26. The Committee recommends that the State Party:

(a) **Repeal section 4 (1) (ix), section 4 (1) (xxx) and section 18 (1) (c) of the Summary Jurisdiction (Offences) Act, and conduct a comprehensive legislative review to repeal any provisions that criminalize women in prostitution;**

(b) **Adopt specific measures to address trafficking in and the sexual exploitation of Maya girls through the *fichera* practice;**

(c) **Adopt comprehensive measures to prevent the sexual exploitation of women and girls in tourist and border regions, and ensure through international agreements and cooperation that foreign perpetrators are prosecuted;**

(d) **Provide exit programmes, including alternative income-generating opportunities, to women and girls who wish to leave prostitution.**

Equal participation in political and public life

27. The Committee commends the State Party on the high representation of women in the judiciary, including at the highest level of decision-making and in local governance, as well as on the election of the first Indigenous woman of Maya descent as Governor-General. However, it notes with concern that the State Party has not introduced any temporary special measures to accelerate the substantive equality of women and men, despite information indicating public support for such measures. It is also concerned about:

(a) The underrepresentation of women, including Indigenous women, in leadership roles in the National Assembly, public service, the diplomatic service and in State-owned enterprises, and the lack of mandatory quotas for women's representation on electoral lists of political parties;

(b) The lack of information on the resources allocated to and the results achieved by the Women's Parliamentary Caucus and of awareness-raising to engage men, including Parliamentarians and party leaders, boys and the general public, in measures to eliminate gender stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes concerning women's participation in political and public life;

(c) The lack of measures to foster understanding of the importance of women's political empowerment.

28. Recalling its past recommendation (CEDAW/C/BLZ/CO/4, para. 18), as well as its general recommendations No. 23 (1997) on women in political and public life, No. 25 (2004) on temporary special measures and No. 40 (2024) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, as well as target 5.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Committee recommends that the State Party:

(a) **Establish parity quotas to ensure women's equal representation at the decision-making level and in leadership roles in the National Assembly, public service and the diplomatic service and in State-owned enterprises, including Belize Electricity Limited, Belize Telemedia Limited and Belize Water Services Limited;**

(b) **Provide the Women's Parliamentary Caucus with a strong mandate and adequate human, technical and financial resources to carry out its functions of contributing to increased representation of women and promoting gender-sensitive decision-making in the National Assembly. It also recommends that the State Party implement awareness-raising campaigns to engage men, including Parliamentarians and party leaders, boys, parents and the general public, in measures to address gender stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes and raise awareness, in collaboration with the media, on the importance of the full, independent and democratic participation of women on an equal basis with men in political and public life as a requirement for achieving political stability and sustainable development in the State Party;**

(c) **Promote understanding that women's equal representation in political and public life is not limited to the National Assembly and the national and local governments, and support the involvement of women in all their diversity, including Indigenous women, in civil society, women's NGOs working on social issues, the private sector and international organizations.**

Gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality and statelessness of women

29. The Committee welcomes the cooperation between the State Party and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to align its legal framework and policies on nationality, immigration and refugees with international human rights standards and to ensure access to relevant procedures for women and girls in need of international protection. However, the Committee notes with concern:

(a) The absence of laws and regulations establishing a statelessness determination procedure, which increases the risk of statelessness for Indigenous women and girls, rural women and asylum-seeking, refugees and migrant women and girls;

(b) The insufficient efforts to improve universal birth registration in rural and Indigenous areas, and that many Maya girls lack birth certificates and cannot apply for citizenship and social benefits;

(c) That the proposed amendments to the Nationality (Amendment) Act may increase the risk of discrimination for girls and women based on their residency status;

(d) That sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls is not formally recognized as a ground of international protection in the State Party.

