

**Statement by His Excellency Sir Ronald Sanders to the Permanent Council of the OAS
on the Referendum in Guatemala on the Belize – General Territorial Dispute.**

20th April 2018

My President on January 30th this year, this Permanent Council heard a very civilized presentation by the Foreign Ministers of Belize and Guatemala that emphasized the declared intention of the two countries to settle their territorial dispute in the context of the international system.

Today, we have learned that the Government of Guatemala has made good on its word.

My delegation welcomes the Referendum held in Guatemala to determine whether the electorate agreed that “any legal claim of Guatemala against Belize relating to land and insular territories and to any maritime areas pertaining to these territories should be submitted to the International Court of Justice for final settlement and that it determines finally the boundaries of the respective territories and areas of the parties”

Antigua and Barbuda also welcomes the decision of the Guatemala electorate to agree to take this long, outstanding matter to the International Court of Justice.

The territorial question has hung over the development prospects of Belize for over a century prior to its independence in 1981 and for almost 37 years since then.

The approach that the Government and people of Guatemala have now taken to this issue is consistent with Article 2 of this Organisation’s Charter and the Charter of the United Nations that require our nations “to ensure the pacific settlement of disputes”.

Guatemala deserves the collective congratulations and support of this Permanent Council.

It is, of course, the right of the Belize government and its people to decide how they will proceed, but we are encouraged by our understanding that Belize is likely to have a similar referendum on the same question to which the electorate of Guatemala has agreed.

We recognize that Belize will require support for the organization and holding of the referendum, and we urge are all member states to provide such support to the best of their ability.

We are pleased that both countries have adhered to Article 93 of the UN Charter which especially states that: “All Members of the United Nations are ipso facto parties to the Statute of the International Court of Justice.”

There is, therefore, no jurisdictional issue for the Court to decide, nor is there any dispute over its competence to make a final decision.

Mr President

The Secretary-General of this Organisation, Luis Almagro, played a positive role in the discusses between Guatemala and Belize.

In this regard, he fulfilled the role that member sates expect of the Secretary-General and that is: to be an instrument for resolving conflicts and for promoting dialogue and peace between our member states and within them.

He too deserves our congratulations for the success so far in this matter.

My delegation wishes Belize and Guatemala well, and stands ready to be as supportive as possible as they peacefully try to resolve their territorial issue in the context of the international legal system.