

**QUICK GUIDE TO ADDRESS WOMEN'S ISSUES
DURING THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW ON BELICE**

These Guides include:

- A list of issues mentioned in the National Report, the Compilation of official UN Documents and the Summary of Other Stakeholders Submissions, with references to the particular paragraphs in which they can be found.
- The full text of those paragraphs
- A reference to "gaps", that is, issues on which the National Report should/could have applied a gender perspective but failed to do so.
- In those cases in which the Sexual Rights Initiative has submitted reports, we have included an Annex with our recommendations.
- In all cases we have included suggested questions and recommendations

References in the two working languages of the Council (English and French) have been kept in their original language.

Issues are highlighted, while **recommendations** are in bold and underlined. References from the National Report are *in Italics*.

All women's rights issues (included sexual rights' issues related specifically to women) are referred to in this Guide. Other sexual rights issues are referred to in the Sexual Rights Guides for each state under review

CEDAW ratified. OP-CEDAW ratified. Rome Statute ratified. Palermo Protocol ratified. (all without reservations).

Gaps

The National Report should/could have applied a gender perspective -that is, make reference to how the issue affects women and men in particular ways- but failed to do so in the following sections: Children's rights (41-44), Culture (50- 53), Trafficking in persons (47-49), Prisoner's rights (63-68), Youth (76-80), Good governance (81-85), Indigenous rights (86-93), Persons with disabilities (94-101), Education (102-106), Capacity building (10), Technical assistance (108-110).

ISSUE	N Report	Compilation	Summary
Abortion		<u>Need to eliminate punitive provisions and provide access to quality services to prevent unsafe abortions (32)</u>	<u>Need for legalization in case of rape or incest, esp. with underage victims. Quality post-abortion care in public hospitals, without reprisals (17)</u>

Access to justice		Impediments (19)	
Early / forced marriage	Age of marriage raised from 14 to 16 years (42)	Concerns and need to increase minimum age of marriage (20)	
Economic rights/ Right to development	Wages increased for shop assistants and domestic workers (40)	Widespread poverty, esp. in rural areas and among Mayan women. Need to integrate gender equality in development policies (10)	
Equality and Non discrimination	National Gender Policy (39)	Need for technical assistance to assess women situation (50) Pregnant students, teenage mothers and girls discriminated. Need for protecting laws and policies (11)	Discriminatory migrant law against prostitutes and homosexuals (24)
Gender mainstreaming		Need for an effective gender mainstreaming strategy with sustainable results (5)	
HIV/AIDS	Vertical transmission program (72)	High rates among women. Gender disparities and stigma as factors (34)	
Public and political participation	No women in Parliament or Cabinet (35)	Need for especial measures (22)	
Reproductive health/rights	Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy (38)	Infant deaths, National Breastfeeding Policy (31, 51).	Complications due to illegal abortions; need to legalize it in case of rape or incest; post-abortion

		High maternal mortality rates and teenage pregnancies. Obstacles for enjoying SSRR health, abortion (32)	care (17)
Rights of girls		Minorities and indigenous girls (40) See also Equality and Non-discrimination (11), Reproductive health /rights (32) Right to education (38) Sexual Violence (12, 16)	See Right to Education (18)
Right to education	Equal access guaranteed (34)	Early dropout rate of girls. Exclusion of pregnant students and teenage mothers, esp. in religious organizations. Need to ensure equality in all educational levels. (38)	Discrimination against pregnant students and single mothers in Catholic and evangelic schools. Sexuality education (18)
Right to work	Unequal unemployment rates (34) Maternity leave (36)	Maternity leave. Occupational segregation, wage gap (23) National Gender Policy and Equal Pay Bill (8)	
Sexual Violence		Social justification of sexual violence (12) Need to bring perpetrators to justice (16)	
State Institutions/ Plans of Actions	National Women's Commission (28,31), Women's Department (31,32)	Weak institutional capacity of national machinery (5)	
Trafficking of	Programs and	Need to enforce laws;	

women/ Forced prostitution	strategies to combat trafficking (47,48,49)	combat the root causes; work on rehabilitation / social integration of victims (14).	
Violence against Women /Gender Violence	National campaigns, policies and laws (33,37,58)	Persistence of domestic violence, lack of social awareness. Need for addressing all its forms, and real enforcement of laws. (12).	

