



# National Assembly of Belize

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### PRESS RELEASE

#### **Speaker of the House of Representatives attends SIDS Gender Equality Forum**

—29<sup>th</sup> May 2024— The **Hon. Valerie Woods, Speaker of the House of Representatives**, attended the **Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Gender Equality Forum** that was held by the UN Women and the Caribbean Development Bank on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> May 2024, in **Antigua and Barbuda**. The Forum was held under the theme “**Charting the Course toward Resilient Prosperity**”. The Forum was a special event of the Fourth International Small Island Developing States (SIDS4) Conference which is being held from the 27<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> May on the island.

Small Island Developing States such as Belize face distinctive challenges and vulnerabilities with the impact of climate change which hinder progress on women empowerment, gender equality, and sustainable development. Ministers of Government, parliamentarians, civil society organizations, private sector, academia, and other key groups working in the SIDS region gathered for the two-day forum to reflect on the implementation of the SIDS action plan, to discuss ways in which a gender lens approach can be applied for a transformative resilient future for these vulnerable states.

A key declaration of the forum shared by participants is that the SIDS region “should not be defined by their vulnerabilities; instead, the proposed action plan for the next 10 years is a key opportunity to transform vulnerabilities to tools of resilience, innovation, and equality.” An official communique from the Gender Equality Forum was presented to the organizers of the SIDS4 conference.

Following the forum, Speaker Woods attended the first day of the SIDS4 Conference and provided opening remarks at the side event, on behalf of ParlAmericas and the network of Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA). The event, *Empowering Action on the Escazu Agreement*, focused on the importance of the Escazu Agreement, which represents a pivotal step towards realizing the right to a healthy environment. In her remarks, Speaker Woods underscored the importance of the role of parliamentarians to ensure effective implementation for a rights-based approach to access to information for citizens and civil society organizations, participation, and climate justice in environmental matters. Belize ratified the agreement in March 2023. Speaker Woods was joined by other parliamentarians from Guyana, St. Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, Dominica, and Jamaica.

Speaker Woods’ participation was made possible through ParlAmericas and Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA). As a board member of PGA, Speaker Woods continues in meetings with PGA and is scheduled to return on 2<sup>nd</sup> June.

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