

**More endorsements for**  
*Guatemala's Claim to Belize –The Definitive History*

Many historians have been grappling with the Guatemalan claim to Belize. Assad Shoman has now, in a most comprehensive and revealing way, shared information not otherwise available, covering everything readers need to know about the claim and how best to end it.

*Lawrence Vernon, Principal Librarian*

Impressively researched with granularity and precision, this timely and important book traces with seismic fidelity the twists, turns and turnarounds of two centuries of negotiation. Shoman frames the territorial dispute within the broad arcs of imperial ambition and colonial manipulation, and his tactile sense of the state of play in the critical era from the 1970's to the present lends the work a singular intimacy and authority. This is essential reading, a book for our times and for posterity, one which bestows the reader with a profound understanding of the complex historical, cultural and geopolitical dynamics that have formed and framed this 200-year-old dispute. It is an essential volume for all students of the dispute, and required reading for all Belizeans contemplating their vote on the ICJ.

*Jules Vasquez, Channel 7 News*

This is the only book worth reading on ALL we need to know about Guatemala's dangerous claim to half of our country. This is the story as only this towering intellectual, historian, prolific writer, and hero of our generation can tell it. For he was there. He made it happen. This is the history we have been longing to read. Read it and emancipate yourselves from lack of knowledge.

*Richard "Dickie" Bradley, lawyer and political commentator*

Read this book if you want to understand why the historical divisions between Belize and Guatemala remain among the unresolved legacies of power politics from colonial days and the Cold War. It provides deep insight into various attempts made by these countries to resolve their dispute arising from Guatemala's claim on Belizean territory. It offers an insider's account of how a stage of democratic expectation is now set for their seemingly intractable differences to be finally resolved peacefully in accordance with international law, using the multilateral system underpinned by the United Nations. This book is the product of decades of first-hand experience and is infused with scholarly research, perceptive analysis and readability. It is bound to become the definitive treatise on the subject for learned scholars and laymen alike.

*Alexis Rosado, Belize's Ambassador to Guatemala*

If you really want to know why Guatemala believes it has a claim on Belize, why this claim is so comprehensively refutable, and why the ICJ is where Belize must prove this, read this book! Share this book! Meticulously researched from multiple sources and passionately argued, this book makes a most timely contribution at a critical period on the road to finally deleting this archaic blight on Belize's existence. Shoman, who has been at the center of almost every twist and turn in the attempts to resolve 'the claim' since the mid-1970s, not only augments his seminal historical writings on the pre-independence period with new information and fresh insights, but also provides the most systematic and riveting account of post-independence events of 'the claim' to date. Our understanding of Guatemala's claim will be permanently shaped by this compelling and brutally honest work!

*Dr Dylan Vernon, Belize's Ambassador to the European Union*

This comprehensively-researched, reader-friendly, eye-opening, must-read book will help Belizeans make their analytical, unemotional ICJ decision. It covers early settlers, two Treaties but unfounded Claim, backroom British-US-Guatemalan land cession double-talk on independence and sovereignty, the legal position and what to expect at the ICJ.

*Dr Gilda Lewis, retired UB Associate Professor, Para-Legal Cert. (Hons.), NABR  
founding member*

Should Belize agree to take the Guatemalan claim to the ICJ? I can't imagine who better to have a conversation with about this question, than Assad Shoman who on the question of resolving this claim, has essentially seen it all. This book offers a compelling argument for going to the ICJ, but more importantly it offers a comprehensive and critical historical account of the claim and efforts to resolve it thus far, knowledge of which is essential to making an informed decision.

*Dr Filiberto Penados, Academic Director, CELA-Belize*

Very thoroughly researched, well written and easy to read. Assad Shoman provides a riveting account of the history of this centuries-old claim. An excellent resource that is much needed as Belize ponders to go or not to go to ICJ. This should be required reading in the country's high schools.

*Senator Valerie Woods*

I was most impressed with the ironclad nature of Belize's case, as described in such detail. I regard myself as a fairly well-informed Belizean, but I hadn't received such an easy to understand explanation as Assad so carefully portrays.

