

REPORT TO THE PERMANENT COUNCIL

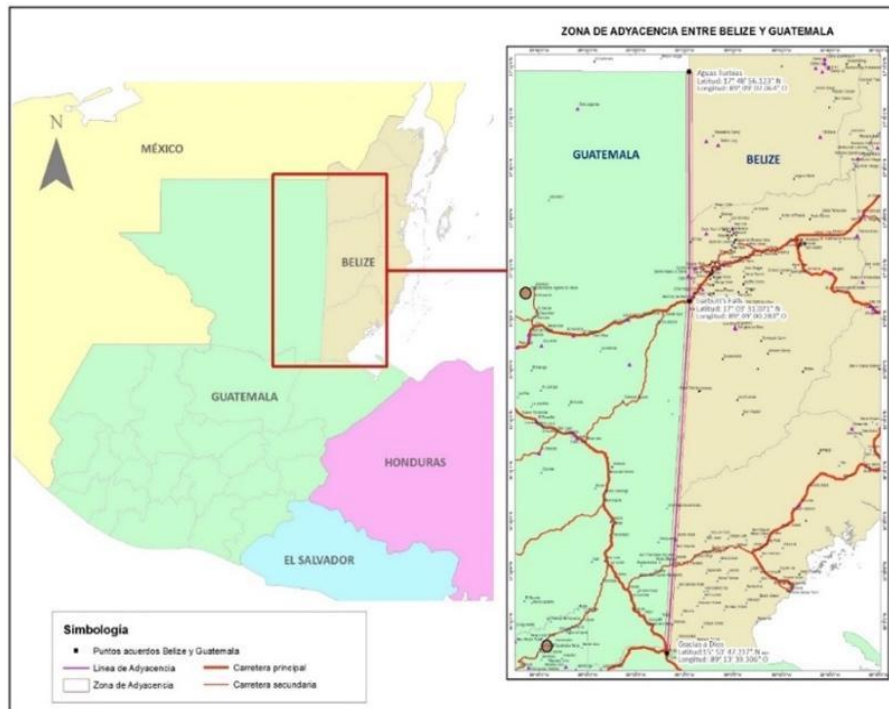
20 YEARS SINCE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE OFFICE OF THE OAS IN THE BELIZE AND GUATEMALA ADJACENCY ZONE

March 20, 2024

Background:

At the beginning of this century, Guatemala and Belize requested the assistance of the Secretary General of the OAS to reach an agreement to resolve their territorial, maritime, and insular dispute.

As a result of this request, in 2000, Belize and Guatemala signed the first Agreement on Confidence Building Measures, through which the two parties agreed to respect an “Adjacency Line” (AL) between each country and an “Adjacency Zone” (AZ), which extends one kilometre east and one kilometre west from this imaginary line, covering an area of approximately more than 400 square kilometres and with a population of approximately 40 thousand people located in just over 35 communities. With the support of the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History (IPGH), this line was precisely defined in 2001. However, this line does not represent the international border between Belize and Guatemala.



Map 1. Adjacency Zone between Belize and Guatemala.

In 2003 and 2005, Agreements were signed to establish a Transition Process and Confidence-Building Measures between Belize and Guatemala, establishing the creation of the OAS Office in the Belize-Guatemala Adjacency Zone (OAS/AZ), and the Group of Friends, aimed at providing political and operational support to the process of peace.

In 2008, since the Parties could not arrive at an agreement through diplomatic negotiations, the Secretary-General recommended that the countries resort to the judicial instances established by international law for the resolution of disputes. This measure was adopted by both countries and culminated in popular consultations in both countries, held in 2018 and 2019. Since then the territorial, maritime, and insular dispute has been under the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

In 2021, Dr. Luis Almagro, Secretary General of the Organization of American States, carried out a visit to the Office of the OAS in the Adjacency Zone. This visit provided the SG with a first-hand experience of the excellent work carried out to reduce the tensions and bring the communities along the Belize – Guatemala Adjacency Line closer together.

