



University of London

INSTITUTE OF COMMONWEALTH STUDIES

COHP Transcript: Mark Robinson APPENDIX ONE

Content Summary:

Supplementary comment provided by Mark Robinson on 23 July 2015, responding to a question on the role played by Sir Shridath Ramphal in the independence of Belize.

On the independence of Belize:

Belize became peacefully independent on 21 September 1981, although this was only formally recognised by Guatemala in 1992. Neighbouring countries had territorial claims regarding Belize and indicated that they were not prepared to allow Belize to become independent until these were resolved. [*Editor's Note: the principal claimant was Guatemala. Mexico, for instance, had renounced its claim to Belize, then British Honduras, in 1893*]

In view of this, Ramphal set up a Caribbean Foreign Ministers Committee to meet in the two years prior to this in New York, at the time of the General Assembly general debate held in September of each year. I acted as Secretary, and if any Foreign Minister could not be present they were represented by their country's Permanent Representative to the UN. [*Editor's Note: Ramphal was 'in the chair' for these meetings, though he did not formally 'chair' the session*] Turnout was always high, the meetings informal, and Belize was represented by its Chief Minister, the Rt Hon George Price, who later became the country's first Prime Minister. Lasting between an hour and one and a half hours, there was a wide-ranging discussion of where neighbouring countries stood on the issue, after which the most appropriate Foreign Ministers would agree to go and talk to the countries concerned, involving their Heads of Government if appropriate. These behind-the-scenes interventions were quiet but effective, and although claims were not dropped, agreement was reached that Belize could move to independence without confrontation and this happened successfully in September 1981. Although the UK, as the colonial power, did not, as far as I recall, attend these meetings, its Permanent Representative was briefed afterwards and viewed these meetings as "helpful".