*Dr Joseph Palacio, writer and educator*

In this book Assad Shoman provides the most comprehensive account of Guatemala's "unfounded and unjust" claim to Belize now available. This invaluable work is a product of his long engagement as a diplomat, advisor and lead negotiator, extensive research across the globe, clear and engaging writing and, above all, no holes-barred analyses. How Belize achieved its independence with its territory intact, the successes and failures of the negotiations over the years with emphasis on the contribution of a host of countries and the impact of developments in Belize and Guatemala, an appraisal of Guatemala's claim under international law, and the conviction that at adjudication Belize would be granted all of its land territory (in line with the 1859 Treaty) and maritime entitlements under the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea are systematically illumined with the insights of a key player. All those seeking to understand Guatemala's claim and make an informed choice on whether to refer it to the International Court of Justice should give *Guatemala's claim to Belize* a careful reading.

*Dr Herman Byrd, Belize Archives and Records Service*

Shoman's history of Guatemala's claim to Belize, which is thoroughly researched and clearly written, is suitable for a wide readership, general as well as academic. His analysis pays due attention to the global context of great power rivalries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and especially to the crucial period of the Cold War. The author, a protagonist who was involved for decades in the negotiations he analyzes, is scrupulously fair and his insights are unique. Indeed, nobody else could have written this book. I recommend it to everyone interested in this particular case and also to those who want to know how a small country can negotiate its way to its independence against formidable odds. This will remain the definitive study and it should be widely read in Belize and elsewhere.

*Dr O. Nigel Bolland, Charles A. Dana Professor of Sociology,  
Colgate University, New York*

In this timely book, Assad Shoman applies his forensic skills to explain the Guatemalan claim to Belize in extraordinary detail. Uncovering material long-forgotten or previously unknown, Shoman helps us understand the origins of the claim and why it has proven so difficult to resolve through negotiation. It is essential reading for anyone interested in this dispute and it will figure prominently in all discussions on this issue.

*Dr Victor Bulmer-Thomas, Professor Emeritus of London University, former Director of  
Royal Institute of International Affairs - Chatham House*



GUATEMALA'S CLAIM TO BELIZE  
—THE DEFINITIVE HISTORY—



ASSAD SHOMAN

GUATEMALA'S CLAIM TO BELIZE

—THE DEFINITIVE HISTORY—

April 2018





## About the Author

Assad Shoman studied law in England and was admitted to the Bar of Belize, practised for a short time and was Attorney General. He has a Master's Degree in International Relations from the University of Sussex, England, and a Ph.D. in History at the University of London. He has researched and written extensively on Belizean society and history generally and particularly on the Guatemalan claim to Belize.

He formed and headed the Belize Independence Secretariat, led the international mission at the United Nations from 1975 and represented Belize at international forums until Belize's independence in 1981. Since independence he has followed and commented on the ongoing negotiations to resolve the dispute, occasionally serving on Advisory Councils relating thereto.

From 2000 until 2008, as Minister of Foreign Affairs and as Ambassador with ministerial rank, he conducted the proceedings relating to the Facilitation Process and its aftermath, including the Agreements and Confidence Building Measures of 2000, 2003 and 2005 and the establishment of the OAS Office near the border with Guatemala.

Since 2008 he has made himself available as an advisor to the government of Belize in its efforts to bring an end to the Guatemalan claim. He has spoken widely on the issue and written several articles and books on the subject, including *Land in Belize 1765-1871*, with Nigel Bolland (1977), *Historia de Belice, El surgimiento de una nación centroamericana*, (UNAM, 2009), *Belize's Independence and Decolonisation in Latin America* (2010), *A History of Belize in 13 Chapters* (2nd ed. 2011), and *How you can end the Guatemalan claim* (2013).

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—The Definitive History—

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A past which is forgotten, or rendered inconsequential, will take  
its historic revenge.

Stuart Hall,  
*Familiar Stranger*



# Table of Contents

About the Author	/ix
Acknowledgements	/xvii
List of Acronyms	/xxi
List of Maps	/xxvi
Note on Sources	/xxvii
Appendices: All appendices can be found at the website <a href="http://www.guatemalasclearing.com">www.guatemalasclearing.com</a>	
Preface: Understanding the Guatemalan Claim	/xxxi

## **Chapter 1 (up to 1949) Evolution of the Nation /1**

Britain And Spain Clash	/1
The Anglo-Guatemalan Dispute	/6
The 1859 Anglo-Guatemalan Treaty	/13
The Ghost of Article 7	/20
The Story So Far: What Does It Mean?	/27