30. Recalling its general recommendation No. 32 (2014) on the gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality and statelessness of women, the Committee recommends that the State Party:

(a) **Adopt comprehensive legislation establishing a statelessness determination procedure and ensure that all women and girls in the State Party at risk of statelessness have access thereto;**

(b) **Facilitate women's and girls' access to birth registration, especially in rural and Indigenous areas and those with a high concentration of asylum-seeking and migrant women and girls, through mobile civil registry units, affordable and easy-to-access procedures, including online, to ensure that they are not excluded from nationality, access to justice, education, healthcare, social benefits and other services;**

(c) **Ensure that the proposed amendments to the Nationality (Amendment) Act do not discriminate against women and girls on the basis of residency status;**

(d) **Establish gender-responsive refugee status determination procedures that recognize gender-based violence as a ground of international protection and adopt the UNHCR guidelines on international protection and gender-related persecution.**

Education

31. The Committee commends the State Party for the establishment of the Belize Education Upliftment Project, the provision of compulsory psychosocial support session for ages 5 and 6 and the increase in the age of compulsory education for a child from 14 years to 16 years under the Education and Training (Amendment) Act, No. 3 of 2024. However, it notes with concern:

(a) That, as the fifth country in the world to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the State Party is yet to extend the age of compulsory education for a child to 18 years;

(b) That some schools in the State Party, especially in rural and remote areas, continue to have limited water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH) services, which is particularly challenging for girls in primary and secondary school, including girls with disabilities and those who are menstruating;

(c) The decrease in education enrolment in schools owing to child marriage and early pregnancies;

(d) That, despite establishing the national school meal programme for vulnerable learners and learners in rural communities to end hunger in schools, the implementation of compulsory nutrition standards or school food within schools remains a challenge;

(e) Persistent gender disparities in vocational training, rural and urban secondary education and tertiary education, as well as gender stereotypes in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) field that deter women and girls from enrolling in STEM subjects or male-dominated fields of study;

(f) The limited access to quality and inclusive education for women and girls with disabilities and for refugee, migrant and asylum-seeking women and girls;

(g) Reports of school-related bullying and violence, cyberbullying and online violence, including exposure to and the distribution of sexual and pornographic material;

(h) The limited availability of data disaggregated by age, sex, ethnicity and type of disability on the number of women and girls enrolled in vocational training.

32. **Recalling its general recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of girls and women to education and its prior concluding observations ([CEDAW/C/BLZ/CO/4](#), para. 24) the Committee recommends that the State Party:**

(a) **Extend the age of compulsory education from age 16 to 18 years;**

(b) **Effectively provide accessible and inclusive WASH services in schools, including safe drinking water, hand washing facilities with soap and water, functional toilets and decent menstrual health and hygiene management, including policies on affordable and/or free-of-charge menstrual products, as appropriate;**

(c) Strictly enforce its legal and policy framework on the prohibition of child marriage and take concrete steps to protect pregnant girls' and adolescent mothers' right to education, including through eliminating discrimination in learning environments, providing age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education, empowering parents, teachers and communities to be supportive and flexible, providing counselling services and eliminating gender stereotypes that perpetuate child marriage and teenage pregnancies;

(d) Continue and strengthen the national school meal programme, as well as develop and implement compulsory nutrition standards in schools and provide learners with nutritious school meals as a means to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education for women and girls;

(e) Address the gender stereotypes and structural barriers at all levels of education that deter women and girls from enrolling and staying in school, including enrolling in STEM studies, traditionally male-dominated fields of study and new fields of study, such as artificial intelligence, and train teachers at all levels of the education system on ways to prevent stereotyping, all in order to achieve parity in the enrolment of women and girls;

(f) Strengthen measures to meet the educational needs of women and girls with special needs, women and girls with disabilities, refugee, migrant and asylum-seeking women and girls and women and girls living in poverty;

(g) Effectively implement school safety policies to protect women and girls from school-related sexual violence, exposure to and the distribution of pornographic material, bullying and online violence;

(h) Provide safe and inclusive educational environments for girls and women free from discrimination, harassment, bullying and gender-based violence;

(i) Collect information on women's and girls' access to education, including data disaggregated by sex, age, geographical location, type of disability, socioeconomic background, women and girls enrolled in the STEM field in tertiary education, dropout rates and teachers being trained to meet the educational needs of women and girls with disabilities, and report thereon to the Committee in its next periodic report.

