



INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

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Press Release

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Sovereignty over the Sapodilla Cayes (Belize v. Honduras)

The Republic of Guatemala requests permission to intervene in the proceedings

THE HAGUE, 11 December 2023. On 1 December 2023, the Republic of Guatemala, referring to Article 62 of the Statute of the Court, filed in the Registry of the Court an Application for permission to intervene in the case concerning *Sovereignty over the Sapodilla Cayes (Belize v. Honduras)*.

Pursuant to Article 62 of the Statute, whenever a State not party to a case considers that it has an interest of a legal nature which may be affected by the decision in the case, it may submit a request to the Court to be permitted to intervene.

In its Application for permission to intervene, Guatemala recalls that on 16 November 2022, Belize instituted proceedings against the Republic of Honduras concerning “sovereignty over the Sapodilla Cays or Cayes, a cluster of islands in the Gulf of Honduras, which Guatemala also claims”. In these proceedings, Belize requests the Court to “adjudge and declare that, as between Belize and Honduras, Belize is sovereign over the Sapodilla Cayes”.

According to Guatemala, Belize’s submission in the *Belize v. Honduras* case overlaps with its submissions in the case concerning *Guatemala’s Territorial, Insular and Maritime Claim (Guatemala/Belize)*. In the latter case, both Belize and Guatemala claim sovereignty over the Sapodillas. In its Application for permission to intervene, Guatemala contends that it has “a clear interest of a legal nature [in the *Belize v. Honduras* case] since . . . it has a longstanding claim of sovereignty over the Sapodillas, which is part of the subject-matter of the pending *Guatemala/Belize* case before the Court”, and which may be affected by a decision of the Court in the present case. Guatemala further indicates that the object of its intervention is twofold:

“(a) to protect the rights and interests of Guatemala over the Sapodilla Cays by all the legal means available, including that established by Article 62 of the Statute of the Court[;]

(b) [t]o inform the Court of the nature and extent of Guatemala’s rights, which may be affected by the Court’s decision on the issue of sovereignty over the Sapodillas. Guatemala’s Application also seeks to ensure that the Court’s determinations do not touch upon or prejudice the legal rights and interests of the Republic of Guatemala.”

As regards the existence of a basis of jurisdiction between Guatemala and the Parties to the present proceedings, Guatemala notes that while Guatemala and Belize have concluded a special agreement in the *Guatemala/Belize* case, there is no basis of jurisdiction between Guatemala and Honduras. However, it contends that “the absence of such a link with Honduras is not a bar to Guatemala’s intervention[,] since the . . . application for permission to intervene is based on Article 62 of the [Court’s] Statute”.

In accordance with Article 83 of the Rules of Court, Belize and Honduras have been invited to furnish written observations on Guatemala’s Application for permission to intervene.

The full text of Guatemala’s Application for permission to intervene will be available on the Court’s website shortly.

History of the proceedings

On 16 November 2022, Belize instituted proceedings against Honduras with regard to a dispute concerning sovereignty over the Sapodilla Cayes, which it describes as a group of cayes lying in the Gulf of Honduras at the southern tip of the Belize Barrier Reef.

In its Application instituting proceedings, Belize states that, since the early nineteenth century, the Sapodilla Cayes have formed part of the territory of Belize, initially as part of the settlement of Belize and later the colony of British Honduras, and since 1981 as part of the independent State of Belize. The Applicant argues that, “[u]nder international law, Belize is sovereign over the Sapodilla Cayes” and that “[t]he Honduran claim to the Sapodilla Cayes, articulated in its 1982 Constitution, which remains in force as a matter of the internal law of Honduras, has no basis in international law”.

Belize requests the Court “to adjudge and declare that, as between Belize and Honduras, Belize is sovereign over the Sapodilla Cayes”. As basis for the jurisdiction of the Court, Belize invokes Article XXXI of the American Treaty on Pacific Settlement (Pact of Bogotá) of 30 April 1948 and Article 36, paragraph 1, of the Statute of the Court.

By an Order dated 2 February 2023, the Court fixed 2 May and 4 December 2023 as the respective time-limits for the filing of the Memorial of Belize and the Counter-Memorial of Honduras. Both written pleadings were filed within the time-limits thus fixed.

Earlier [press releases](#) relating to this case are available on the Court’s website.

Note: The Court’s press releases are prepared by its Registry for information purposes only and do not constitute official documents.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. It was established by the United Nations Charter in June 1945 and began its activities in April 1946.

The Court is composed of 15 judges elected for a nine-year term by the General Assembly and the Security Council of the United Nations. The seat of the Court is at the Peace Palace in The Hague (Netherlands). The Court has a twofold role: first, to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States; and, second, to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by duly authorized United Nations organs and agencies of the system.

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