

Signing of Special Agreement between Belize and Guatemala

December 8, 2008

This is an extraordinary occasion for the OAS and, if I may add, for me personally as well. The Special Agreement that is being signed here today at the headquarters of the Organization of American States—the House of all the Americas as I like to call it—is a faithful expression of one of our Organization’s main purposes: to promote understanding, harmonious relations, and peace among our member countries.

Ever since I became Secretary General of the OAS more than three years ago, I have endeavored to honor that mission, and I believe we can all take pride in what we have forged during this period as our Organization is now recognized as an effective forum for the resolution of specific problems that have arisen—or could arise—between our countries.

Today’s signing marks an important step towards settling one such problem—a process whose beginnings date back to the early in the year 2000 when the Governments of

Belize and Guatemala decided to reopen dialogue, under the auspices of the OAS General Secretariat, on their longstanding territorial differendum. A significant milestone in that dialogue was achieved on September 7, 2005, when the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of both countries met right here in this very house to sign the Agreement on a Framework for Negotiations and Confidence-Building Measures, in which they undertook to launch a new round of negotiations under the aegis of the OAS General Secretariat.

That negotiation is what we are bringing to a satisfactory conclusion here today because, as it unfolded, Belize and Guatemala concluded that the dispute was fundamentally juridical in nature. Accepting a recommendation that I made at the time, they then agreed that the differendum should be settled through the International Court of Justice. And so we are gathered here today to witness and to herald the signing of the Special Agreement, whereby these two sister countries are committing to submit Guatemala's territorial, insular, and maritime claim to the International Court of Justice.

During these years of dialogue that has clearly delivered results, not only have we supported the negotiations but we also established a presence in the region that is the object of the differendum, through the OAS Office in the Adjacency Zone, which has operated uninterrupted since 2003.

The Office has carried out numerous activities during that period: among other things, conducting verifications and preparing reports on any incident occurring in the area. I must say, however, that I am especially proud of the follow-up and focus on the communities that have settled irregularly in the Adjacency Zone sector of the country distinct from their own nationality. Between 2004 and 2008 two Guatemalan communities settled in the Belize-administered area were successfully resettled in Guatemala: the Community of Nueva Judá was resettled in Melchor de Mencos; and the Community of Santa Rosa was resettled in Finca La Esmeralda, located in Poptún, Department of El Peten.

The outcome of these efforts encourages us to keep the Office operating, even after this agreement is signed. Personally, I believe the Office can serve as an effective

confidence-building tool throughout the judicial process as well.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank those countries that have contributed to the Belize-Guatemala Subfund of the Fund for Peace for their invaluable and selfless show of support, without which the OAS Office in the Adjacency Zone would not have been able to operate. Spain, the United States, Turkey, and the United Kingdom made financial contributions in 2008, for which I convey my heartfelt appreciation.

While we are pleased that these negotiations have yielded satisfactory results, I must reiterate the OAS General Secretariat's decision to spare no effort to support the peaceful resolution of disputes and conflicts between and within member states.

For that specific purpose, this past September 23 we formally launched the Inter-American Peace Forum and at the same time announced our intention to establish an Inter-American Peace Prize to recognize individuals who have

made selfless and significant contributions to promoting and building peace in the Americas.

I believe that this historic date is a most fitting occasion to officially launch this Inter-American Peace Prize, as two sister countries are taking a very significant step to bring their century-old dispute to an end. A call will soon be issued for nominations for the Prize; and the winners will be announced on April 30, to coincide with the date on which the Charter of Bogotá was signed. The Prize will be awarded at the next Inter-American Peace Forum, in September 2009.

I congratulate Guatemala and Belize on this brilliant agreement they have worked out, and I thank all others that contributed in one way or another to this felicitous outcome. I take this opportunity to renew the General Secretariat's commitment to continuing its support for initiatives that foster understanding among the peoples of the Hemisphere. The states of the Americas can rest assured of our continued support for frank discussion of problems that may arise, in the collective quest for long-term solutions, so that we may

promote peaceful, fraternal inter-American relations and give regional cooperation new dynamism.

Thank you very much.