Employment

33. The Committee is concerned about:

(a) Disparities in labour force participation, largely due to gendered notions about unpaid domestic and caregiving responsibilities, the fact that women continue to experience lower employment rates and wages, despite having higher education levels than men, and that they are disproportionately represented in lower-paying sectors;

(b) The lack of comprehensive measures for the full inclusion of self-employed women in the State Party's insurance system;

(c) The persistent gender pay gap, leading to women earning only 68 per cent of men's income on average;

(d) The lack of comprehensive implementation of the State Party's legislation on sexual harassment in the workplace, including the Anti-Sexual Harassment Act;

(e) The fact that the State Party has not acceded to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), Promotional

Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187) and Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189).

34. The Committee recommends that the State Party:

(a) **Identify the root causes of gender disparities in labour and, based on the results, implement targeted measures to enhance the access of women to employment. Such measures should include training opportunities and safeguards to protect women from discrimination in recruitment, with a special focus on disadvantaged groups of women, strategies to eliminate horizontal and vertical occupational segregation, in particular in traditionally male-dominated industries, and improve the conditions of work in female-dominated occupations and actions aimed at countering societal, structural and institutional obstacles contributing to de facto inequality in the workforce;**

(b) **Ensure that women employed in the informal economy and unpaid work, as well as self-employed women, have full access to labour, social and insurance protection coverage;**

(c) **Enforce the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, regularly review wages and benefits and further strengthen measures to close the gender pay gap, including by means of gender-inclusive job classification and regular pay surveys;**

(d) **Effectively implement legislation on sexual harassment in the workplace, including through regular labour inspections, and ensure that women victims of sexual harassment have access to effective remedies, including in rural and remote areas, that their complaints are effectively investigated, perpetrators prosecuted and adequately punished and victims protected from retaliation;**

(e) **Ratify the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187) and Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189).**

Health

35. The Committee notes with appreciation that the State Party's health system is rooted in the principle of social justice, that it has ensured universal access to healthcare, achieved gender parity in health and survival and waived duties and taxes on female sanitary products and that, in 2023, it eliminated the transmission of HIV and syphilis from mother to child. Nevertheless, it remains concerned:

(a) That the State Party lacks updated and intersectional statistics on the right to health of women and girls;

(b) That the criminal code allows abortion in very limited circumstances and treats all others, including when the pregnancy is the result of rape, incest or sexual intercourse with a minor, as a crime with severe penalties, including for pregnant women and girls;

(c) That the State Party has not implemented comprehensive sexual education in all schools, in particular faith-based schools, and has yet to ensure sufficient funds for contraceptives for women and girls;

(d) At the lack of access to radiotherapy, including for the treatment of breast cancer;

(e) At the persistent rates of maternal mortality, which have almost doubled from 2000 to 2020, in particular among rural Maya women;

(f) At the limited access to health services and geriatric care for elderly women, especially in rural areas.

36. In line with its general recommendation No. 24 (1999) on women and health and targets 3.1 and 3.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals, to reduce global maternal mortality and ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services, the Committee recommends that the State Party:

(a) Collect updated and intersectional data on women's and girls' health, including information on unplanned pregnancies, births among minors and the prevalence of cervical and breast cancer;

(b) Decriminalize abortion in all cases and ensure that women and adolescent girls have adequate access to safe abortion and post-abortion services, as a means to ensure the full realization of the rights of women and their economic and bodily autonomy to make free choices about their reproductive rights;

(c) Ensure education on sexual and reproductive health and rights in schools, including in faith-based schools, ensuring that it is age-appropriate and comprehensive, addresses responsible sexual behaviour, with a focus on preventing early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections and contraceptive information, and train teachers to address such topics in a gender-sensitive manner, as well as adequate and sufficient funding for free-of-charge contraceptives for women and girls;

(d) Allocate adequate human and financial resources to ensure that women have access to comprehensive treatment for breast, cervical and other cancers, including radiotherapy;

(e) Strengthen measures to counter the growing rate of maternal mortality, including by improving access to prenatal and postnatal care and emergency obstetric services and by addressing its root causes, such as obstetric complications, early pregnancy and unsafe abortions. The State Party should also ensure the availability of skilled birth attendants throughout its territory;

(f) Ensure that older women have affordable access to specialized health services addressing their specific health needs, including noncommunicable diseases, dementia, Alzheimer's disease, autoimmune diseases and mental health.

