

ASSAD SHOMAN, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND COOPERATION OF
BELIZE
CEREMONY MARKING THE RECEIPT OF THE FACILITATORS' PROPOSALS
TO END THE BELIZE - GUATEMALA TERRITORIAL DIFFERENDUM

September 30, 2002 - Washington, DC

Excellencies Secretary General and Assistant Secretary General of the Organization of
American States
Ministers of Foreign Affairs
His Excellency the Secretary General of the Central American Integration System
Distinguished Representatives and Special Envoys of Regional Organizations and
Financial Institutions
Distinguished Ambassadors to the Organization of American States
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for being here to share this moment in the history of Central America. Its significance is best summed up in the words of Secretary General Gaviria, when he declared that "the culmination of this first phase is very significant not only for the Belizeans and Guatemalans—who will benefit by coexisting in peace, harmony and confidence—but also for the people of the Americas, who will recognize the tremendous benefit to be derived from mediation and negotiation processes."

In a hemisphere endangered by the political land mines of unresolved and festering border disputes, this Facilitation process provides a novel approach to ease tension and combat the infection of distrust and hostility, the frustration of unrealized dreams. The disease of dispute drains our countries of scarce resources, stifles the growth of our economies, robs our people of peace and prosperity, deprives them of hope.

Ensuring that this process of Facilitation results in the resolution of the differendum between Belize and Guatemala is the collective responsibility of our hemisphere and our world community. The peace we fought so hard to conceive and birth must not be orphaned for lack of support.

As we make history here today, let us recall that this thing has a history.

The Guatemalan claim to the territory of Belize is something that every Belizean, no matter how old, has as one of her or his earliest memories. A hangover from the 19th century, it delayed the independence, distorted the development and cast a shadow over the future of Belize. It not only led to fear, suspicion and hostility toward the claiming country, but also toward the other Spanish speaking countries of Central America. For a long time, to be Spanish speaking was considered suspicious. It even soured relations and delayed the natural coming together of the Caribbean Community and Central American countries.

Those of us who have long dreamt of a bigger trans-Caribbean region living in peace and harmony, struggling together to bring equitable development to our peoples –and, for Belize, foremost among those dreamers was and is George Price, the Father of the Nation- those who have seen the Caribbean Sea as a great uniter of cultures and ethnic groups from all over the world, those dreamers have always longed for an end to this anachronistic dispute that divides peoples that are natural allies and partners.

We see the real possibility of that end coming soon.

No previous attempts to settle this dispute –and, believe me, there have been many over a century and a half and using all the established conflict resolution mechanisms- none have come this close to, or shown this promise of, satisfying the yearning of the ordinary peoples of Guatemala and of Belize to put this thing behind us and work together to build a better life for ourselves and our children.

I believe this process has been successful because Guatemala and Belize took the decision to try to understand –and make provisions for- each other’s concerns, limitations and susceptibilities. Because we were prepared to think out side the box and create a process without precedent: we would not negotiate directly with each other, but through Facilitators that we would each appoint; the OAS would be directly involved, not only by having the Secretary General as Honour Witness, but also by using Pan American organisations to carry out technical work to advance the Process; we could not agree that there was a border, so we called it an Adjacency Line and created a Zone along it for which we agreed a special regime as part of the Confidence Building Measures that have served us so well; we found out we could not alone provide the elements for a solution, so we asked a neighbour and friend to help us; we agreed not to “accept” the Proposals of the Facilitators, but to “receive” them, ad referendum, literally: each of us would submit them to a referendum on the same day and with the same question. Let the people decide, let democracy reign!

Both of us have learnt a lot over this process. We have learnt to work together and to build trust between us. We have learnt that despite the deep suspicions among our people, they desperately want to live in peace with each other and work together to produce a better tomorrow. Above all, we have learnt that there are so many peoples and countries who share our dreams of living peacefully and productively and who have come forward to help us realize that dream.

Foremost among these I want to give thanks to Honduras. This thing we are celebrating today is bigger than it looks. It is not only the best chance to end forever a dispute that has torn two peoples apart for much too long, but it is also forward looking, solving problems above and beyond that dispute.

The Proposals allow for the maritime boundaries in the Gulf of Honduras between Belize, Guatemala and Honduras to be agreed: territorial sea boundaries and EEZ boundaries, without the expensive and long-drawn out process of negotiations, much less of

adjudication. This is made possible by the willingness of Honduras, in a truly praiseworthy and honourable spirit of Central American solidarity, to help us to reach an agreement. I will go further: without Honduras' participation, a settlement of the Guatemalan territorial claim to Belize would not have been possible. Thank you, Honduras; your efforts to foster peace in our region exemplify what it means to be a good neighbour.

Thanks, of course, to the OAS Secretary General and Assistant Secretary General, both of who have shown a keen interest in, and great aptitude for, advancing this Facilitation Process, and without whose expert assistance we could not have succeeded. A special word of thanks to staff members of the OAS who have been exemplary in their willingness to sacrifice their time and family duties to help us make it through the night. You have made us feel proud to belong to this organization.

