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## **O.A.S. hands over equipment to Belize and Guatemala soldiers**



**The European Union and the Canadian government today made a donation to the Belize and Guatemalan forces that will assist them in enhancing accuracy of border patrols. The ceremony took place at the O.A.S. offices located at the Adjacency Zone. News Five's Isani Cayetano reports.**

### **Isani Cayetano, Reporting**

Traversing the expanse of the Belize/Guatemala Border, from its northernmost reach at Aguas Turbias, to Garbutt's Falls in the west and Gracias A Dios down south, has been quite a challenge for the armed forces of both countries. Notwithstanding these three markers, the boundary, a combination of dense vegetation, hills and flatlands, is a task in navigation. Without a compass or a directional guide it is relatively easy to venture into foreign territory. Recognizing the need for accurate border patrols, the Office of the General Secretariat of the Organization of the American States in the Adjacency Zone has gifted the Belize Defense Force and the Guatemalan Army with handheld global position systems provided by the European Union and the Government of Canada.



**Magdalena Talamas, Chief, O.A.S. Peace Fund**

*“The equipment that will be donated consists of one hundred GPS units, four satellite radios, solar panels and chargers, as well as laptop computers to upload software, worth more than two hundred thousand US dollars. These devices will be distributed equally among the Belize Defense Force and the Guatemalan Army. We’re very pleased to be making this donation today since it’s the first time that the O.A.S. office in the Adjacency Zone, through the Peace Fund, is able to provide such sophisticated devices to the security forces of Belize and Guatemala.”*

The satellite navigation systems, manufactured by Garmin, are all state-of-the-art equipment which will be used by soldiers on both sides of the border in finding their way across the rugged terrain which divides Belize and Guatemala. The donation falls under the Mandate of the Agreement of Confidence Building Measures of Belize and Guatemala.



**Ret. Col. George Lovell, CEO, Ministry of National Security**

*“These corporations and friendly relations that I refer to today are between Belize and the Organization of American States. The establishment of the Office of the General Secretariat of the O.A.S. in the Adjacency Zone with Belize and Guatemala has contributed to fostering community to community*

*cross-border contact, to improve cross-border relations and to inform the communities along the border of the confidence building measures that are in place. They are also to perform the very important task of conducting verification of incidents that occur within the Adjacency Zone.”*

The most recent confrontation involving the incursion of Guatemalan nationals onto Belizean soil was reported on June third, when B.D.F. on routine patrol of the Chiquibul Forest encountered twenty-seven year old Edgar Alexander Sacasa of Picalito Village. Sacasa was shot to the abdomen following an armed face-off with B.D.F. personnel. The detail of that incident, specifically the area where Sacasa was found, was later disputed in the Guatemalan press.



**Lt. Col. David Jones, Commander, Belize Defense Force**

*“We haven’t had or been hearing of any incidents of Belizeans being caught over on the Guatemalan side. It’s mainly on Guatemalans who have been caught doing illegal activities in Belize which is why the B.D.F. and other agencies like the FCD, Forestry have always been encountering them and hence reasons why they’ve had shooting incidents between Guatemalan civilians and Belize Defense Force soldiers because they are the ones who are being caught over here. There have been no incidents of Guatemalans having to encounter our Belizean citizens on the Guatemalan side.”*

The contribution, says C.E.O. George Lovell, will go a long way in bolstering the relationship between Belize and Guatemala and in getting the job of maintaining our border points done.



**Ret. Col. George Lovell**

*“Today we are honored with the OAS handing over fifty global positioning systems and one satellite radio to our military forces. I was made to understand in Magdalena’s brief that we are also receiving some laptops in this presentation. This contribution demonstrates the commitment of the O.A.S. to work with the Government of Belize and Guatemala to enhance and strengthen the confidence building measures between the countries.”*

Reporting for News Five, I am Isani Cayetano.