Access to justice

In 2007, the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) expressed concern about the **lack of access to justice** for women, and **encouraged Belize to eliminate impediments and to enhance women's legal literacy, awareness of their rights and capacity to effectively claim them** (Para 19, Compilation)

Early marriage

*In 1998 the Families and Children's Act was passed to incorporate specific provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in domestic legislation. The **age of marriage** with parental consent has been increased from 14 to 16 years (Para 42, NR).*

In 2005, the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) expressed deep concern about the practice of early marriage, and the low minimum age for marriage (14 years with parental consent). CEDAW noted with concern that a man who has sexual relations with a girl under the age of 16 can, with the consent of her parents, **marry her without being prosecuted for carnal knowledge**. Both CEDAW and **CRC recommended that Belize raise the minimum age of marriage** (Para 20, Compilation).

Economic rights/Right to development

*In 1999 the NGO Women's Issues Network (WIN-Belize) developed an advocacy campaign to **increase the minimum wage for shop assistants and domestic workers**, as a result of the comments made by the CEDAW Committee on Belize's first and second periodic report. WIN-Belize reviewed the minimum wage again in 2006. The wages council was re-established to review the minimum wage levels in Belize for the minimum was not revised since 2002. Statutory Instrument No. 14 of 2007 was gazetted on 10th February 2007. The Order is amended to repeal the minimum wage from \$2.25 to \$3.00 an hour (Para 40, NR).*

In 2007, CEDAW expressed concern that **widespread poverty** among women is one of the causes of **violation of women's rights** and **discrimination** against them, particularly in rural areas and among **Mayan women**. It **urged Belize to make the promotion of gender equality an explicit component of all its national development strategies, policies and programmes, in particular those aimed at poverty**.

alleviation and sustainable development. It also recommended that Belize put in place evaluation and monitoring mechanisms to assess the impact of its poverty reduction strategies on women, including on rural women (Para 10, Compilation)

Equality and Non-discrimination

A National Gender Policy was developed and ratified by Cabinet in 2003. The Policy aims to achieve gender equity and equality by eliminating discrimination against women in five priority policy areas: health, wealth and employment generation, violence-producing conditions, education and skills training, and power and decision-making (Para 39, NR).

In 2007, CEDAW invited the Government to seek international technical assistance for the development of data collection and analysis efforts, in order to assess the actual situation of women in Belize (Para 50, Compilation).

Joint Submission -United Belize Advocacy Movement and the Sexual Rights Initiative (JS1) indicated that Chapter 156 of the 2000 revised edition of the Immigration Act, under categories of prohibited immigrants includes: "(e) any prostitute or homosexual or any person who may be living on or receiving or may have been living on or receiving the proceeds of prostitution or homosexual behaviour." Engaging in sex work is not a crime in Belize. JS1 stated that it would thus be reasonable to suspect that age, sex/gender and the immigration officer's gender and sexual stereotypes will play a large part in enforcing that part of the law, making it therefore discriminatory and unfair (Para 24, Summary)

In 2005, CRC expressed concern at the persistent discrimination faced by girls (among others), as well as pregnant students and teenage mothers in schools. It recommended that Belize increase its efforts to adopt appropriate legislation, to ensure the implementation of existing laws guaranteeing the principle of non-discrimination, and to adopt a proactive and comprehensive strategy to eliminate discrimination on any grounds, particularly against all vulnerable groups of children (Para 11, Compilation)

Gender mainstreaming

CEDAW recommended that Belize provide the Department with the authority, decision-making power and resources necessary to work effectively for the promotion of women's equality, coordinate use of the gender mainstreaming strategy across all sectors of Government and ensure that such efforts are results-oriented and sustainable (Para 5, Compilation).

