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LADB Staff

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## **El Salvador, Honduras Sign Treaties to End Border Conflicts**

by LADB Staff

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On Jan. 19, in a ceremony in Tegucigalpa attended by heads of state from most of the Central American countries, Salvadoran President Armando Calderon Sol and then Honduran president Carlos Roberto Reina signed two accords to end all territorial disputes between their two nations. Both countries have squabbled over their common border since independence. In 1969, a brief war left 5,000 soldiers dead and ruptured diplomatic ties for more than ten years. In 1986, the two nations turned to the World Court at The Hague to resolve the conflict. In 1992, the court awarded about three-fourths of the disputed territory along the 374-km border to Honduras and the remainder to El Salvador.

Nevertheless, the court left it to the two countries to resolve the legal demarcation of the border, as well as the rights of citizens who were affected by the ruling. About 10,000 Salvadorans reside in zones awarded to Honduras, and another 3,000 Hondurans live in areas awarded to El Salvador.

### ***Property, civil rights of border communities recognized***

Since 1995, a binational commission has debated these problems. The rights of citizens posed a special problem because the Honduran Constitution prohibits foreigners from owning property within 40 km of its border, meaning Salvadorans in those zones would have to become naturalized citizens to retain their property. However, under one treaty signed Jan. 19, both sides agreed to respect all property and civil rights of border residents regardless of their nationality. Individuals can choose whether they want to be considered Salvadoran or Honduran without losing any rights in the country where they reside.

The second treaty calls for the completion of border demarcation by January 1999. Since the World Court ruling, the two countries have only demarcated 130 km, leaving 244 km to be resolved. Both countries recently acquired satellite equipment that will speed the process. The treaty also commits the governments to expand the binational team in charge of demarcation and provide it with sufficient resources to complete its work. Within three months after demarcation is finished, both nations will hire a private firm to construct markers along the border.

### ***Legislative approval of treaties could pose stumbling block***

Both presidents were under pressure to sign the treaties given that border problems have led to frequent military tensions between the two countries, complicating economic and political integration projects (see NotiCen, 10/17/96 and 02/17/97). "We have acted with a vision of Central American union and integration," read a declaration by the presidents. "In the era of globalization and market economies, political borders tend to disappear as pressure grows for greater freedom of movement for capital, technology, and the productive process."

Nevertheless, legislative approval of the treaties remains an important hurdle, especially in Honduras, where the Constitution will have to be amended to allow Salvadorans to retain their

nationality and their property rights. Honduran President Carlos Flores, who took office Jan. 27, supports the treaties, and his party has a majority in Congress. However, congressional deputies warn they will carefully examine all clauses in the treaty, and approval should not be taken for granted. "We are going to analyze the treaty thoroughly," said congressional vice president Rafael Pineda. "We will submit it to three assembly debates as required by law, and if we find it is in the national interest, then we will ratify it." [Sources: Prensa Grafica (El Salvador), 01/10/98; Reuter, 10/30/97, 01/18/98, 01/19/98; Spanish news service EFE, 01/19/98; El Tiempo (Honduras), 10/31/97, 01/09/98, 01/19/98, 01/20/98; Notimex, 12/13/97, 01/16/98, 01/20/98; Inforpress Centroamericana (Guatemala), 01/23/98]

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