

International Court of Justice rules Chile not forced to negotiate Bolivian sea access



The Hague, October 1 (RHC)-- The International Court of Justice at The Hague has ruled that Bolivia cannot force Chile to negotiate over granting it "sovereign access" to the Pacific Ocean.

Bolivia surrendered most of its former coastline to Chile in a 1904 treaty following the War of the Pacific. Reading the panel's 12-3 decision, Presiding Judge Abdulqawi Yusuf said that despite the countries' long history of talks, Chile had never bound itself to negotiations that would lead to a surrender of territory, as Bolivia had argued.

Accordingly "the court is unable to conclude... that Chile has the obligation to negotiate with Bolivia in order to reach an agreement granting Bolivia full sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean."

Bolivian President Evo Morales attended the court session and listened attentively during the ruling, taking notes as judges rejected all eight grounds advanced by Bolivian lawyers to support their claim.

Chile currently allows Bolivia duty-free access to the port of Arica, near its northern border with Peru. Bolivia aspires to have a corridor including train line and port under its own control, and Morales in 2012

halted discussions he saw as fruitless in favor of seeking a legal ruling to bolster the strength of Bolivia's case.

Judges noted their ruling, while siding with Chile, was not intended to stop the countries from re-entering negotiations "in the spirit of good neighborliness."

Yusuf encouraged them to resolve "issues arising from the 'land-lockedness' of Bolivia, the solution of which, they have both recognized to be a matter of mutual interest."

Bolivian President Evo Morales gave a press release shortly after the ruling and vowed to continue the fight for sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean. "I would like to take this opportunity to say that Bolivia is never going to give up its prosecution. The Bolivian people know, the world knows, that because of an invasion, we have been denied access to the Pacific Ocean."

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