



INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

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Press Release

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Question of the Delimitation of the Continental Shelf between Nicaragua and Colombia beyond 200 nautical miles from the Nicaraguan Coast (Nicaragua v. Colombia)

Fixing of time-limit for the filing by Nicaragua of a written statement of its observations and submissions on the preliminary objections raised by Colombia

THE HAGUE, 3 October 2014. By an Order of 19 September 2014, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, has fixed 19 January 2015 as the time-limit within which the Republic of Nicaragua may present a written statement of its observations and submissions on the preliminary objections raised by the Republic of Colombia on 14 August 2014 in the case concerning the Question of the Delimitation of the Continental Shelf between Nicaragua and Colombia beyond 200 nautical miles from the Nicaraguan Coast (Nicaragua v. Colombia).

The subsequent procedure has been reserved for further decision.

History of the proceedings

On 16 September 2013, the Republic of Nicaragua filed an Application instituting proceedings against the Republic of Colombia relating to a “dispute concern[ing] the delimitation of the boundaries between, on the one hand, the continental shelf of Nicaragua beyond the 200-nautical-mile limit from the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea of Nicaragua is measured, and on the other hand, the continental shelf of Colombia”.

In its Application, Nicaragua requests the Court to “adjudge and declare . . . [t]he precise course of the maritime boundary between Nicaragua and Colombia in the areas of the continental shelf which appertain to each of them beyond the boundaries determined by the Court in its Judgment of 19 November 2012” in the case concerning the Territorial and Maritime Dispute (Nicaragua v. Colombia). The Applicant further requests the Court to state “[t]he principles and rules of international law that determine the rights and duties of the two States in relation to the area of overlapping continental shelf claims and the use of its resources, pending the delimitation of the maritime boundary between them beyond 200 nautical miles from Nicaragua’s coast”.

Nicaragua recalls that “[t]he single maritime boundary between the continental shelf and the exclusive economic zones of Nicaragua and of Colombia within the 200-nautical-mile limit from the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea of Nicaragua is measured was defined by the Court in paragraph 251 of its Judgment of 19 November 2012”.

Nicaragua further recalls that “[i]n that case it had sought a declaration from the Court describing the course of the boundary of its continental shelf throughout the area of the overlap between its continental shelf entitlement and that of Colombia”, but that “the Court considered that Nicaragua had not then established that it has a continental margin that extends beyond 200 nautical miles from the baselines from which its territorial sea is measured, and that [the Court] was therefore not then in a position to delimit the continental shelf as requested by Nicaragua”.

Nicaragua contends that the “final information” submitted by it to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf on 24 June 2013 “demonstrates that Nicaragua’s continental margin extends more than 200 nautical miles from the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea of Nicaragua is measured, and both (i) traverses an area that lies more than 200 nautical miles from Colombia and also (ii) partly overlaps with an area that lies within 200 nautical miles of Colombia’s coast”.

The Applicant moreover observes that the two States “have not agreed upon a maritime boundary between them in the area beyond 200 nautical miles from the coast of Nicaragua. Further, Colombia has objected to continental shelf claims in that area”.

Nicaragua bases the jurisdiction of the Court on Article XXXI of the Pact of Bogotá, to which “both Nicaragua and Colombia are Parties”. Nicaragua states that it has been “constrained into taking action upon this matter rather sooner than later in the form of the present application” because “on 27 November 2012, Colombia gave notice that it denounced as of that date the Pact of Bogotá; and in accordance with Article LVI of the Pact, that denunciation will take effect after one year, so that the Pact remains in force for Colombia until 27 November 2013”.

In addition, Nicaragua contends that “the subject-matter of the present Application remains within the jurisdiction of the Court established in the case concerning the Territorial and Maritime Dispute (Nicaragua v. Colombia), of which the Court was seised by the Application dated 6 December 2001, submitted by Nicaragua, in as much as the Court did not in its Judgment dated 19 November 2012 definitively determine the question of the delimitation of the continental shelf between Nicaragua and Colombia in the area beyond 200 nautical miles from the Nicaraguan coast, which question was and remains before the Court in that case”.

By an Order of 9 December 2013, the Court fixed 9 December 2014 and 9 December 2015 as the respective time-limits for the filing of a Memorial by Nicaragua and a Counter-Memorial by Colombia.

On 14 August 2014, Colombia, referring to Article 79 of the Rules of Court, raised certain preliminary objections to the jurisdiction of the Court and to the admissibility of the Application. In accordance with Article 79, paragraph 5, of the Rules of Court, the proceedings on the merits were suspended.

The full text of the Court’s Order can be found on the Court’s website (www.icj-cij.org), under “Cases/Pending Cases”.

Note: The Court’s press releases 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 seat of the Court is at the Peace Palace in The Hague (Netherlands). Of the six principal organs of the United Nations, it is the only one not located in New York. The Court has a twofold role: first, to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States (its judgments have binding force and are without appeal for the parties concerned); and, second, to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by duly authorized United Nations organs and agencies of the system. 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. Independent of the United Nations Secretariat, it is assisted by a Registry, its own international secretariat, whose activities are both judicial and diplomatic, as well as administrative. The official languages of the Court are French and English. Also known as the “World Court”, it is the only court of a universal character with general jurisdiction.

The ICJ, a court open only to States for contentious proceedings, and to certain organs and institutions of the United Nations system for advisory proceedings, should not be confused with the other — mostly criminal — judicial institutions based in The Hague and adjacent areas, such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY, an ad hoc court created by the Security Council), the International Criminal Court (ICC, the first permanent international criminal court, established by treaty, which does not belong to the United Nations system), the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL, an independent judicial body composed of Lebanese and international judges, which is not a United Nations tribunal and does not form part of the Lebanese judicial system), or the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA, an independent institution which assists in the establishment of arbitral tribunals and facilitates their work, in accordance with the Hague Convention of 1899).

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