HIV/AIDS

In 2001 the Government of Belize initiated its Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) programme to reduce the risk of HIV/AIDS infected pregnant mothers passing the virus on to their newborns. The PMTCT has been integrated within the public health prenatal clinics countrywide to enhance its impact. In 2008 only two cases were reported countrywide as a result of vertical transmission highlighting the success of the programme (Para 72, NR)

In 2007, CEDAW expressed concern about the high rates of HIV/AIDS among women and girls, recommending Belize step up efforts to prevent and combat HIV/AIDS and improve dissemination of information about the risks and ways of transmission. UNICEF indicated that gender disparities and ingrained stigma and discrimination hamper efforts to reverse the spread of HIV and inhibit universal access to testing, prevention, treatment and care (Para 34, Compilation)

Public and political participation

Women's participation in electoral politics is limited. There are currently no female members of either the Cabinet or the House of Representatives. At the municipal level there are two female mayors out of seven mayors (Para 35, NR)

In 2007, CEDAW remained concerned about the low rate of representation of women in public life and in elected bodies; a United Nations Statistics Division source indicated that the **seats held by women in the national parliament decreased** from 6.7 per cent in 2004 to 3.3 per cent in 2008. CEDAW noted with concern that Belize does not support the use of **quotas or targets** to accelerate the achievement of de facto equality between women and men. It urged Belize **to effectively use temporary special measures to accelerate the realization of women's de facto equality with men** (Para 22, Compilation)

Reproductive health/rights in general

*In 2005 the **Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy** was launched which focuses on interventions to protect and promote sexual and reproductive health and rights. It addresses Millennium Development Goal No.5 to improve maternal health and outlines strategies to provide women with more access to reproductive health services (Para 38, NR).*

CRC was concerned at the regional disparities in accessibility to health services, the high number of **infant deaths** and regional differences in this respect, and the low prevalence of breastfeeding. **It recommended that the Government continue its efforts to improve prenatal care and the nutritional status of infants and children, and ensure access to safe drinking water. CRC also recommended that Belize strengthen its efforts to implement the National Breastfeeding Policy** (Para 31, Compilation). **CRC recommended that Belize seek technical assistance from, among others, UNICEF and WHO, for the implementation of the National Breastfeeding policy** (Para 51, Compilation)

In 2007, CEDAW was concerned about high maternal mortality rates, the number of deaths resulting from induced abortions, and the high rate of teenage pregnancies. UNICEF noted that women in Belize face obstacles in the use of contraceptives, in seeking sexual and reproductive health counselling, and in making decisions about their sexual behaviour due to the control of their spouses, partners, families, and society. CEDAW **urged Belize to take concrete measures to enhance women's access to health care, in particular to sexual and reproductive health services** (Para 32, Compilation)

CEDAW recommended that Belize consider reviewing laws relating to **abortion** with a view to removing punitive provisions and providing women with access to quality services for the management of complications arising from unsafe abortions (Para 32, Compilation).

Abortion is legal in Belize when the pregnant woman is facing severe physical or mental health problems or when there is fetal impairment, but not on request or in case of rape or incest, as noted by JS1. In 2005, over 365 women were admitted to local hospitals for complications resulting from illegal abortions. JS1 **recommended the legalization of abortion in case of rape or incest, particularly when the victims are underage. It also recommended that Belize guarantee quality post-abortion care in public hospitals for all women who have undergone abortions, regardless of their age, without reprisals** (Para 17, Summary)

Rights of girls

CRC **recommended that the Government take measures to promote respect for the views of children, especially girls, belonging to minorities and indigenous peoples and facilitate their**

participation in all matters affecting them (Para 40, Compilation)

Right to education

Part VI of the Education Act of the laws of Belize provides for **equal access** for males and females at all educational levels and for gender sensitivity within educational systems. Primary school enrolment rates for girls and boys are virtually equal: 33, 734 boys and 32, 273 girls were enrolled for the academic year 2007-2008. However, girls outnumber boys at both secondary and tertiary levels of education (Para 34, NR).

