Report on the Project for Resettlement of the Santa Rosa Community in the Belize-Guatemala Adjacency Zone

I. Introduction: Background

The Santa Rosa Community Resettlement Project–executed by the Department of Sustainable Democracy and Special Missions of the Secretariat for Political Affairs through the Office of the OAS General Secretariat in the Adjacency Zone (OAS/AZ)–is a noteworthy achievement for the Organization because it fulfills two member states' objectives and is consistent with the Organization's basic spirit of contributing to the peaceful settlement of disputes between member states.

The Adjacency Zone between Belize and Guatemala was established with the signature of the first Agreement on the Promotion of Confidence-Building Measures of February 7, 2003 and continued after the signature of the second agreement on September 7, 2005. In this zone–which is divided into two sectors, one administered by each of the respective countries–there was a human settlement in a forested region beyond the towns, consisting of more than 100 highly vulnerable people from rural areas. The settlement, known as Santa Rosa, was established in 1988 by Guatemalan citizens, who had expressed their desire to be resettled outside the Adjacency Zone administered by Belize. Since 2004 the OAS field mission in the Adjacency Zone has worked within the framework and scope of the abovementioned confidence-building measures to help the people of the settlement exercise their human rights and provide them with information on all aspects of issues in the Adjacency Zone. In August 2005, thanks to the launching of an active effort of awareness-building, and in view of the number of conflicts occurring in the Zone–which could potentially trigger problems between both countries–and the fact that the settlement residents were living in precarious conditions, they were offered concrete help to meet their needs. In 2005 the community asked both the Organization and Guatemalan authorities to help them relocate to Guatemala. The request was submitted in writing and orally during the visit of the Guatemalan ministerial authorities at the time, who were visiting the site with the OAS.

Subsequently, with the signing of the second agreement in September 2005, the ***Agreement on a Framework of Negotiation and Confidence-Building Measures between Belize and Guatemala***, the Organization was given a mandate to heed and respond to the will of the community as clearly expressed in paragraph 9.A of the chapter on confidence-building measures.

It was far from easy to carry out this project. Given the special circumstances of a human settlement in a conflictive area within a territorial dispute, remote from minimum urban centers and services, the project suffered many hurdles posed by the action of external elements working against the continuous good will displayed by both governments–elements also contrary to the interests of the community itself, which affected the normal execution of the project. There were also structural constraints from working in forest areas, such as the lack of adequate roads, inclement weather, and limited available resources because of the distances involved. The project also had to carefully respect the timelines and procedures necessary for this sort of initiative, which is sensitive because of the interests of the two states, and it had to be mindful as well of the humanitarian aspect to be protected and supported at every step.

II. Activities

Here, in broad strokes, are the activities carried out in the field:

1. **Community social work with the beneficiary population:** This included surveying, updating the population censuses, information workshops with the population, socio-economic self study of the community, and community organization workshops. Many of these activities were begun even before the formal start of the project.

2. **Identification, evaluation, and acquisition of lands suitable for resettlement:** This involved procedures for acquiring land not only suitable for the settlement of rural population with decent living standards, but also simultaneously suitable specific agricultural activities, given the characteristics of the type of farming generally practiced by the population covered by the project. It was necessary to adapt this procedure to a geographical area suited to the population's socio-cultural pattern, which was found in the Department of El Petén, adjacent to Belize, where the land market has various constraints. To this end there was an exhaustive study of the legal title status of the properties considered, their location and comparative price in the domestic market. The ***IICA*** (the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture) of the inter-American system provided valuable support for technical evaluation of all the properties and the one that was selected. Finally, a trust, with a duration of five years, was formed to buy the property in June 2007. The project bought a total of 243.93 hectares (602.74 acres) for the housing and sustainable development of agricultural activities.

3. **Construction of the houses:** On November 17, 2007, after the above stages were fully completed, construction began on the housing complex for the Santa Rosa community in Poptún, El Petén Department,

Guatemala. It is important to note that the houses were designed for a rural context and with the premise of improving living standards in terms of their covered infrastructure, accessibility, and available services in that rural area. A total of 17 houses were built for the same number of families, benefiting a total of 102 persons. Each house was built of cinderblocks with cement floors, wooden roof structures covered with zinc sheets, two rooms, a kitchen, a modern bathroom, and a total covered area of 75 m^2. Each house has potable water from a spring in the woods on the property and sewage treatment. Each home is built on a plot with an area of 600 m^2.

4. **Area for farming:** Each family has a total area of 9.53 hectares (23.54 acres) for agricultural use.

5. **Forest area:** The property has a mountainous tropical forest with an area of 76.36 hectares (188.69 acres), which is subdivided into symmetrical portions for each of the beneficiary families. It will be used for conservation and a natural source of water for the community, the clean air for the area, and a possible source of income from the generation of oxygen, without precluding the possibility that it might be used for government projects for sustainable timber projects to benefit the community.

III. Conclusion of resettlement of the community

The stage of resettlement of the Santa Rosa community–relocation of the entire community of Santa Rosa from its former location in the Adjacency Zone to the new site–is now fully completed. This involved first building the 17 houses and installing their essential services. Then the community was given support to harvest their crops of corn and beans that had been planted in the Adjacency Zone, and support for moving that harvest. Moving of household goods and possessions was carried out with all necessary logistical support in various stages between December, January, February, and April. Finally, all the precarious houses and community infrastructure in the old settlement were completely demolished. This activity was finished on April 15.

IV. Process for completion of the model housing project of the Santa Rosa community in the Republic of Guatemala

With the completion of the housing construction and the transfer of the population, it only remains to complete the final tasks in the ***Nueva Santa Rosa*** project in Poptún. These include: completion of the building for the community school, an educational unit that already has support for a teacher's position from the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Guatemala; construction of the

multipurpose community hall and an area for sports and recreation for the children; and all the final administrative steps for titling in the trust for the parcels earmarked for agriculture and the green forest area. In addition, support will be sought from agencies of the central government of Guatemala and international cooperation sources for projects for agricultural diversification and sustainability for the families in their new settlement.

Finally, it should be stressed that execution of the project was made possible thanks to the unfailing support of the two countries that signed the Agreement for Promotion of Confidence-Building Measures and the members of the Group of Friends: Spain, the United States, the United Kingdom, Mexico, and Turkey.

Termination of this resettlement project is an innovation in processes of this kind in the Hemisphere, where there has been no history of population resettlement in the context of territorial disputes. It eliminated an obstacle to the process of dialogue between both countries while accomplishing the resettlement with respect for the residents' human dignity and improvement of the living standards of the affected population.