



**STATEMENT BY**

**HIS EXCELLENCY HON. SAID W. MUSA**

**PRIME MINISTER OF BELIZE**

**AT THE HIGH LEVEL PLENARY MEETING**

**OF THE**

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**PERMANENT MISSION OF BELIZE  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

Mr. President,

### **COMMITMENT REAFFIRMED**

Five years ago I stood upon this very podium, committing my country – my government – to a global compact for development. As leaders we agreed to:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS as well as the incidence of malaria and other major diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability; and,
- Develop a global partnership for development

In addition to these targets, small countries like Belize have to find effective solutions to other grave concerns such as crime and violence in our societies and our vulnerability to natural disasters.

The terrible tragedy unleashed by Hurricane Katrina on a major city in the United States of America and the stunning paralysis and vulnerability it exposed should leave a very clear idea of the damage that is done to entire economies of small countries like Belize on an annual basis, away from the glare of international media attention. Our sister Caribbean country, Grenada is but the latest example.

In the face of these economic, social and environmental challenges, some would say our goals are too ambitious, too idealistic, but idealism grounded in reality is what provides the passion for concerted action.

### **BELIZE'S REPORT CARD**

Like most other member states, Belize's first Millennium Development Goals Report shows mixed results in the progress towards the achievement of the targets. While there is a positive outlook for achieving universal primary education, eliminating gender disparity in education at all levels, reducing child mortality and improving maternal health, there are considerable challenges to meeting the time-bound targets for poverty eradication and for halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS and the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

As a young, developing nation we are faced with various demographic and economic challenges. For example 52 percent of our population is less than 19 years of age, 51 percent of our people live in rural areas, and the population density is 10.9 persons per square kilometer, which increases the cost of infrastructural development.

Growing inequality and income disparity, the rise in poverty hotspots especially within urban and indigenous communities, youth unemployment and malnutrition are critical MDG-related challenges that Belize is facing.

While we have made significant progress with respect to reversing the spread of malaria and tuberculosis, new emerging non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes and hypertension, are on the rise.

In addition, our vulnerability to external shocks such as exploding oil prices, the dismantling of preferential access to industrial countries for agricultural commodities and vulnerability to destructive hurricanes make it difficult for countries like Belize to avoid high public debt, which in turn restricts our ability to invest in public and social services to reach all our people.

## **TACKLING THE MDGS**

My Government has taken a head-on approach in meeting these challenges. We are very advanced in developing our five year National Poverty Elimination Strategy and Action Plan. This plan, which will be completed by January 2006, is incorporating a results-oriented approach to poverty reduction using specific poverty reduction targets based on the Millennium Development Goals.

An updated medium-term economic strategy is also underway that will incorporate debt management, fiscal policy, public sector investment, and growth with equity as integral components.

At the same time, we recognize that the eradication of poverty and improvement of the quality of lives of Belizeans will only be sustainable if government is effective, transparent and accountable. My Government has been building, since 1998, a strong national integrity system including an independent judiciary with security of tenure, a broad-based Governance Improvement Commission that is working to strengthen oversight institutions like the Auditor-General, the Contractor-General and the Ombudsman and modern legislation that safeguards accountability in the administration of public finances.

## **WHAT IS TO BE DONE?**

### **The Central Role of the United Nations**

It is the position of my government that the United Nations and its development system are indispensable to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in 2015. For millions of poor people around the world, a reformed United Nations with an agenda for international cooperation, promoting peace and security, development and human rights can literally mean life over death, hope over despair.

## **Development and Security**

Small countries like Belize, of necessity, tend to be more concerned with poverty and development, while the developed world tends to be more concerned with security issues. These differing perspectives might be the biggest obstacle to international cooperation in achieving the MDGs. The UN Secretary-General's Report *In Larger Freedom* vividly and graphically demonstrates the links between security and development. They are two sides of the same coin. Collective security can never be built on a global minefield of poverty and injustice.

What is needed is the global political will to make good on our respective pledges of five years ago.

## **Effective Aid**

Although the primary responsibility for development rests with national governments, it is also essential that our developed partners follow through on the assistance to which they committed. International assistance is a key investment in human development. The Government of Belize therefore supports the call that, for aid to be effective, the volume of aid must be increased; aid must be more easily accessible and at lesser transaction costs and aid must have country ownership.

We must commend the efforts of the G-8 to cancel the debt of those developing countries designated by the United Nations as Heavily Indebted Poor Countries. This is the type of partnership that we must develop if we are to accomplish the full implementation of the Millennium Development Goals in the decade to come.

## **Unfair Trade Practices**

The Government of Belize accepts that trade has the potential to advance the prosperity of the poorer countries of the world. Unfair trade practices not only limit that potential but are also inconsistent with the MDGs.

Agricultural subsidies in rich countries continue to stifle the prosperity of efficient agriculture sectors in developing countries.

The Doha Development Round was launched in 2000 with the overarching objective of ensuring that the multilateral trade rules account for the needs of developing countries. There are high stakes for Belize in a successful conclusion of this Round, that is, a conclusion that embodies the needs and concerns of developing countries, especially those with smaller economies.

**Mr. President,**

The great achievements of the past century and indeed the current wave of globalization have created more wealth and knowledge than ever before, making it possible for the first time in human history, to eradicate poverty and improve the quality of life for men, women and children. Yet, there is persistent poverty and growing human insecurity. Our strategy of achieving sustainable economic growth with social equity requires fundamental reforms of social policies with a view to reflecting principles of universality, inclusion and solidarity. We must all recognize that we are our brother's and our sister's keepers. For Belize, the United Nations and its Charter epitomize these core and indispensable principles. The lives of millions around the world hang in the balance. Let us not lose this opportunity to change our world for the betterment of all.