CEDAW expressed concern about the persistence of social barriers that impede women's education and are reflected in the **early dropout rate of girls** from school and the lack of measures to ensure that teenage mothers stay in or return to school. In 2005, CRC expressed its grave concern that Belize does not have a policy to prevent and combat the school based practices of educational **exclusion of pregnant students and teenage mothers**. UNICEF highlighted that the expulsion of pregnant girls continues in schools managed by **religious organisations**. CEDAW **recommended that Belize implement measures to ensure equal rights of girls and young women to all levels of education, to retain girls in school and to put in place monitoring mechanisms to track girls' access to and achievement levels in education** (Para 38, Compilation)

JS1 indicated that **sex education** is being integrated in the primary and secondary curricula as part of a program called the **Health and Family Life Education** formulated by the Ministry of Education, with teachers trained and Officers having been hired to incorporate basic sex education into the curriculum. However, JS1 indicated that **Catholic and evangelical schools**, which run over an estimated 60 per cent of the country's schools, have not adequately contributed, given that **girls are expelled when pregnant** and female teachers are fired for having a baby out of wedlock, while the former Catholic Bishop has also spoken against condom use. It **recommended that Belize review the current curricula on Health and Family Life Education in consultation with civil society organizations, the academia, teachers and student unions**. It also recommended design and implementation of **public awareness and education campaigns on sexuality** strategically aimed at young people who might be left out of the sexuality education provided by Government-run schools either because of they attend religious schools or because they have been marginalized by the education system (Para 18, Summary)

Right to work

Unemployment rates among women stand at 13.1 per cent compared to only 5.8 per cent for men (Para 34, NR).

In 2005, the Labour Act was amended to provide for **14 weeks maternity leave** entitlement for women, instead of the previous 12 weeks, **on full pay** and as required by the ILO Convention No. 183 - Maternity Protection Convention which Belize has ratified (Para 36, NR).

In 2007, CEDAW noted with concern the absence of a system of **maternity leave** with pay or with comparable social benefits for all women as required by article 11, paragraph 2 (b) of the Convention. The Committee **urged the Government to fully implement it** (Para 23, Compilation). In 2007, CEDAW expressed concern about the situation of women in the labour market, characterized by levels of female unemployment at twice the rate of men, inadequate employment opportunities for women, the concentration of women in low-paid sectors of public employment and the consistent wage gap. It **encouraged Belize to implement measures to encourage and support women's entrepreneurship and also recommended that efforts be strengthened to eliminate occupational segregation and to close the wage gap between women and men** (Para 23, Compilation)

A 2007 ILO Committee noted with interest the adoption of the National Action Plan entitled "Belize equity and equality strategic plan: Facilitating the implementation of a national gender management system", which resulted in the decision to draft a **National Gender Policy and an Equal Pay Bill**. The Committee asked the Government to indicate the measures taken under the plan to promote the employment of women in general and in particular in higher income jobs, with a view to reducing inequalities in remuneration (Para 8, Compilation)

Sexual Violence

The 2005 Common Country Assessment (CCA) report noted that the **'cultural' justification** for the continued **sexual predation of young females** is still a persistent problem (Para 12, Compilation). Gravely concerned at the growing number of cases of domestic violence and sexual abuse of minors, especially girls, CRC recommended that Belize conduct investigations and bring perpetrators to justice (Para 16, Compilation)

State Institutions/Plans of Actions

*The Women's Issues Network (WIN), an umbrella organization for NGOs working in the area of women and children's issues has been very active in promoting women's rights, and raising awareness about gender based violence and HIV/AIDS. The **National Women's Commission** is a quasi-governmental agency charged solely with promoting, monitoring and evaluating compliance with CEDAW and other national, regional and international obligations regarding women including Belem do Para Convention. The government has recently sought to institutionalize the Commission by installing a technical secretariat for the first time in its over 20 year history (Para 28 and 31, NR). The fulfilment of the obligations arising from CEDAW and from the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women is coordinated by the **Women's Department**. The work of the Women's Department is carried out by its main office in Belize City and by Women Development Officers in each district, who work as a team with other personnel from the Ministry of Human Development such as social workers of the Department of Human Services and officers of the Community Rehabilitation Department and/or the Community Parent Empowerment Programme (Para 31 and 32, NR).*

In 2007, CEDAW expressed concern about the weak institutional capacity of the national machinery for the advancement of women such as the Women's Department in the Ministry of Human Development (Para 5, Compilation)

