

AMBASSADOR ODEEN ISHMAEL OF GUYANA, REPRESENTING THE
PRESIDENCY PRO-TÉMPORE OF CARICOM
CEREMONY MARKING THE CONCLUSION OF THE FACILITATION PROCESS
OF BELIZE AND GUATEMALA TERRITORIAL DIFFERENDUM

September 30, 2002 - Washington, DC

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Foreign Ministers, Mr. Secretary of State, Secretary General and Assistant Secretary General of the Organization of American States, Ambassadors, Esteemed Facilitators, Representatives of Multilateral Financial Institutions, Honored Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen. . . .

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the current Chairman of CARICOM, and by extension, on behalf of the CARICOM countries, at this ceremony, which marks the conclusion of the facilitation process of the Belize and Guatemala territorial issue.

In a statement issued on September 27, President Bharrat Jagdeo of Guyana and Chairman of CARICOM expressed the Caribbean Community's satisfaction with the conclusion of the facilitation process on the Belize-Guatemala border situation. As he said, these proposals, presented by the facilitators, provide a solid basis for a just and definitive resolution of this long-standing territorial dispute.

It is the view of the Caribbean Community that the course of action mapped out by the facilitators marks a significant moment in Belize-Guatemala relations. It offers an historic opportunity for peace and development, which will contribute significantly, to the benefit of the peoples of both countries, and also to the CARICOM and Central American sub-region.

I also want to place on record that the Caribbean Community applauds the role played by the Republic of Honduras in facilitating a vital aspect of the understanding that has been reached.

CARICOM will continue to offer its support to the fulfillment of the process, as the people of Belize and of Guatemala determine, through referenda, their acceptance of the course of action presented by the facilitators representing the two countries.

Mr. Chairman, It would be remiss of me if I do not commend the OAS for the role as a mediator in enabling this process. This relatively new role of the Organization in aiding in the peaceful solution to border issues between its member states must be applauded. And considering the existence of similar problems between and among other countries of the hemisphere, serious thought must be given to the utilization of the growing experience of this Organization in assisting to bring about solutions.

And I must, on behalf of CARICOM, congratulate both the President of Guatemala and the Prime Minister of Belize for displaying great leadership by agreeing to a process to solve this long standing problem between their countries. Very often, solutions to problems between countries are propelled when their leaders make a decision to take a giant forward step to confront the issues, and develop imaginative ways to reach a mutual understanding.

Both leaders have made the first giant forward steps, and it is now left to them to continue in this direction by leading their peoples to accept the mutually agreed proposals.

As we well know, border disputes create an unnecessary barrier to economic and social development between affected countries. It is obvious that in addition to placing unnecessary pressures on budgets and other available resources, they also frustrate foreign and local investments.

They also negatively impact on international cooperation in trade, environment protection and security.

We in CARICOM feel confident that both the facilitation process, and the ultimate final resolution of this territorial issue between the two neighbors, can become a model for the countries of this hemisphere in helping to reach final settlements of long-standing territorial issues.

In concluding, let me pay tribute to the sterling efforts of the two eminent facilitators, Sir Shridath Ramphal and Mr. Paul Reichler. Sir Shridath, as you all know, is a Guyanese and a CARICOM citizen, and his negotiating skill is internationally recognized. Mr. Reichler's legal and negotiating talents have also won him acclaim in international jurisprudence. Without doubt, we can all learn from the ideas and methodology on international territorial settlement that these two legal luminaries have generated during their discussions to reach an understanding in the Belize-Guatemala territorial issue.

Thank you.