Achievements and Activities:

Since the installation of this Mission and from my appointment as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, I wish to specifically address the achievements and activities carried out by this mission in the last 3 years. The Office in the Adjacency Zone has four main areas of work:

- a. Verification System;
- b. Promotion and development of a culture of peace;
- c. Security coordination and;
- d. Strengthening political and diplomatic dialogue.

a. Verification System:

Since its inception and to date, the OAS/AZ Office has addressed 420 verification requests received from both parties, with 2022 being the year with the highest number of requests, 84, mainly related to the development of irregular economic activities in the Adjacency Zone. During 2023, the number of requests decreased by 83%, with only 13 requests received, 92% of which have been addressed.

This significant decrease in verification requests is due to diplomatic efforts and good offices, as well as the ongoing awareness-raising activities carried out by the mission in the communities regarding the respect for the mutually agreed confidence-building measures between the Parties, and the support from the authorities of both Belize and Guatemala, mainly from the Foreign Ministries and the Armed Forces. We believe that this figure is a true reflection of many years of work carried out by the OAS.

Thanks to the constant dialogue and intervention of the OAS/AZ Office and, above all, the good disposition of both Parties, detentions of minors and residents engaged in economic activities in a country other than their own were completely reduced. This act alone reflects a substantial

advancement in bilateral relations to create a Zone that develops in an environment of peace and stability, with total adherence to respect for the human rights of the inhabitants of both Belize and Guatemala.

b. Promotion of Development and Culture of Peace:

Regarding the second axis, and in terms of the Culture of Peace, since 2021 a new vision has been adopted and the program has been redesigned, with the idea of contributing to the promotion of economic and social development of these communities with special emphasis on empowering women through training in skills to enter the job market and improve their personal and family economic situation.

In implementing this new paradigm, there has been a significant qualitative leap in assistance to the communities residing in the Adjacency Zone, with the establishment of 4 "Ta'Amay" Centres for Training and Promotion of Peace in the last two years. These centres, located in both Belizean and Guatemalan communities in the Adjacency Zone, offer certified and free technical training in various areas, such as cooking, sewing, beauty, motorcycle repair, electricity, and entrepreneurship, among others.

These courses are supported by official educational institutes from both countries, which accredit the training received and facilitate access to new job opportunities, both in entering the labour market and in creating new businesses.

To date, in the first 3 "Ta'Amay" Centres for Training operating since April 2022, 1,032 people have benefited and graduated, of which 80% are women, representing, in many cases, their first opportunity for training and education in their lives. These initiatives not only bring communities together but also provide economic opportunities, especially for women and single mothers.

We are witnessing hundreds of success stories where individuals participate in various courses to learn new techniques and become entrepreneurs by innovating new small businesses and generating additional income for their families. In other instances, alumni gather courage and motivation to further their studies at other educational centres or institutes.

From another perspective, the "Ta'Amay" Centres for Training have become a safe space for the attending women, fostering an environment of respect and community integration. It is important to note that these centres have helped reshape the reality of family structures in many cases, breaking glass ceilings and allowing women in the Adjacency Zone to become more involved and have a more active role in the social structure of their communities.

Moreover, institutional collaboration with local governments and civil society organizations, such as Help for Progress, Human Rights Commission of Belize, Conexión Guatemala and Operación Sonrisa Guatemala and others, has expanded the range of services and benefits for the population, from nursing techniques training to coordination between law enforcement institutions. The "Ta'Amay"

Centres have been embraced by various entities to have a closer connection with vulnerable populations.

Likewise, promoting human rights serves as the guiding principle of these Centre's operations. Therefore, access to education, health and security is largely guaranteed thanks to the cooperation between the OAS/AZ and various authorities of the Member States that support and sustain this project.

I take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to the Government of Italy, whose generous grant made it possible to inaugurate the 4th "Ta'Amay" Centre for Training and Promotion of Peace in the southern region of the Adjacency Zone on February 29th of the present year. This specific region has been characterized as the highest risk in tension zones in recent years.

c. Coordination in Security Matters:

Since the beginning of its functions, this Office has maintained close contact with the military forces from both countries, they are responsible for patrolling the Adjacency Zone and when necessary, they identify and notify their respective authorities of possible violations of the Confidence-Building Measures. The Adjacency Zone is subject to coordinated military and police patrols from both countries with the assistance of the OAS Office in the AZ.