## **Chapter 2 (1950-1972) The Recalcitrant Claim /31**

Belize “Inherits” the Claim	/31
To Webster and Beyond	/53
The Story So Far: What Does It Mean?	/81

## **Chapter 3 (1972-1977)**

### **Internationalisation /87**

Belize on the World Stage /87

The International Arena: The Commonwealth,  
NAM and the UN /92

Negotiations with Guatemala /95

Mission to the UN /113

After the Resolution: Persisting Pressures /127

The Story So Far: What Does It Mean? /156

## **Chapter 4 (1978-1981)**

### **Ya Da Fu We Belize /161**

US Pressures to Cede Territory Escalate /161

Disunity Favours Guatemala /176

Changes in the UK, the Region and Belize /189

*Sandinista!* /190

The Heads: Passport to Independence /220

The Story So Far: What Does It Mean? /236

## **Chapter 5 (1981-2018)**

### **The Never-Ending Claim /249**

The Defence of Belize /249

Pursuing an End to the Claim /254

Post-Independence Negotiations /262

Guatemala Recognizes Belize /277

The Claim Revitalized /289

The Facilitation Process /300

The “Transition Process” and CBMS /334

Heading Towards the ICJ /340  
The Special Agreement to Go to the ICJ /350  
The Story So Far: What Does It Mean? /377

Chapter 6  
Whose Territory?  
A Legal Appraisal of the Claim /393  
What is to Be Done? /430

Afterword /437

Select Bibliography /439  
Maps /449  
Index /453





## Acknowledgments

I want to say a special word of thanks to the late Sir Eli Lauterpacht, who I had the pleasure and honour of working closely with over many years and who I considered a friend. His work on behalf of Belize spanned four decades, and far more than a legal commission, for him it became a labour of love.

All those Belizeans who were part of the several negotiating teams and advisory councils from the 1970s until the present helped to make Belize's case heard, respected and supported regionally and internationally, and made it possible for this tiny, colonised, poor and underdeveloped country to punch far above its weight in international arenas, and to face down and overcome attempts by major powers to deny Belizeans their dream of a free, sovereign independent country: Belize owes them recognition and appreciation.

Many other Belizeans and others, especially in the years leading up to the attainment of the independence of Belize in 1981, by their principled, committed and unwavering support against colonialism and for freedom and independence; the workers, farmers, teachers, cultural workers, women, students and youth, who rose above all efforts to weaken their resolve, confuse their principles and temper their anti-imperialist commitment,

brought down the colonial banner and raised the Belizean flag: Belize owes them its very existence.

Others have contributed to making known to Belizeans, without resorting to chauvinism and xenophobia, the meaning and value of nationhood and the necessity of defending independence while embracing internationalism and the common struggle of the dispossessed of the world, as exemplified in organizations like UBAD, SPEAR, Friends for Conservation and Development and others.

Very special recognition is due to Evan X Hyde, who over a period of five decades has almost single-handedly, through his writings in the *Amandala* (whose continued existence against all odds is nothing short of heroic), explained and denounced in language the people can understand the essential role of US imperialism, capitalism and international white supremacy<sup>1</sup> in the persistence of threats to Belize's integrity and as an essential cause of the persistent poverty imposed on underdeveloped countries. His consistent and principled exposure of racism, class discrimination and the corruption of ethical principles that blights the promise of a free Belize, his fearless acknowledgment of the seminal importance of Fidel Castro for the cause of freedom and justice in the world, or his exposure of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine by apartheid Israel and its support of the Guatemalan dictators, his willingness to speak truth to power, is recognized and prized by Belizeans and conscious people everywhere.

Some friends kindly read earlier drafts and made valuable comments that helped to improve the text immeasurably, including Professor Orlando Nigel Bolland and Ambassadors Salvador Figueroa, Robert Leslie, Alexis Rosado and Dylan Vernon. Dr Gilda Lewis caught many grammatical and stylistic errors. My thanks to the Institute for Social and Cultural Research (ISCR, NICH), the Belize Archives and Records Service, and the Belize National Library Service and Information System for the research assistance provided. Lindsay Belisle, Dr Herman Byrd, Ambassador Janine Coye, Ardelle Sabido and Larry Vernon were kind enough to respond to specific queries,

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, *Amandala* editorial 11 November 2017: <http://amandala.com.bz/news/natural-supernatural/>

## Acknowledgements

and Luis Salazar spent many hours and did a phenomenal job digging up references and suggesting other information and sources, and for this I am truly grateful. I am deeply indebted to Annie Lou Burns for catching many errors of grammar and style as well as typos that slipped my editor, and in particular for insisting that I add a summary at the end of each chapter, so that readers with little time on their hands can just skip to “The Story So Far...” and get the picture, and if they want more details dig back into the chapter. Above all, I am indebted to my daughter Kiren, whose good sense and love has always inspired and guided me.



