PERMANENT MISSION OF BELIZE
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Belize Statement to the General Assembly on Agenda Item 72: Report of the International Court of Justice

Mr. President,

Belize thanks **His Excellency Judge Iwasawa Yuji**, President of the International Court of Justice, for his presentation of the Court's annual report.

The report reflects the Court's centrality to the peace architecture of the United Nations.

Eighty years on, the **Court has grown from strength to strength**.

In its first year, it received a single case.

On 31 July 2026, its General List stood at 24;

and, over the reporting period, 88 States took part in its proceedings.

These numbers represent cases, not conflict.

Relations between States must rest on friendship, sovereign equality, and mutual respect.

Where dialogue alone cannot settle a disagreement, its peaceful resolution must rest on law.

This eighty-year-old institution was born knowing the alternative.

Humanity is better for the Court, and the United Nations that houses it.

Belize reaffirms its steadfast commitment to the Court. We commend its judges and its Registry for guarding the integrity, independence and impartiality on which everything else depends.

It is a trusted institution.

Mr. President,

Belize is a small State with modest means.

We have, nonetheless, chosen to defend principles we consider essential to our own existence **through the Court**.

We first appeared before the Court in 2004, in the advisory proceedings on the *Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, **to defend the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination**.

We have since taken part in ***four more*** advisory proceedings:

- In 2018, in *Chagos*, we argued that the right of peoples to self-determination was already customary international law by 1965, that it is owed *erga omnes*, and that it protects the territorial integrity of a non-self-governing territory until its people have freely expressed their wishes; the Court agreed on each point.

- In 2023 and 2024, the international community had to return to the question of Palestine, and so did Belize. The Court's Opinion of 19 July 2024 confirmed that, in a situation of foreign occupation, the **right to self-determination is a peremptory norm**, that the obligation to respect it is owed *erga omnes*, and that Israel's presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is unlawful and must end.

These are not causes unique to a small State alone. They are the causes of the Charter.

Most recently Belize took part in the advisory proceedings on *Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change*. We submitted that the customary duty to prevent significant transboundary harm applies to greenhouse gas emissions; that this duty demands due diligence; that the climate treaties sit alongside it and do not displace it; and that a State's failure to meet it is an internationally wrongful act with the ordinary consequences in reparation. The Court's Opinion of 23 July 2025 upheld each of these propositions.

Why does this matter to us?

Because clarity in the law is essential to sovereign equality envisaged in the Charter. Put differently, when the Court tells us what the law is, a small State can negotiate on equal footing with a much bigger State based on the same understanding of the law.

Mr. President,

Belize is also before the Court as a party.

By the **Special Agreement of 8 December 2008**, confirmed by the peoples of Guatemala and Belize in referendums in 2018 and 2019, we requested the Court to decide on Guatemala's territorial, insular and maritime claim and to fix our boundaries. The written phase closed in June 2023; the oral hearings are now fixed for February 2027. After more than a century and a half, the end of this matter is in sight.

In November 2022, Belize instituted a second case, asking the Court to declare that, **as between Belize and Honduras, Belize is sovereign over the Sapodilla Cayes**. The Court's Judgment of 19 March 2026 permits Guatemala to intervene as a non-party on the question of sovereignty over the cayes. Belize did not object. The case will be heard in March 2027.

Through the Court, we expect finally to settle our differences with our neighbours, to secure our borders, and to realize the lasting peace and friendship that our three peoples deserve.

Mr. President,

Because of the Court’s importance to the peaceful settlement of disputes, it must be **accessible**.

The Secretary-General's trust fund is intended to assist states for this purpose; *however*, its funds are limited and the procedures to access it are onerous.

We urge for simplified access and for a substantial increase in the funds that can be accessed by individual states.

We thank France for its recent contribution and, we urge every State in a position to do so to contribute, substantially and regularly, so that the choice to go to the Court never turns on the size of a treasury.

Access also lives in the **Court's Rules and Practice Directions**.

We welcome recent amendments which will enable more effective participation of States, and, transparency about compliance with provisional measures.

We also support the Court's proposed budget for 2027, including the case management system it has asked for.

Access, finally, is a matter of **people**.

The trust fund for the **Judicial Fellowship Programme** has so far enabled 19 young lawyers from universities in 17 developing countries to spend a year at the Peace Palace, five of them in the cohort that begins this year. We congratulate them.

We also note that for 2026/27 the Court received 164 eligible applications from 108 universities, 71 of which could not fund their own nominee.

Demand outstrips the fund, and no university from the Caribbean Community has yet appeared on the list of sponsoring institutions.

We encourage the Court to reach further into the Global South and appeal to States to help the fund grow to meet the demand.

In closing, Mr. President, Belize congratulates the five newly elected Members of the Court.

We thank each of them for what they have already given to international law.

Belize wishes them well as they rise to the bench and endeavours that the Court will maintain the trust of the international community well beyond these first eighty years.

I thank you.