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Suriname

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By Ivan Cairo, Correspondent at Caribbean Net News Suriname

PARAMARIBO, Suriname: Authorities in Suriname are confident about the outcome of the hearings in the long-standing border dispute with Guyana. Both parties began presentations Thursday before an Arbitration Tribunal established under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The oral pleadings are being held behind closed doors in the headquarters of the Organization of American States (OAS) in Washington, DC, and will last until December 20.

"I am confident that the Surinamese team is well-prepared for the oral pleading, that the Surinamese interests will be looked after vigorously and I expect that the Tribunal will judge the Surinamese positions on its merits," said Suriname Foreign Affairs minister Lygia Kraag-Keteldijk from Washington, DC.

The same sentiments go for president Ronald Venetiaan. Earlier this week he also noted Suriname's readiness for the procedures. "The Surinamese side is thoroughly prepared and is going with a good spirit and good feeling towards this arbitration procedure," said the head of state. About the outcome, however, he is more cautious. "At this moment there is no reason to speculate on the outcome," he responded to questions from journalists.

In February 2004, Guyana formally submitted to the Government of Suriname a Statement of Claim invoking Article 287 and Annex VII of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in relation to its maritime boundary dispute with Suriname.

Annex VII of the Convention sets out the rules and procedures for the establishment and functioning of an Arbitration Tribunal under the Convention. These procedures allow for disputes relating to maritime boundaries between adjacent States which are Parties to the Treaty to be submitted for binding resolution to an Arbitration Tribunal established under the Treaty.

Pursuant to the requirements, the Government of Guyana also gave notice of its action under the Convention to the President of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. It has done so similarly to the Secretary General of the United Nations.

After a lull for three decades, the border tensions between Guyana and Suriname flared up again in June 2000 after Surinamese gunboats evicted an oil rig from Canada's CGX Energy Inc. from the disputed maritime area on the Surinamese coast. CGX was granted an oil exploration contract by the Guyanese government in 1998 for the area in dispute.

Between June 2000 and October 2002 several efforts, including high-level talks between the presidents of both countries, failed to bring about a resolution. Both countries have claimed ownership to the Tigri Area (called by the Guyanese the New River triangle) in the south, while there is also a dispute over the maritime border. Guyana's President, Bharat Jagdeo, says he is looking forward to the matter being settled once and for all.

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E-mail: natlaw@natlaw.com