## List of Acronyms

AL: Adjacency Line

AZ: Adjacency Zone

BEC: Belize Estate and Produce Company

BCG: Belize Coast Guard

BDF: Belize Defence Force

BIS: Belizean Independence Secretariat

BNCG: Belize National Coast Guard

BTV: Belize Territorial Volunteers

CABEI: Central American Bank for Economic Integration

CACIF: *Comité Coordinador de Asociaciones Agrícolas, Comerciales,  
Industriales y Financieras*

CACM: Central American Common Market

CARICOM: Caribbean Community

CBM: Confidence Building Measures

Guatemala's Claim to Belize...

CELA: Center for Engaged Learning Abroad, Belize

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

CHOGM: Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency

CMCB: Commonwealth Ministerial Committee on Belize

CNR: *Comisión Nacional de Reconciliación*

CO: Colonial Office

CONDECA: *Consejo de Defensa Centroamericano*

CSL: Commonwealth Secretariat Library

C24: Committee of 24 (of the UNGA's Fourth Committee)

DC: *Democracia Cristiana*

DOS: Department of State (US)

EAC: External Affairs Committee

ECLA: Economic Commission for Latin America

ECLAC: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

EEC: European Economic Community

EEZ: Exclusive Economic Zone

FCO: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

FMLN: *Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional*

FSLN: *Frente Sandinista por la Liberación Nacional*

FO: Foreign Office

FOB: Forward Operating Base

FCN: *Frente de Convergencia Nacional*

FRG: *Frente Revolucionario Guatemalteco*

GAF: Guatemalan Armed Forces

GOB: Government of Belize

List of Acronyms

- GOG: Government of Guatemala  
GMA: Guatemalan Maritime Area  
GRULAC: *Grupo Latinoamericano y Caribeño*  
HIP: Honduran Independence Party  
HM: Her Majesty  
HMG: Her Majesty's Government  
ICJ: International Court of Justice  
IOM: International Organization for Migration  
IR: International Relations  
JC: Joint Commission  
JIC: Joint Intelligence Committee  
JDZ: Joint Development Zone  
MAA: Maritime Areas Act  
MAB: Maritime Areas Bill  
MAS: *Movimiento de Acción Solidaria*  
MFA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
MRE: *Ministerio de Relaciones Extranjeras*  
MOD: Ministry of Defense  
MOU: Memorandum of Understanding  
NABR: National Alliance for Belizean Rights  
NAC: National Advisory Commission  
NACLA: North American Congress on Latin America  
NAM: Non-Aligned Movement  
NIMA: National Imagery and Mapping Agency  
NIP: National Independence Party  
NP: National Party

Guatemala's Claim to Belize...

NTUCB: National Trade Union Council of Belize

OAS: Organization of American States

OAU: Organization of African Unity

ODECA: *Organización de Estados Centroamericanos*

OEA: *Organización de Estados Americanos*

PAIGH: Pan American Institute of Geography and History

: *Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil* (Civil Defence Patrols)

PAN: *Partido de Avanzada Nacional*

PDM: People's Development Movement

PPP: People's Progressive Party

PS: Permanent Secretary

PUP: People's United Party

RAF: Royal Air Force

RDC: Regional Development Corporation

SOSC: Secretary of State for the Colonies

SPEAR: Society for the Promotion of Education and Research

TOC: Treaty of Cooperation

TOR: Treaty of Recognition

TPP: Toledo Progressive Party

UBAD: United Black Association for Development

UCN: *Unión del Centro Nacional*

UDI: Unilateral Declaration of Independence

UDP: United Democratic Party

UNDP: United Nations Development Program

UNGA: United Nations General Assembly



List of Acronyms

UNSC: United Nations Security Council

UPCA: United Provinces of Central America

UK: United Kingdom

UN: United Nations

UNCLOS: United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea

UNGA: United Nations General Assembly

UNSC: United Nations Security Council

URNG: *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca*

US: United States of America

USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WIAD: West Indies and American Department

Guatemala's Claim to Belize...