Economic empowerment of women

37. The Committee is concerned at:

(a) The absence of comprehensive information on financial support available to women-owned businesses and assessments on the social and economic impact thereof. Information is also unavailable on the results and impact of the Development Finance Corporation's training for loan officers and other initiatives for the economic empowerment of women;

(b) That the Belize National Sports Policy lacks specific measures to encourage and expand girls' and women's participation in professional and recreational sports. It is also concerned that the Ministry of Human Development Families and Indigenous People's Affairs – the lead ministry for the National Women's Commission, with overall responsibility for gender equality – is not part of the institutional framework for the implementation of such a policy.

38. The Committee recommends that the State Party:

(a) Increase women's financial literacy and support them in navigating the requirements of personal financial management, obtaining and managing

loans, mortgages and other forms of financial credit, reduce increased financial risks for women, and ensure the inclusion of women-owned businesses in all aspects of economic life on an equal basis with men;

(b) Ensure that the National Sports Policy guarantees the right of women and girls to participate in sports recreationally and professionally in both rural and urban areas by, inter alia, encouraging the participation of women in leadership roles in sports, enhancing funding and investment in women-specific sports and ensuring that women in sports generate economic autonomy and financial well-being and enjoy a healthy living. The Committee also recommends that the Ministry of Human Development Families and Indigenous People's Affairs become part of the institutional framework for the National Sports Policy.

Women facing intersecting forms of discrimination

39. The Committee is concerned about:

(a) The delay in the full implementation of the landmark 2015 judgment of the Caribbean Court of Justice, *Maya Leaders Alliance et. al. v The Attorney General of Belize*, and the lack of meaningful participation of Maya women and girls therein, as well as the authorization of oil drilling, logging and concessions to energy companies in Maya lands;

(b) The insufficient information on the implementation of the Disabilities Act, adopted in 2024;

(c) The lack of information on the participation of women and girls in the State Party's blue economy, that is, an economy based on the sustainable use of ocean and coastal resources for economic growth while protecting the environment and improving livelihoods;

(d) The fact that the Arms Trade Treaty and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) model legislation for the implementation of the Treaty have not been incorporated into the State Party's domestic legislation;

(e) The increased imprisonment of women, including those incarcerated for immigration-related offences, as well as the lack of policies to ensure the protection of women's rights in prison.

40. The Committee recommends that the State Party:

(a) Ensure that the domestic implementation of the judgment of the Caribbean Court of Justice is in accordance with the constitutional rights of Maya women and girls and their right to free, prior and informed consent in all issues related to their lands, and that the official recognition of Maya people as a collective legal subject with customary land rights, the issuance of land titles, demarcation of lands and granting of reparations addresses the unique experiences and needs of Maya women and girls;

(b) Mainstream the rights of women and girls with disabilities into all public policies, action plans and strategies, including those concerning the rights of persons with disabilities and the rights of women, at all levels of government;

(c) Ensure that all its programmes on the agricultural sector and the "blue economy" incorporate a gender perspective, and that it guarantee access for rural women to technical support and training for agricultural innovation, new technologies, agribusiness development, banking services, including mobile banking services, and that women have access to electricity generated by renewable energy;

(d) **Incorporate the CARICOM model legislation for the implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty into its domestic legislation, and address the arms trade as a root cause for gender-based violence;**

(e) **Ensure that the conditions of women in detention comply with the United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems, the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules), the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) and the international standard pursuant to which the irregular entry and stay in a country by migrants, including women and girls, should not be treated as a criminal offence, and migrants must not be qualified or treated as criminals.**

Equality in marriage and family relations

41. The Committee is concerned at:

(a) The persistent high rates of child marriage and early unions, despite legislation enacted to counter such harmful practices;

(b) The lack of comprehensive legislation and implementation of the rights of the child regarding custody and visitation rights;

(c) De facto gender disparities in landownership and inheritance, especially in rural areas and for Indigenous women;

(d) Article 53 of the Criminal Code, which criminalizes same-sex relations remaining on the State Party's books, even though the Supreme Court deemed it unconstitutional in 2016 (*Caleb Orozco v. The Attorney General of Belize et al.*), as well as the lack of recognition of same-sex marriage and civil unions;

(e) The lack of information on access to justice for Indigenous women and girls, and on customary judicial systems.

