



National Assembly of Belize

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PRESS RELEASE

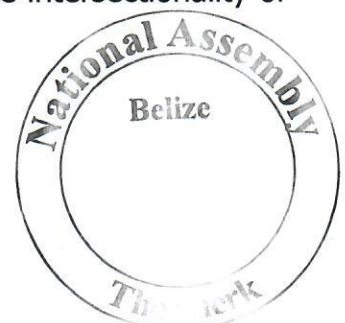
Women's Parliamentary Caucus partners with United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to host forum in commemoration of 75th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

—**16th November 2023**—The right to dignity, freedom, and justice; the right to education, healthcare, food, and shelter; the right to choose our faith and to express ourselves, to privacy and to our property were all enshrined and are protected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations 75 years ago on the 10th of December 1948.

As Belize joins in the commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Women's Parliamentary Caucus, with support from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, organized a forum to promote knowledge sharing, learning and collaboration and to enhance awareness about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. By creating a space for parliamentarians, civil society organizations, the private sector and the public on rights-based approaches and activities, the initiative is designed to collectively and effectively contribute to the recognition of, respect for and protection of our inalienable human rights.

Featured speaker at the event was Madam Justice Antoinette Moore, Justice of the High Court of Belize, Southern Administrative District. By providing a historical perspective, Justice Moore highlighted the way forward. *"One of my favourite quotes from Eleanor Roosevelt, who Chaired the HR Commission, says, "Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman and child seek equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world." Human rights and fundamental freedoms are in our DNA. It is for this reason that human rights and fundamental freedom are included in our Constitution, and I predict will be fortified in the Constitutional revisions currently underway. However, while human rights are a part of the Belizean spirit, we must continue to do all we can to shed the legacies of elitism, colonialism, sexism, racism and classism that remain with us. There is much work to do, and it is an everyday challenge, "in small places, close to home." The expansion of rights and our understanding of human rights is part of the natural progression of the human race. It is how we move forward "in larger freedom.""*

Key to the forum were three panel discussions which highlighted the intersectionality of human rights issues.



The first panel topic was on **Combating gender-based violence, particularly for vulnerable women, especially asylum seekers and refugees**. Panelists were: Ms. Diana Locke, Head of Office, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Senator, Hon. Erica Rodriguez Jang, Educator, and Ms. Nancy Dominguez, Project Coordinator, Humana People to People Initiative. The ensuing discussion was moderated by Ms. Dalila Ical of the Human Rights Commission of Belize.

The second panel topic of the day was on **Gender equity, including LGBTQ+ inclusiveness, diverse abilities, and healthcare**. Panelist were: Ms. Christy Almeida, from Autism Belize, Ms. Karen Lewis-Bell, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)/WHO Representative, and Mr. Luke Martinez, President, National Trade Union Congress (NTUCB). The ensuing discussion was moderated by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon. Valerie Woods.

The final panel topic was on **Climate resilience and environmental justice, particularly for women and children**. Panelist were: Dr. Percival Cho, Expert in Environment and Climate Change, Mr. Ian King, Deputy Resident, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and Hon. Carolyn Trench Sandiford, President of the Senate and an Expert in Planning and Environmental Law. The ensuing discussion was moderated by the President of the National Garifuna Council, Ms. Sheena Zuniga.

Present at the event were members of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus and fellow parliamentarians, members of the diplomatic corps, human rights advocates from various civil society groups, representatives of the United Nations agencies, village councilors from Barranco, Sittee River, Seine Bight and Monkey River, religious leaders, among other invited guests.

During the forum, participants had the opportunity to share personal pledges to respect, promote and strengthen human rights, to create human rights-enhancing economies, to address the climate crisis and to create peace.

The forum is the first discussion organized by the Women's Parliamentary Caucus towards generating comprehensive recommendations as to the shared vision we all hold to positively impact the enjoyment of human rights in Belize. For additional information, please contact clerkna@bna.gov.bz. Photos of the event can be found here: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1fZv8is8Imzss7IcVmW-s3BMe6-BP-mD5?usp=sharing> or by scanning the below QR code.



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