## List of Maps

**Map 1:** Map to illustrate border treaties affecting Belize /449

**Map 2:** Map attached to the 1859 Treaty /450

**Map 3:** Map showing Guatemalan demands during 1975-1981 negotiations /451

**Map 4:** Map showing main UK and US Proposals during 1975-1981 negotiations /452

## Note on Sources

Manuscript sources used include:

The National Archives, London. The major relevant items were found at Foreign Office, Colonial Office, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Defence files. These are referred to in the footnotes as FO, CO, FCO and DEFE respectively, followed by the number of the file. There are also some files from the Prime Minister's office and from the Cabinet office, referred to respectively as PREM and CAB. It should be noted that certain documents, some as far back as 1957, well outside the normal 30-year rule, were excluded from the files. Many documents for the 1980s have been marked "Closed for 40 years" and are not available. Requests to gain access to these documents by applications under the Freedom of Information Act were, without exception, refused.

The National Archives & Records Administration, Washington. References are in the footnotes by the number of the file followed by the acronym NARA.

The Belize Archives, Belmopan, for the earlier periods, as nothing in the modern period relating to official correspondence on the Guatemalan claim is currently available. References to this source are signified in the footnotes with the acronym BA. For many of these records, references in the book are made to earlier works of the author.

Commonwealth Secretariat Library, London. The references to these are cited by the file number followed by the acronym CSL.

United Nations documents are footnoted with reference numbers of documents, followed by the acronym UN. Many of these are now available on the United Nations website.

*Archivo Histórico Diplomático Mexicano, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Mexico City.*

Personal Files. The author was a participant in the events of the modern period, as a result of which he has in his possession papers not otherwise available; these are indicated in the footnotes as PF. Many of the documents written by British officials have been withheld from public viewing by the British government and are not available at the National Archives in London. Most of these documents relating to the period up to the independence of Belize have been delivered to the National Archives of Belize for cataloguing and making available to researchers. Documents for the post-independence period will soon be delivered to the National Archives of Belize as well.

Major printed collections of documents:

Sir John Burdon's (ed.) *Archives of British Honduras* (3 vols., London, 1931-1935) is a collection of documents in the archives at Belize in 1930 which were extracted, some incomplete, by public officers in Belize and later printed in London. Its value is enhanced by the destruction of archival documents in subsequent hurricanes in Belize. Cited as ABH.

The *White Book*. Controversy between Guatemala and Great Britain relative to the Convention of 1859 on Territorial Matters. *Belize Question* (translated from the Spanish copy), published by the Guatemalan Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1938, is a useful volume containing a large number of documents. It must be used with care because it was compiled **specifically**

to further Guatemala's cause and omits certain documents; also, the translations are not always accurate. Cited as *White Book*.

British Documents on the End of Empire, Series B, Volume 6, edited by SR Ashton and David Killingray, London, The Stationery Office, 1999 (1948 – 1966), and Series A Volume 4, Parts I and II, edited by Ronald Hyam and Roger Louis, London, The Stationery Office, 2000, (1957-1964), cited as BDEE.

Parliamentary Debates in the House of Commons are cited as Hansard.

*Guía del Archivo de Límites y Ríos México-Belice 1723-1980*, SRE y Instituto Mors, Mexico City, 1994.

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968 Volume XXXI, South and Central America; Mexico, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 2004, cited as FRUS, 1964-1968, available on the web.

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980, Volume XV, Central America, United States Government Publishing Office, Washington, 2017, cited as FRUS, 1977-1980, available on the web.

British and Foreign State Papers, 1859-1860.



## Understanding the Guatemalan Claim to Belize

Most Belizeans in Belize<sup>1</sup> in 2018 were born after Belize became independent in 1981, and more than 65% of adults were below the age of 10 when the nation of Belize was born<sup>2</sup> and have no memory of what it meant to be a colony, or what it took for Belize to become independent. They are not conscious that the yet unborn nation Belize was pressured by its colonial master, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,<sup>3</sup> and by the United States of America, to give up land and islands and sea to Guatemala in return for its recognition of Belize's right to exist.

