



December 3rd 2008

Officials of Belize and Guatemala are slated to sign the *compromis*, or special agreement, for eventual submission to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which would set out the terms under which they would seek the court's intervention to settle the age-old territorial claim of Guatemala over half Belize's territory.

A fax sent to our newspaper today from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade indicates that the document would be signed at the headquarters of the Organization of American States (OAS) at 11:00 their time, on Monday, December 8, 2008.

Since neither Belize nor Guatemala have given the ICJ mandatory jurisdiction over disputes with other states, the ICJ can only hear the case if the parties submit to the court the special agreement, which would set out the scope of the case, and the question that the ICJ would be asked to determine.

In the case of the dispute between Belize and Guatemala, the ICJ would be asked to make a final and binding determination on where the border of Belize with Guatemala lies.

Guatemala contends that Belize's southern border ends at the Sibun River in the Belize District, and everything below there belongs to its territory.

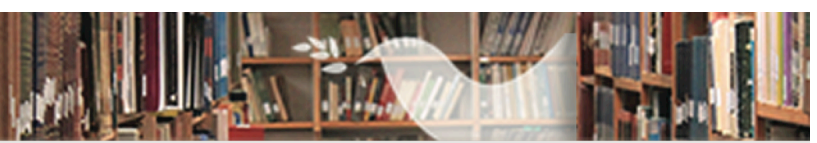
However, Belize holds the view that under the 1859 Convention between Britain and Guatemala - which sets out Belize's boundaries as detailed in the 1981 Constitution of Belize - the southern border ends not at the Sibun River, as the Guatemalans say, but at the Sarstoon River in Toledo. (For more on this, see this week's installment of "ICJ Stats.")

According to the correspondence we received from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs today, the *compromis* "...contains the process to be followed in referring the Guatemalan territorial claim to Belize to the International Court of Justice."

Notably, that document, even though it has already been vetted by the Cabinets of both countries, has still not been made public.

Government of Belize officials have said that the document would be made public only after it is signed in Washington.

Officials of the Opposition People's United Party (PUP) have expressed the view that even before the document is signed at the OAS, it should go to the National Assembly, which is the body legally empowered to submit an issue of national importance to a countrywide referendum.



The Government has invited the media to attend the signing, at its own expense.

* Courtesy of <http://www.amandala.com.bz>

