



**SPEECH TO THE NATION DELIVERED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC
OF EL SALVADOR, FRANCISCO FLORES, ON TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2002**

Ten years ago, on September 11, 1992, the International Court of Justice in The Hague, issued its verdict on the border dispute between El Salvador and Honduras.

That was the body that both countries resorted to, of our own free and sovereign will, to settle our differences.

One of the six land zones involved contains the Goascoran River estuary in the Gulf of Fonseca.

The judgment of the International Court of Justice is definitive and unappealable. This means that, as the two states involved in this case, we are obliged to abide by it.

Ten years ago, that judgment ruled, once and for all, what El Salvador gained and what it lost.

The only window left open by the International Court of Justice with respect to the judgment was the possibility of requesting a revision of the verdict on three conditions: first, the discovery of a new fact, that is to say, a fact that, had it been known during the proceedings, would have had a decisive effect on the Court's ruling; second, that the Court's ignorance of this new fact was not due to negligence on the part of the country adducing it; and, third, that that fact be presented within six months of it having been discovered, within a maximum period of 10 years from the date the ruling was handed down.

There exists no further possibility of appeal to challenge the judgment. We are bound by it.

Yesterday I met with President Ricardo Maduro of Honduras to let him know about El Salvador's decision in this regard and to reaffirm our country's commitment to abide by the law. We also agreed on the importance of complying with our joint obligation to demarcate our common border and, above all, to expedite execution of the development and services projects designed to benefit the Salvadoran and Honduran citizens living in the border zone.

Since 1992, demarcation of our border with Honduras has proceeded in accordance with a mutually agreed upon schedule. So far, demarcation has been completed along 197.5 kilometers. The demarcation teams of the two countries are meeting here this week in San Salvador to plan the remaining work. We believe we should expedite demarcation to give security to the inhabitants of that area.

Equally in accordance with international law, a few hours ago today, our Minister of Foreign Affairs submitted to the International Court of Justice a request for revision of the 1992 judgment.

This is the result of a serious and responsible effort made in response to an order issued by this Government to conduct the research and studies needed to find a new fact on which to base our request for a revision.

It was in the last few months that this effort bore fruit: a momentous achievement.



Our request for a revision is supported by solid evidence based on the discovery of new maps, scientific evidence that was not available at the time of the ruling, and on a series of documents that support El Salvador's position with regard to the sixth sector of our land border: the zone in which the Goascoran River flows into the Gulf of Fonseca.

When the Court in The Hague was examining the El Salvador-Honduras case between 1986 and 1992, it had no knowledge of these facts. We believe that this explains why, ten years ago, the Court ruled in favor of Honduras.

I wish to make it clear, first, that it will be the Court that decides when it will pronounce on this matter. Second, I would like to point out that we should not have too high expectations given that, in the 50 years during which the Court has been ruling on disputes of this type, it has only once admitted an appeal for revision and has yet to pronounce on that case.

The fact that judicial proceedings are under way between El Salvador and Honduras at the International Court of Justice does not signify and should by no means be construed as an obstacle to promoting what is really important for the future of both countries, that is to say, continuing efforts to forge a united and integrated Central America.

Nor should this request for a revision, submitted by us to the International Court of Justice, be interpreted as an escalation of tensions with regard to the border with Honduras. On the contrary, it illustrates how civilized nations address and solve their historical differences.

Similar processes are under way between Belize and Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, and between Costa Rica and Nicaragua, demonstrating that today's Central America has chosen dialogue and international law as the way to settle differences that date back to the previous century in a civilized and harmonious fashion.

This generation in Central America has inherited the border disputes and, in order to proceed to build our future, we have taken up the historical challenge of not ignoring them but rather addressing them seriously and responsibly, so that in the appropriate manner and through the appropriate channels we can gradually close this border dispute chapter in our history.

Our vision of the future looks forward to the day when the borders we are establishing through these proceedings are in practice done away with thanks to harmony and mutual respect among our peoples. Through integration, considerable progress has been made in customs procedures, electricity grid connections, and the quest for free trade agreements to generate jobs and combat poverty in our countries.

I would like to conclude by sharing a thought with each and every Salvadoran and, if I may, with each citizen of Central America.

If we conceive of Central America as a group of small countries isolated within their own frontiers, we will always remain small countries cut off from the rest of the world If we think of it as a region bound only by our ability to integrate with the world as it moves on, our size will cease to matter ... because through integration we multiply the opportunities for progress of each of the inhabitants of Central America.

May God bless us all.