42. **The Committee reiterates its recommendation ([CEDAW/C/BLZ/CO/4](#), para. 32) that the State Party:**

(a) **Address the root causes of child marriage and early unions, including through awareness-raising on the negative health, education and financial consequences of early pregnancy and marriage for girls. It also recommends that it prosecute guardians and marriage officiators who conduct or facilitate marriage before the age of 18, as well as the betrothal of a child, in line with joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019) on harmful practices;**

(b) **Ensure, through capacity-building and measurable indicators, that judges incorporate a gender perspective and the rights of the child in cases regarding custody and visitation rights, in particular those involving domestic violence, and that its legal framework sets forth adequate protection measures for victims and consequences for perpetrators;**

(c) **Eliminate all barriers that in practice (de facto) favour males in landownership and inheritance, and ensure that women, Indigenous women and LGBT women and intersex persons have access to land and property titles on an equal basis with men;**

(d) **Recognize same-sex marriage and civil unions and ensure the full enjoyment of their rights, inter alia, in family relationships, inheritance rights, tax benefits and medical decisions, and repeal article 53 of the Criminal Code;**

(c) **Collect comprehensive and disaggregated information on the access to justice for Indigenous women and girls, including Creole, Garifuna and Maya women, and customary justice systems, and report thereon to the Committee in its next review.**

Data collection and analysis

43. The Committee notes the efforts of the State Party to improve data collection disaggregated by sex and gender, in cooperation with international and regional organizations, notably through the Spotlight Initiative. It also welcomes the data produced by the Statistical Institute of Belize. However, the Committee remains concerned that comprehensive, sex-disaggregated and intersectional data remains largely unavailable, which undermines efforts to assess, monitor and evaluate the gender-specific impact and outcomes of legislation, policies and strategies related to women's and girls' human rights and compliance with the Convention.

44. **The Committee reiterates its previous recommendations (CEDAW/C/BLZ/CO/4, paras. 9 and 10) that the State Party put in place a comprehensive system of data collection in all areas covered by the Convention to assess the actual situation of women and to track trends over time. The Committee recommends that such a system mainstream gender and intersectionality and comprise, at least:**

(a) **Quantitative information (disaggregated by sex, ethnicity and rural and urban areas, as well as data on women with disabilities, Indigenous women, including Creole, Garifuna and Maya women, refugee, asylum-seeking, stateless and migrant women and girls, LGBT women, intersex persons and older women);**

(b) **Indicators to measure the progress of policies to achieve the substantive equality of women and men in all areas of life;**

(c) **Information on structural gendered issues, such as access to justice, trafficking and women in prostitution, gender-based violence, the political participation of women, education, employment (unpaid care, domestic work, gender pay gap), health and poverty.**

Optional Protocol to the Convention and amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention

45. **The Committee encourages the State Party to ratify, as soon as possible, the Optional Protocol to the Convention and to accept the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention concerning the meeting time of the Committee.**

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

46. **The Committee calls upon the State Party to use the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to further evaluate the realization of the rights enshrined in the Convention to achieve substantive equality between women and men.**

Dissemination

47. **The Committee requests the State Party to ensure the timely dissemination of the present concluding observations, in the official language of the State Party, to the relevant State institutions at all levels (national, regional, local), in particular to the Government, the National Assembly and the judiciary, to enable their full implementation.**

Ratification of other treaties

48. The Committee notes that the adherence of the State Party to the nine major international human rights instruments and relevant regional instruments would enhance the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms in all aspects of life. The Committee therefore encourages the State Party to ratify the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure and, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to which it is not yet a party.

Follow-up to concluding observations

49. The Committee requests the State Party to provide, within two years, written information on the steps taken to implement the recommendations contained in paragraphs 14, 32 (b) and (c), and 40 (a) above.

Preparation of the next report

50. The Committee will establish and communicate the due date of the tenth periodic report of the State Party in line with a future clear and regularized schedule for reporting by States parties (General Assembly resolution [79/165](#), para. 6) and following the adoption of a list of issues and questions prior to reporting, if applicable, for the State Party. The report should cover the entire period up to the time of its submission.

51. The Committee requests the State Party to follow the harmonized guidelines on reporting under the international human rights treaties, including guidelines on a common core document and treaty-specific documents ([HRI/GEN/2/Rev.6](#), chap. I).
