PERMANENT MISSION OF BELIZE
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Statement delivered by Belize on Report of the International Law Commission on the work of its seventy-sixth and seventy-seventh sessions - Item 78, Cluster I.

Madam Chair,

Belize aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States, and adds the following remarks in its national capacity.

Belize welcomes the Final Report of the Study Group on sea-level rise in relation to international law, and thanks the Commission and the Co-Chairs of the Study Group for six years of careful, consultative work.

Madam Chair,

For small island and low-lying coastal developing States, clarity in the international law governing sea-level rise bears directly on our security, our statehood and the protection of our people.

Sea-level rise is accelerating. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has found that the rate of rise has

increased in each successive period of observation and that sea level will continue to rise for centuries. The Secretary-General has reported that average global sea level rose by almost six millimetres in 2024, the largest annual increase on record. In many parts of the Caribbean, inhabited land is scarcely one metre above sea level, and population, infrastructure and economic activity are concentrated along the coast. Belize is no exception: our coast, our cayes and our barrier reef are the foundation of our economy and our identity. The sea is not merely approaching our doorsteps; it is already there.

Belize reaffirms the position that AOSIS has set out in this Committee, which the Report's conclusions confirm. First, maritime zones established in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and the rights and entitlements that flow from them, shall continue to apply without reduction, notwithstanding physical changes resulting from climate change-related sea-level rise. Second, statehood and sovereignty continue.
However, on the protection of persons, the Report is candid that the work has only begun. It finds that the applicable

frameworks are fragmented and not specific to sea-level rise, that affected persons remain rights-holders, and that legal and practical solutions are needed for those who remain in situ and those who are displaced, guided by their safety, essential needs, and human dignity. The Report's chapter on possible ways forward offers States a range of options, from interpretative statements to new instruments. It is now up to Member States, and for this Committee, to decide.

Madame Chair,

Two developments since the Report's adoption reinforce its conclusions.

The first is the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of 23 July 2025. It lends the authority of the principal judicial organ of the United Nations to the Report's conclusions on baselines and maritime zones, and it speaks directly to the continuity of statehood. On the protection of persons, the Court confirmed that States have obligations under the principle of non-refoulement where the effects of climate change pose a real risk of irreparable harm to the right to life. That affirms the Report's starting point, but it addresses only movement across borders and leaves the wider protection gap open.

The second is the United Nations Declaration on Sea-Level Rise, adopted by consensus, the first declaration of the General Assembly devoted to the subject. In affirming the stability of maritime zones and the presumption of continuity of statehood, the declaration adopts conclusions that the Commission drew from State practice and regional declarations into a position of the UN membership as a whole, exactly the kind of declaration the Report envisaged. Its language on the protection of persons and on cooperation, however, remains general, and requires further elaboration on quantified financial commitments.

Madam Chair,

Two areas call for further clarification.

The first is the protection of persons. The Report identifies the need to delineate the obligations of the affected State and of host States, including support for adaptation and resilience measures. At the High-level Meeting, CARICOM called for a framework that defines the responsibilities of affected and receiving States, creates pathways for cross-border movement, supports those who remain, and guarantees self-

determination. AOSIS and the Pacific Small Island Developing States have made the same call. Belize shares it.

The second is the duty to cooperate. The Report, the Court and the Declaration all affirm it, but none yet specifies its content in the context of sea-level rise: what cooperation is owed, by whom and to what standard, and what measures are required, including technical, financial and capacity support. That question should not be left to inference. We recall the suggestion of AOSIS that obligations of cooperation, prevention and reparation could merit the Commission's future attention.

The conclusion of the Commission's work is not the end of this Committee's task. Belize supports the Pacific Small Island Developing States in calling on the Sixth Committee to decide, in this year's resolution on the report of the Commission, to continue its consideration of the legal aspects of sea-level rise at the eighty-second session.

I thank you.