

INDEPENDENCE OF BELIZE

On September 21, 1981, Belize gained its independence from the United Kingdom.

Independence for Belize, which has had internal self-governing status since 1964, has been long delayed because of Guatemala's long-standing claim to the territory; and attempts, over the past seventeen years to reach a negotiated settlement, acceptable to all parties to the dispute have proved unsuccessful.

2. Since the 1960s, successive Jamaican governments, together with the Governments of the other Commonwealth Caribbean nations have expressed full support for the right of the people of Belize to self-determination and independence, with full territorial integrity. They initiated the internationalization of the Belize question which led to the decision of Non-Aligned countries to accord Belize special status within the Movement; and to the decision of the Commonwealth Heads of Government to establish a Ministerial Committee on Belize.

3. The position taken by the CARICOM countries has obtained the full support of the international community. Since 1975, the United Nations has adopted a series of resolutions re-affirming Belize's right to self-determination, independence and territorial integrity; and at its 35th Session in 1980, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution, co-sponsored by 50 states including Jamaica, which declared that Belize should become independent before the conclusion of the 36th UN General Assembly in 1981, and called for the convening of a constitutional conference to prepare for Belize's independence. The Assembly also called on the administering power, the United Kingdom, to continue to ensure the security and territorial integrity of Belize. (The resolution was adopted by 130 votes in favour; 8 abstentions;

and 1 negative vote, that of Guatemala.)

4. In March 1981, the Premier of Belize, and the Foreign Ministers of Guatemala and the United Kingdom signed a preliminary Agreement which was intended to form the basis for the negotiation of a permanent settlement. Subsequently, talks between the three countries in July 1981, failed to achieve a final settlement. It is understood that the talks broke down primarily over the use by Guatemala of certain cays off the coast of Belize. A decision was taken for Belize to proceed to independence this year, in accordance with the terms of the UN General Assembly resolution of November 11, 1980.

Guatemala has now announced that it will not recognize Belize's independence, and has closed the borders between the two countries, and withdrawn its consular representatives. It has also severed consular relations with the United Kingdom.

5. The Government of the United Kingdom has announced that British troops currently stationed in Belize would remain for an appropriate period to ensure the country's future security from external threat.

6. The continuing threat to Belize's independence must also be a matter of concern for Jamaica and the other members of the Caribbean Community.

7. It is against this background therefore, that the following announcement is being made:

"The Government of Jamaica welcomes the emergence of Belize as a fully independent state, and a member of the Commonwealth. In the spirit of support for Belizean sovereignty and territorial integrity, repeatedly expressed at Commonwealth meetings and in the United Nations, the

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Government of Jamaica declares that in the event of an armed attack against Belize, externally organized or supported, or the threat of such an attack, it would consult with the Governments of the Bahamas, Barbados, Canada, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United Kingdom to consider what measures should be taken in relation to such an attack."

H. L. Shearer
Deputy Prime Minister and
Minister of Foreign Affairs.

22nd September, 1981.

M.P. 183/01