



December 8, 2008

Today, at the headquarters of the Organization of American States (OAS), the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belize, Wilfred Elrington, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Guatemala, Roger Haroldo Rodas Melgar, signed a Special Agreement to submit Guatemala's territorial, insular, and maritime claim to the International Court of Justice.

In a joint statement signed at the same ceremony, both Ministers of Foreign Affairs "congratulated each other on the signing of the Special Agreement, as recommended by the OAS Secretary General, subject to the approval of the citizens of the two countries expressed in referendums."

Elrington and Rodas Melgar expressed their "profound appreciation to the Organization of American States (OAS) and, in particular, to its Secretary General, José Miguel Insulza, for their effective and sustained work of mediation and follow-up to the negotiation process between the two States" and they underscored "the valuable support of the Group of Friends, who provided commitment, cooperation, and assistance throughout the negotiations."

The Secretary General underscored the importance of the occasion and pointed out that "the Agreement signed today at the headquarters of the OAS, which is, as I always say, home to all the inhabitants of the Americas, constitutes a true expression of one of the principal missions of our Organization: to promote in-depth understanding, harmonious relations, and peace in our countries."

Insulza mentioned that the signing of the Special Agreement is the culmination of a process that dates back to 2000, when the governments of Belize and Guatemala "decided to resume dialogue regarding their longstanding territorial differendum under the auspices of the OAS General Secretariat."

He recalled that during that dialogue "there was a very special moment, on September 7, 2005, when the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the two countries met, also at OAS headquarters, to sign the Agreement on a Framework for Negotiations and Confidence Building Measures, in which they committed to beginning a new round of negotiations under the auspices of the OAS General Secretariat. Today that negotiation process is coming to a satisfactory end," said the head of the Hemisphere's highest political body.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Guatemala declared that the signing of the Special Agreement marked "a historic day, because we are concluding a political decision in order to find a definitive solution to our differendum with Belize, and we are beginning a process that, regardless of its outcome, will enable the governments and peoples of these two countries to act in a manner that befits the start of the Twenty-first Century."

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belize used the word "milestone" to describe an



agreement which, he said, would make it possible to settle a longstanding dispute between his country and Guatemala. "This is an era of democratization, and while we in the Government have agreed that the differendum should be submitted to the International Court of Justice, both governments, that of Belize and that of Guatemala, have decided and agreed that it is the right of their peoples to take a final decision on this matter."

Article 7 of the Special Agreement establishes that both Parties commit to making the arrangements provided for in their respective domestic systems for submitting to a referendum the decision to ask the International Court of Justice to settle the territorial differendum. The plebiscites will take place simultaneously in both countries on a date agreed upon by the Parties.

Once the differendum has been submitted for consideration by the International Court of Justice, the "Parties shall accept the decision of the Court as final and binding, in accordance with Article 1, and shall undertake to carry it out in full and in good faith. Specifically, the Parties agree that, within three months following the date of the Court's ruling, they shall agree on the composition and terms of reference of a Binational Commission that will proceed to demarcate their borders in accordance with the decision of the Court."

At the end of the ceremony, the Secretary General congratulated Guatemala and Belize "for having reached this brilliant Agreement," and he thanked all those who "in one way or another helped bring about this happy outcome." "I reiterate the General Secretariat's commitment to continue supporting initiatives conducive to understanding among the peoples of the Hemisphere," he said.

Attending the ceremony were, in addition to the Secretary General, the Assistant Secretary General, Ambassador Albert Ramdin; the Chair of the OAS Permanent Council and Representative of Bolivia to the Organization, Ambassador Reynaldo Cuadros; and a numerous group of ambassadors, permanent observers, and senior staff members of the Organization.