These actions result in a monthly coordination exercise with commanders of the forces patrolling the Adjacency Zone, followed by quarterly meetings with High Commands. During these meetings, information is exchanged, and joint operations are established to ensure and reinforce the security of the Adjacency Zone.

As of today, since 2021, 37 meetings have been held, of which 25 are monthly meetings with brigade commanders patrolling the Adjacency Zone and 12 have been quarterly meetings with High Commands.

These coordination meetings allow this mission to understand the situation in the patrolled areas, recognize possible situations that may require a verification process and, in general, assess the state of peaceful coexistence in the communities of both countries.

This permanent and close contact between the armed forces of both countries has allowed for the containment of risky situations, prevention of acts of violence, and mitigation of the impact of violations of Confidence-Building Measures.

d. Strengthening Political and Diplomatic Dialogue:

Regarding the last axis of work of this mission, and since the signing of the 2005 agreement to date, the OAS Secretary General has designated his special representative to observe diplomatic negotiations between the parties and provide any assistance required by them.

During the past three years, I have been fulfilling this role, with which Secretary Almagro has honoured me, residing mainly in the Adjacency Zone. My mission fundamentally consists of ensuring good political and diplomatic dialogue between the Foreign Ministries of both countries, listening to their requirements, and making recommendations to the Secretary-General so that he can act accordingly.

In this regard, in my capacity as Special Representative, I have held regular meetings with the Foreign Ministries of both countries and as a result, enhanced coordination and communication between both parties have been achieved to generate joint actions that benefit the inhabitants of the Adjacency Zone.

During my tenure, we have received 18 Heads of Mission from Canada, Mexico, Germany, the United States, South Korea, the Netherlands, Colombia, Honduras, Italy, Norway, Bulgaria, Spain, France, Belgium, Brazil, the United Kingdom, Panama, and the European Union, delegations that have visited the Office on multiple occasions to learn about the activities being carried out, with visits from European, Asian, and American Countries being highlighted.

Each of these visits has aimed to raise the visibility of the mission through accredited countries in both Belize and Guatemala and has also served to seek to reinforce funding for the Office and its operations.

Next Stage:

Ambassadors, and esteemed friends: in 2023, our OAS/AZ Office celebrated its 20th anniversary. Over these two decades, it has fostered relations between communities on both sides of the Adjacency Line, observed the implementation of Confidence-Building Measures approved by the Parties, verified, and reported on transgressions committed by the Parties, informed residents about the Measures, and executed projects for economic and social development in the Zone.

The OAS Mission in the Adjacency Zone has become a beacon of peace, representing the longest-standing interstate mission of this Organization, which is governed by the principles of neutrality, objectivity, impartiality, and independence.

This mission looks to the future with great hope, awaiting the decision to be made by the International Court of Justice, which will put an end to a long-standing interstate conflict. I hope that the Governments of Belize and Guatemala continue to cooperate with each other, fulfilling the 2005 Framework Agreement, and thus consolidating an Adjacency Zone that develops in a climate of peace.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the constant support and trust of the Secretary General, Dr. Luis Almagro, for this peace mission, as well as the invaluable cooperation of the Secretary for Strengthening Democracy, Dr. Francisco Guerrero, and especially the Department of Democratic Sustainability represented by María T. Mellenkamp.

Also, I want to acknowledge the former Director of the OAS Office in the AZ, Juan Carlos Amador, the current Director of the Office Sergio López, and all the staff of our mission, without their commitment and dedication, these achievements that I proudly present today before this Permanent Council would not have been reached.

On their part, without the political support of the Foreign Ministries of Belize and Guatemala, the mission would not have been able to achieve the results presented today. So, many thanks to the Foreign Ministers of Belize and Guatemala, and especially to the Vice Ministers present here, Ambassador Amalia Mai and Ambassador Mónica Bolaños.

My special thanks to our patrons, especially the European Union and the Government of Italy, whose strong commitment has been supporting this mission politically and financially.