The Pan American Institute of Geography and History, which has helped us with verification and mapping work, and the International Organization for Migration, have played crucial roles in this Process, and we thank them and their officers profoundly.

The National Imaging and Mapping Agency of the United States of America, and the Ordnance Survey and Hydrographic Offices of the United Kingdom have made crucial contributions, and we thank them.

To all those countries, and to the Holy See, that have contributed with moral and political support for this Facilitation Process, to those that have contributed to the special Peace Fund at the OAS, which made it possible to fund the process; and to all those many more countries that will contribute generously to the Development Trust Fund that is an essential part of the settlement package, our heartfelt thanks. Your investment in peace will yield bountiful returns.

Our deepest gratitude goes to the Facilitators, Sir Shridath Ramphal and Mr. Paul Reichler. Your steadfastness, wisdom, and skill as negotiators have been the engines providing the propulsion for our journey so far. We are comforted by the fact that you will stay the course with us, through the referenda, the Treaty drafting, finalisation and implementation, to ensure that this peace process continues to notch up successes for our two countries and for the hemisphere.

To my friend, the Foreign Minister of Guatemala: Gabriel, we began this journey together; together we conceived the idea, steered the vessel through difficult, sometimes raging waters; our Governments must ensure that the cargo reaches shore, and the precious goods are delivered to our people.

Above all, not only the peoples of our two countries but also those of the hemisphere, owe a great debt of gratitude to the vision, wisdom and courage of President Alfonso Portillo and Prime Minister Said Musa. They were pained by the breach between two

neighbours, by the waste and lost opportunities of conflict, and took the bold decision to bring peace at last to our troubled peoples.

I may have left out some key players; as Prime Minister Said Musa said when commenting on the task he and President Portillo had set themselves of relegating this dispute to the dustbin of history: “What we could not know was just how much help we could expect – and from how many quarters – in bringing that task to an honourable conclusion.” To all those who have helped, therefore, thank you very much.

Allow me one more quote from Prime Minister Musa’s address. “In the lives of all countries”, he said, “there come moments of decision that are of extraordinary significance for the future, when the choices we make influence not only our own lives but those of generations to come.

This is one of those moments.

For Belize, I believe, that choice is clear; and for Guatemala too. It must be a choice dictated by our peoples’ yearning for development, not impaired by uncertainty and anxiety.”

I believe both peoples will make that historic choice for peace and justice; and as they do so, it is now, more than ever, that we need and seek the support of all our friends. For this Process is not yet over. Our immediate first step must be to keep the peace and tranquillity along our border, a fragile and often threatened peace that has endured only because of the creative confidence building measures in place. The Agreement on Confidence Building Measures expires today. Its essential extension requires not only the political will of the Parties, but also a replenishing of the Peace Fund. We need your moral, political and practical support to help us keep the Facilitators and the OAS in play and this process on course.

We need your help to carry out and monitor the referenda, which the Facilitators have proposed for no later than the end of November of this year. To ensure success in the referenda, our people must not only be convinced that the proposals are the best possible solution, but also that the entire process has the full backing of the international community.

Already the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, and many countries, have praised the Proposals of the Facilitators. But the reality is that the Proposals can only be implemented with the full and continued support of the international community. The Development Fund is a fundamental component of the package. Our people need to know that this component, which underpins various aspects of the implementation of the package, is in fact attainable. You and our other friends are the only ones who can ensure this.

It will be even more critical for our friends to be there for us for the implementation of the Treaties of Settlement, when the time comes. This Facilitation process, which has

afforded us the opportunity to be creative and flexible, has also enabled us to assimilate tried and proven concepts such as Guarantors for the Treaties of Settlement.

Having a number of Friends of the Process assume the role of Guarantors of the Treaties of Settlement would be most beneficial to all parties. Belize and Guatemala would be assured of the continued involvement of our friends, it would provide our friends with an active stake in ensuring the success of the Treaties of Settlement and of creating lasting peace. It would be a tragedy if you helped our two countries to achieve an honourable, just and definitive settlement of this age-old dispute and not commit to be there for us when we need help in staying true to our agreements.

Distinguished gathering of friends, the Facilitation process thus far has taught us a great deal. It has shown us what is possible when there is the will of two countries to settle undesired legacies of history. It will teach us what it means for two neighbours, separated by accidents of history, buttressed by the winds of suspicion and hostility, but united by destiny, to be able to live in peace and harmony, to work together for the betterment of our peoples.

Within my own country, this Process has taught us a lot too. The question of how to resolve the Guatemalan claim has deeply divided our people for generations; we have learnt, through this process, to act with unprecedented national unity to resolve it. Government and Opposition have worked together as full and equal partners, and civil society has played a crucial role in advising and guiding us on this difficult journey.

The journey is not yet over. We all have a role to play. We continue to lay the building blocks for peace. We ask our friends to heed the calling and remain steadfast with us in this most noble of causes, for “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.”

I thank you.