

Meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Committee on Belize
24th September 2009
Concluding Statement

The Commonwealth Ministerial Committee on Belize was convened by the Commonwealth Secretary-General on 24th September 2009 in New York, in accordance with the mandate given to him by the Commonwealth Heads of Government when they met in Kampala in 2007 "to convene the Ministerial Committee on Belize whenever necessary". The meeting was chaired by Senator the Honourable Maxine McLean, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados.

The Committee met to review developments in the continuing efforts of Belize to bring an end to Guatemala's territorial claim. The Committee was briefed on the current situation by the Honourable Wilfred Elrington, Attorney General and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Belize.

The Committee recalled the decision of Belize and Guatemala to accept the recommendation of Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS) on 19th November 2007, to refer the territorial claim to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for adjudication.

The Committee noted with satisfaction that on 8 December 2008 the Special Agreement required for submission of the case to the ICJ was signed by the Foreign Ministers of Belize and Guatemala, as well as by the OAS Secretary General as a Witness of Honour. They further noted that the Agreement provides the question that the ICJ will decide based on the principles of international law as set forth in article 38 (1) of the ICJ Statute. They also took note that the Agreement provides the question to be put to the citizens of both countries in simultaneous referenda to determine whether the case shall be referred to the ICJ.

The Committee commended Belize for the public awareness campaign it has launched to ensure that its citizens are fully informed in preparation for the referendum which can only be held after both Governments have finally approved the Agreement according to their separate constitutional procedures.

The Committee expressed high confidence that the dispute could be resolved through the judicial procedure of the International Court of Justice, resulting in the satisfactory conclusion of the Parties' efforts toward the peaceful and definitive settlement of the territorial dispute, and urged the support and financial assistance of the international community to meet the costs entailed for both the public education campaign, and costs related to the submission of the dispute to the ICJ.

The Committee expressed satisfaction over the agreement by the Parties to maintain, during this phase of the process, the Confidence Building Measures that, through the support of the Organization of American States, had contributed immensely to stability

in the adjacent border areas of Belize and Guatemala. The instrumental role played by the Office of the Organization of American States continues to be an essential requirement for the effectiveness of the Confidence Building Measures.

The Committee reaffirmed its firm support for the territorial integrity, security and sovereignty of Belize.