Trafficking of women/Forced prostitution

In June 2003, the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act was passed, and an Anti Trafficking in Persons Committee was established to coordinate the Government's response to human trafficking (Para 47, NR). Belize's response to human trafficking has focused on prevention, protection and prosecution. (Para 48, NR). Recognizing the link between trafficking in persons and transnational organized crime, regional cooperation is a critical part of Belize's strategy to combat trafficking. To this end, Belize has worked with neighbouring countries to repatriate victims, share best practices and experience. The Regional Conference on Migration had adopted guidelines for special protection to facilitate repatriation of child victims of human trafficking. Belize has subscribed to these guidelines (Para 49, NR).

While noting the enactment of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act in 2003, CEDAW expressed concern that Belize is becoming a destination country for trafficked women. It called upon the State

to ensure that legislation on trafficking is fully enforced. It also recommended that Belize address the root cause of trafficking and exploitation of prostitution by increasing its efforts to improve the economic situation of women, and that it take measures for the rehabilitation and social integration of victims (Para 14, Compilation).

Violence against Women/Gender Violence

Several measures are being taken on a continuous basis to reduce the incidences of gender based violence. The Women's Department along with several partner NGOs have sustained an ongoing multimedia national public awareness campaign, which is heightened during Women's Week in March and during the Sixteen Days of Activism from November 25- December 10 each year. A new Domestic Violence Act was introduced in 2008, expanding the definition of abuse to include financial abuse; it provides for longer protection orders and harsher penalties for persons who breach such orders (Para 33, NR). In 2007, the National Gender-Based Violence Plan 2007-2009 was developed. This plan of action makes reference to international commitments made by the government combined with other regional and international instruments, which are being used to mount a national vigorous effort to halt gender-based violence in all its forms in Belize (Para 37, NR).

In October 2008, amendments to the Domestic Violence Act, which provides for special protection for older women, were passed by Parliament (Para 58, NR).

While welcoming the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act of 2007, CEDAW expressed concern about the continued prevalence of violence against women and the lack of social awareness about it. It urged Belize to place high priority on implementing a comprehensive approach to addressing all forms of violence against women, including through the effective enforcement and monitoring of the Domestic Violence Act. In 2008, WHO indicated that domestic violence continues to increase. In 2003, there were over 1,200 registered cases of domestic violence (Para 12, Compilation)

Suggested questions and/or recommendations:

(By the Sexual Rights Initiative, mentioned in the OHCHR Summary):

- Recommend that Belize legalizes abortion in case of rape or incest, particularly when the victims are underage.
- Recommend that Belize guarantees quality post-abortion care in public hospitals for all women who have undergone abortions, regardless of their age, without reprisals
- Recommend that Belize reviews the current curricula on Health and Family Life Education in consultation with civil society organizations, the academia, teachers and student unions; designs and implements public awareness and education campaigns on sexuality strategically aimed at young people who might be left out of the sexuality education provided by Government-run schools either because of they attend religious schools or because they have been marginalized by the education system

Additional recommendations:

- Ask which measures has Belize implemented or is planning to implement to address the disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS on women/Recommend that Belize implements the

required measures to address the disproportionate impact on HIV/AIDS on women

- Ask how is Belize planning to address the complete lack of women's representation in the Cabinet and in Parliament, and why quotas are not included in State policies /Recommend that Belize reviews its policies to adopt temporary special measures, including quotas, to ensure women's representation in Parliament and in Cabinet.
- Ask if the Women's Department in the Ministry of Human Development has enough resources and decisional autonomy to perform its work /Recommend that the resources and decisional autonomy of the Women's Department in the Ministry of Human Development be scaled up in order to strengthen its capacity to perform its work.
- Ask Belize to share information on its national awareness campaign on violence against women, a joint government-civil society effort, as a best practice.
- Ask Belize what are the root causes of domestic violence that, in spite of the government's best efforts, still remain unaddressed as the problem is increasing /Recommend that Belize identifies and addresses the root causes of domestic violence that make the problem persist and increase in spite of the government's best efforts.