STATEMENT DELIVERED BY

HIS EXCELLENCY MR. JOHN BRICEÑO

PRIME MINISTER OF BELIZE,
MINISTER OF FINANCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & INVESTMENT

ON BEHALF OF THE ALLIANCE OF SMALL ISLAND STATES (AOSIS)

TO THE

31ST SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN RESPONSE TO THE
CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) PANDEMIC

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Statement by Hon. John Briceño, Prime Minister of Belize on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States:

There are periods in our history that cast long shadows and remain etched in our minds. Already 2020 has become such a point in our history. This COVID-19 Pandemic has engulfed all nations. Lives have been lost, economies upended, and development stalled.

In 2015, the international community adopted a bold 2030 sustainable development agenda, a renewed approach for financing that agenda and a climate agreement on limiting global warming to 1.5°C. For Small Island Developing States (SIDS), we had the wind in our sails, having in 2014 secured international support for the third framework for sustainable development in SIDS. We were confident in the future.

Then came COVID-19. Immediately AOSIS joined many of the initiatives and resolutions in the UN on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent calls for unity and solidarity. We did this because we know that a crisis of this magnitude can only be overcome by collective purpose and goodwill.

Today we reiterate our call for solidarity to all nations and people. We again join the Secretary-General’s call to the G20 nations to waive sanctions imposed on countries, and call upon the international community to adopt urgent and effective measures to eliminate the use of unilateral coercive economic measures.

We also wish to ensure fair, transparent, equitable and timely access to and distribution of essential medical supplies. We call for new diagnostics, drugs and future COVID-19 vaccines, with a view to making them available to all those in need, in particular in developing countries, as stated in resolution 74/274, which was adopted by consensus by the General Assembly.

It is well documented that countries in special situations find themselves in an unimaginable and un-enviable position during this crisis. Despite our best efforts and the exhaustion of all available resources, the COVID-19 global lockdown has forced small island developing States to our knees. Our health systems are struggling. There are no prospects for short term recovery for our economies, leaving our people to face an uncertain future. We need your support and tangible, measurable action but in the present circumstances we need a new compact with SIDS that more effectively addresses our vulnerability and exposure to risk.

As SIDS, it seems that our limited resources are constantly chasing behind building resilient societies and addressing emergency situations. But the times are rare when they can serve both masters. Our development gains are at constant risk of erosion. Before COVID-19, SIDS clamored for better treatment and reiterated time and again that our income levels have disguised our inherent vulnerabilities. COVID-19 didn’t place SIDS in a difficult situation, it exposed the situation that exists in SIDS. If anything, the pandemic has made our situation more urgent.
At the start of the COVID 19 pandemic, our countries amplified our advocacy for access to grants and concessional financing. There was just no way that we could meet the costs of safeguarding our health systems, providing social safety nets for our citizens, and continue to meet our financial obligations. SIDS just didn’t have to liquidity needed to meet these competing duties. We did what we could; we repurposed where possible and borrowed when we could ill afford it. But now, the situation grows more urgent. The existing resources in SIDS are about to dry up and the debtors are waiting by the door.

We therefore continue to call for an overhaul of the international financial system to address our challenges of indebtedness, limited fiscal space and vulnerability to market volatility. To have emerged out of this Pandemic without tangible changes to the international financial system to enable vulnerable countries access to resources they so desperately need would be a complete loss. This is the critical moment to galvanize our commitments to collective action so that the most vulnerable countries can catch our breath as our economies are choked by the socioeconomic impacts of this crisis. In times of multiple crises it would seem that we have already lost the battle. Yet, some continue to belligerently advocate for outdated metrics and archaic systems that not only pre-dates this crisis, but is also detached from the reality on the ground.

SIDS have long been advocates for sustainable development and building resilience. Climate change is an imperative like no other. And, unless, and until, we seriously address it, some of our countries will cease to exist, while others will face overwhelming odds at survival. We can no longer equivocate on a firm collective call for robust urgent action to align COVID recovery, climate action and sustainable development. Moreover, COVID 19 reminds us that human health and planetary health are inextricably linked. This is a human imperative, driven by science, demanded by future generations, and fortified by international law most recently reaffirmed in the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda. Rolling over for business as usual, would be a gross dereliction of our collective responsibility to humanity.

There is no question that we would be on the right side of history if we were to operationalize the resounding call for ambitious climate action, through urgent and aggressive mitigation measures, and comprehensive adaptation by enhancing resilience. For SIDS and equally so for all nations, survival is not negotiable. Now, more than ever, all of us have to reaffirm and fully implement our commitments in the Paris Agreement and the UNFCCC.

This pandemic met us unprepared, as countries and as a global community of nations. These are undoubtedly trying times, for families, for nations, and for the UN. Of course we hold to the fundamental belief that there is nothing that is as resilient as the human spirit and the desire to overcome adversity. We also know that with bold actions we will overcome.

Thank you.