



Organization of American States

NEW MEASURES BRINGING CLOSER BELIZE AND GUATEMALA TAKEN AT THE OAS

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The Organization of American States (OAS) will help bring even closer the governments and people of Belize and Guatemala through cooperation projects, as was decided in a meeting between the two countries' respective foreign ministers, Wilfred Elrington and Roger Haroldo Rodas Melgar, and José Miguel Insulza, the Secretary General of the OAS.

As a result of the meeting and following a proposal by the OAS Secretary General, a high level working group will be created, to promote a direct and continuous line of communication between both sides on the situation of the Adjacency Zone and eventually other territorial areas in dispute, to analyze issues provoking difficulties and advance in pending bilateral issues. The group will be integrated by the respective Ambassadors to both countries, representatives from both Foreign Ministers and the OAS General Secretariat.

The high level working group will inform both Ministers regarding the agreements reached. Furthermore, it will elaborate proposals to both governments about joint projects of cooperation, with technical assistance from the OAS. Cooperation in environmental issues has been mentioned among the issues so far.

"We have taken a series of decisions that will contribute to solve specific problems that exist and we are going to set them in motion in the next few days to stimulate the work of cooperation in the Adjacency Zone," Secretary General Insulza said.

The two Ministers welcomed the creation of the High level working group to further facilitate the efficiency in the fulfillment of the Confidence-Building Measures and the possibility of carrying out joint projects of cooperation in the framework of the OAS.

The Minister of Foreign Relations and Commerce of Belize said that "a cordial relationship between neighbors is based on trust and confidence. It is as a consequence of interaction that you develop confidence. We have to interact to emphasize the view that we are not different from each other; the fact of this artificial border does not make us different. We are still the same people, with the same aspirations and desires."

The Minister of Foreign Relations of Guatemala, for his part, said that "there is a clear will from the government of President Colom to advance in all programs of mutual cooperation. Minister Rodas also acknowledged the active and efficient job carried out by the OAS through its Office in the Adjacency Zone and highlighted that the Framework agreement reached in September 2005 constitutes the Road Map for the high level working group to be created.

In general, all attendees praised the cordial atmosphere of the event and the discussion of issues surrounding the Adjacency Zone. "The most positive thing is the good will that is evident on both sides, the willingness, the good will that is always essential in achieving understanding. In this case the good will of the two ministers and their strong desire to reach a solution to the problems was very apparent," the OAS Secretary General added.

"Both governments are willing to work together. Neither wants tensions or problems, and we are sure that existing ones will be solved," said Minister Elrington. "There is willingness to solve the problems," agreed Minister Rodas.

Since 2000, the OAS has assisted the governments of Belize and Guatemala during the process of negotiation and facilitation to reach a peaceful solution to their land controversy, including the signing of various agreements to promote trust, the establishment of an OAS Office in the Adjacency Zone and the acceptance by both parties of the General Secretariat's suggestion that their dispute be submitted to the International Court of Justice.

Reference: E-418/09