



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, FOREIGN TRADE AND IMMIGRATION

NEMO Building
P.O. Box 174
Belmopan, BELIZE, C.A.
Tel: (501) 822-2322/2167
Fax: (501) 822-2854
E-mail: belizemfa@btl.net

PRESS RELEASE

December 8TH, 2020 - Today, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs received Guatemala's Memorial in relation to Guatemala's Territorial, Insular and Maritime Claim to Belizean territory which it filed at the International Court of Justice, in accordance with the Court's order of 22 April 2020 extending the date for such submission following Guatemala's request for extension, citing delays resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Guatemalan Memorial states what Guatemala is claiming in terms of continental land, islands and seas, and the legal grounds for such claims. It consists of one volume of 500 pages, 462 Annexes, 8 Maps and 24 Figures.

The ICJ rules do not allow Belize to disclose Guatemala's pleadings, and Belize is obliged to abide by these rules. (Article 53(2))

At the same time, the Ministry is aware that all Belizeans are rightly anxious to know what Guatemala is claiming, since it has made varying claims to different parts of Belize's territory over the years. While at times it has laid claim to all of Belizean territory, at others it has limited itself to claiming a part, albeit a substantial part.

The most explicit formulation of the claim made in modern times was that contained in a letter from Guatemala's Foreign Minister addressed to Belize's Prime Minister on 18 October 1999 (attached) in which, although the claim to other parts of the territory was not expressly abandoned, Guatemala declared that the territory between the rivers

Sibun and Sarstoon should “revert” to Guatemala, being an integral part of the Verapaz province. The letter also protested the “de facto occupation of the islands adjacent to Belize.” Guatemalan governments since then have tended to follow the line laid down in that letter and have refrained from claiming the entire territory.

While it is constrained in what it can say by the ICJ Rules, the Ministry can reveal that Guatemala’s Memorial presents no surprises, no new claims that are different from those that have been made at different times in the past, which are well documented.

The Court’s order of 22 April 2020 also extended until 8 June 2022 the time for the filing of Belize’s Counter-Memorial. The Belize Office of the Agent to the ICJ, in collaboration with the international team of experts, is already at work in preparing Belize’s Counter Memorial which will resolutely reject Guatemala’s Claim and strongly assert Belize’s claim to all its territory, islands and seas in accordance with international law.

The Ministry can also state that, maintaining absolute respect for the Court and its esteemed Judges, Belize remains confident of its sovereignty over all the territory we succeeded to from the United Kingdom at independence on 21 September 1981 and over all the maritime areas to which we are entitled by the law of the sea. Belizeans can be secure in the knowledge that our rights and interests are well preserved by our local and international teams of experts and with confidence in the justice dispensed by the ICJ that it has demonstrated in years of adjudicating territorial disputes.

Belize’s Agent at the ICJ is Dr. Assad Shoman and Co-agent is Ambassador Alexis Rosado. Belize’s international team is comprised of Senior Counsel Sam Wordsworth QC, Dr. Ben Juratowith QC and Mathias Forteau; Junior Counsel Amy Sander, Philippa Webb and Kate Parlett; Support Counsel Catherine Drummond and Jamie Trinidad and Hydrographer/Geographer Robin Cleverly.

Hon. Eamon H. Courtenay SC and Leslie Mendez represent the Government in this process. Hon. Patrick Faber, Leader of the Opposition, has named Michael Peyrefitte and Godwin Hulse as representatives of the Opposition who will remain fully engaged and informed of the process.

ENDS