



# INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

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## Press Release

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### *Sovereignty over the Sapodilla Cayes/Cayos Zapotillos (Belize v. Honduras)*

#### The Court grants Guatemala permission to intervene in the proceedings as a non-party

THE HAGUE, 19 March 2026. The International Court of Justice today delivered its Judgment on Guatemala’s Application for permission to intervene in the case concerning *Sovereignty over the Sapodilla Cayes/Cayos Zapotillos (Belize v. Honduras)*.

It is recalled that on 16 November 2022, Belize [instituted proceedings](#) against Honduras with regard to a dispute concerning sovereignty over the Sapodilla Cayes (referred to by Honduras as the “Cayos Zapotillos”), which Belize describes as a group of cays lying in the Gulf of Honduras at the southern tip of the Belize Barrier Reef. It requests the Court to “adjudge and declare that, as between Belize and Honduras, Belize is sovereign over the Sapodilla Cayes”.

On 1 December 2023, Guatemala, referring to Article 62 of the [Statute of the Court](#), filed an [Application for permission to intervene](#) in the case. According to Guatemala, Belize’s submission in this case overlaps with its submissions in another case pending before the Court, concerning *Guatemala’s Territorial, Insular and Maritime Claim (Guatemala/Belize)*. In the latter case, both Belize and Guatemala claim sovereignty over the Sapodilla Cayes/Cayos Zapotillos. 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.

Public hearings on Guatemala’s Application for permission to intervene were held from 24 to 26 November 2025. In its closing arguments at the end of the hearings, Belize stated that it had no objection to Guatemala being permitted to intervene in this case. Honduras, however, considered that the Application was “redundant and an abuse of the institution of intervention”, and must therefore be found inadmissible.

In its Judgment, the Court concluded that “Guatemala’s Application for permission to intervene satisfies all substantive and procedural conditions under Article 62 of the Statute and Article 81 of the Rules of Court”. That being so, the Court did not accept Honduras’s argument that the Application for permission to intervene should be rejected on the ground that Guatemala has abused the process. The Court also made clear, in paragraph 76 of the Judgment, that “Guatemala has sought permission to intervene to protect its legal interests in relation to the question of sovereignty over the cays”, and that, therefore, its “intervention is to be limited to the issue of

sovereignty over the Sapodilla Cayes/Cayos Zapotillos, including fishing rights in the waters surrounding them”.

In the operative clause of its [Judgment](#), which is final, without appeal and binding on the Parties, the Court:

“*Decides* that the Republic of Guatemala is permitted to intervene as a non-party in the case, pursuant to Article 62 of the Statute, to the extent and for the purposes set out in paragraph 76 of this Judgment.”

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Judge CHARLESWORTH appends a separate opinion to the Judgment of the Court; Judge TLADI appends a declaration to the Judgment of the Court.

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A summary of the Judgment appears in the document entitled “Summary [2026/1](#)”, to which a summary of the opinion is annexed. This summary and the full text of the Judgment are available on the [case page](#) on the Court’s website.

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

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

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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 specialized agencies.

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