



Press Release

BELIZE-GUATEMALA DISCUSSIONS CONTINUE

May 10, 2004

Delegations from Belize and Guatemala met with Assistant Secretary General Luigi R. Einaudi at the OAS headquarters in Washington DC, May 4-6, 2004, to continue discussions aimed at reaching a just, equitable and permanent solution to the territorial differendum between the two countries within the framework of the Organization of American States. The delegations discussed the establishment of a Joint Commission that would examine a comprehensive list of new confidence building measures including a mutual legal assistance treaty, a free trade agreement, facilitation of the transit of goods of both countries and the joint promotion of tourism, among other issues.

Ambassador Einaudi presented the Delegations with a progress report on the OAS resettlement project in Nueva Juda, Melchor de Mencos. This project, designed to resettle Guatemalan citizens who were living on the eastern-side of the Adjacency Line, or very near the Line, is being executed in collaboration the Municipality of Melchor de Mencos, which has provided assistance in matters such as the legalization and donation of the building lots. The project houses were designed in consultation with the beneficiaries so as to respect local designs and traditions. The first 15 houses were completed at the end of April, and the entire project is scheduled for completion at the end of July, 2004. Included in the project design are plans for a primary school, a park area with playground for children and a community center. Ambassador Einaudi also presented the Delegations with the results of the Secretariat's investigation into an incident which occurred on April 7 between members of the Belize Defense Force (BDF) and a number of Guatemalan citizens. The Secretariat concluded that the incident took place near Las Cuevas Chiquibul, approximately 16 km East of the Adjacency Line when a BDF patrol discovered some Guatemalan citizens. The Guatemalans were illegally harvesting xate in Belize and one of them was illegally armed. The BDF patrol did not appear to have used excessive force in attempting to apprehend the Xateros, however, one of the Belizean soldiers involved was not certain about the proper BDF procedures for the use of weapons. The Secretariat further concluded that thick forest in the area worsened a tense situation which ended in gunfire, resulting in the serious but non-life threatening injuries sustained by one of the Xateros. The Parties agreed to maintain in effect the existing confidence building measures under OAS auspices until the next Belize-Guatemala ministerial meeting which will be held in June.