Mr. President,

First, let me express my delegation’s congratulations on your election as President of this 73rd Assembly. You can be assured of our full support and cooperation.

Let me also at the outset, express my Government’s commendation to the Director General of the WHO, whose resolute, humane and indefatigable leadership is steering us through these unprecedented times.

We meet at a critical time, as the COVID-19 health pandemic ravages the world. No country has been spared; and all aspects of our lives have been altered. The global nature of the COVID-19 pandemic underscores the indispensability of multilateral institutions to securing a strong recovery for all.

Belize reaffirms its support for the centrality of the UN system in coordinating a comprehensive global response and the key leadership role of the WHO.

Mr. President,

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating human toll, it has destroyed economies and livelihoods and caused strain or collapse of public health systems.

The Government of Belize mounted an early, ‘all of government’ and ‘all of society response rooted in classic public health approaches. To date Belize has had only 18 cases of COVID-19: two unfortunate deaths and full recovery of the other 16 cases. Belize is one of the few countries in the world that is, for now, free of COVID-19, having not had a positive case in over a month. We remain vigilant as numbers escalate in some countries in our region.

Now we need an 'all of the world' response based on robust international cooperation to maintain global supply chains, for effective surveillance, for equitable and affordable access to and distribution of COVID-19 health products. This will be even more important if and when there is a vaccine.

Importantly, Mr President,

At the same time the pre-existing global epidemic of non-communicable diseases remains a critical challenge. We are extremely concerned that our countries are falling short of NCD targets. This underscores the need for enhanced international cooperation in
fighting NCDs. Two percent of multilateral aid for health is allocated to NCDs; yet NCDs account for 70% of deaths worldwide. NCDs are associated with higher morbidity and mortality with COVID-19. We need to redouble our efforts to combat NCDs given its wider public health impact.

Belize, as the current Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), also reiterates that the radical upheavals that mark climate change do not lurk meekly in isolation. The effects of increased incidents of drought and resultant fires at this time invariably exacerbate symptoms for persons suffering from NCDs, such as cardiovascular and other respiratory diseases, and further complicate and reduce chances of surviving the pandemic for those affected. This is the interconnected nature of these threats we all now face and must address, preferably, through joint and coordinated actions.

Finally, Mr. President,

My delegation has long been an advocate for Taiwan’s inclusion in the WHO. Taiwan has much to share regarding its success in containing the spread of COVID-19, notwithstanding its proximity to the source of the outbreak. It has, indeed, provided much needed assistance and advice to Belize. Taiwan’s continued exclusion from WHO is a break in the chain in the global health system which puts all of us at risk and undermines the good work of this organisation. Belize, therefore calls for Taiwan’s meaningful participation in WHO and for its Observer Status in this 73rd World Health Assembly.

I thank you.