For those Belizeans, the vast majority, who were not born, or not politically conscious, or not here, on Independence Day, how does it hit them when they hear that Guatemala claims large areas of Belize's territory? Or that the Guatemalan military is stopping Belizeans from

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<sup>1</sup> This land was first called "The Settlement at the Bay of Honduras," and after it became a colony in 1862, "British Honduras". While still a colony, its name was officially changed to "Belize" in 1973.

<sup>2</sup> Statistical Institute of Belize, census figures.

<sup>3</sup> In certain periods in this narrative, the country referred to was called "England". It became Great Britain with the 1707 Act of Union with Scotland, and the United Kingdom in 1802 upon union with Ireland. For convenience, however, I will use the terms "Britain" or "the United Kingdom" or "the UK" indiscriminately.

transiting the Sarstoon River, when they had been taught that the Sarstoon up to the mid-channel was part of their national patrimony? Surely for many of them, the situation is most confusing. In the first place, most of them have learnt what they know about the Guatemalan claim not systematically in the school system, but from the mouths of politicians and those calling in to talk shows.

Consequently when the people are asked in a referendum to decide whether they agree that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) should resolve the Guatemalan claim once for all, most will only be able to vote based on emotion, and not on a reasoned analysis of the facts, because information has not been supplied to them on a regular and systematic basis. In order to make such a momentous decision, they must have facts, reasoned opinions, knowledge about what has been done so far to end the claim and why all those efforts have failed.

That is why I have written this book, because we need an informed people who know the true facts about the past and about the present, so that they can help decide the future. It is a bit long and detailed, because I do believe that people need to have the fullest possible knowledge of the history of the case, from the beginning until now, to understand how we got here and how best we can get rid of this threat to our existence as a nation.

I will deal with many burning and divisive issues based on facts, and using original materials from the archives of Belize, the UK, the Commonwealth, the UN, Mexico and the USA, the writings and statements of Guatemalan officials, my own participation and files, interviews with key people and reliable secondary sources. I have provided sources for my statements, particularly the more controversial ones, so that you can check for yourself. Everyone is entitled to their own opinions, but not to their own facts, because while opinions are subjective, based on a personal viewpoint, facts are objective and indisputably true. It should be clear when I am stating my own opinion and when I am stating a fact.

You also need to know about what was happening in Guatemala at different times and how this influenced the attitude of other countries, especially Britain and the USA, towards the claim. I will therefore



include a lot more material on internal developments in Guatemala than is usually the case.

And it is essential to understand what we mean when we say “Guatemala”. I often use that word as shorthand for meaning the government, the ruling class, the official bureaucracy or the military, and not in reference to the people. The vast majorities of Guatemalan people have been ruthlessly oppressed and exploited by a small white ruling class supported by the military, denied access to land, social services and subjected to racism and class discrimination. The people of Guatemala are our brothers and sisters, and in their struggles against their ruling class have supported and respected the rights of the people of Belize. Many Belizeans are descendants of immigrants from Guatemala or are themselves such immigrants. They have grown to love and are prepared to defend Belize and the last thing on their minds would be to have Belize fall under the power of the very regime they ran away from. I stress this because I have seen how easy it is to become xenophobic in relation to Guatemalan people when we are talking about the claim of that repressive government to our land. That would be a fatal mistake, a terrible trap which I implore you not to fall into.

I also want in particular to provide to readers as much of the conjuncture as possible, the state of affairs surrounding the issue at any given time, the wider context in which events were determined, since this is important in understanding why certain things happened and others didn't.

I will try to say everything you need to know about the Guatemalan claim in order to make an informed choice as to how best to end it. I shall make a special effort to present those facts that Guatemala relies on to stake its claim, because you need to learn about all the relevant facts, not just those that favour our arguments. You would not like to hear those Guatemalan arguments, or the facts they rely on, for the first time if and when they are presented in an international tribunal.

I will not try to convince you to vote one way or the other, if it ever comes to a vote. That is not my purpose, but rather to provide you with the materials for you to make your own informed choice.

Guatemala's Claim to Belize...

Finally, I expect you to read this critically, to verify facts and question interpretations; all I ask is that you read fully without prejudice before drawing conclusions or making selective interpretations.

Assad Shoman  
Havana, April, 2018