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INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

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Telex 32323

Communiqué

*unofficial
for immediate release*

Last Communiqué in 1981
series was No. 81/16

No. 82/1
26 January 1982

The Court forms a chamber to deal with the case submitted
by Canada and the United States

The following information is made available to the press by the
Registry of the International Court of Justice:

Canada and the United States have submitted to a specially formed
chamber of the International Court of Justice a longstanding dispute
over the boundary separating the fishery zones and continental shelf
areas of the two countries off the Atlantic coast in the Gulf of Maine.
This chamber has now been constituted by an Order of the Court.

It is the first time in the history of the Court that the parties
to a dispute have made use of the possibilities, embodied in the Statute
and Rules of the Court, of sending their case to a chamber instead of the
full Court.

Details of the process by which the chamber has been created are
given below.

26-1-82

Press called for 2.00
20 Jan 1982

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On 25 November 1981 the Government of Canada and the Government of
the United States had notified to the Registry a Special Agreement,
concluded by them on 29 March 1979, and having entered into force on
20 November 1981, by which they submitted to a chamber of the Court a
question as to the course of the maritime boundary dividing the
continental shelf and fisheries zones of the two Parties in the Gulf of
Maine area.

The Special Agreement provided for the submission of the dispute to
a five-member chamber to be constituted after consultation with the
Parties, pursuant to Article 26, paragraph 2, and Article 31 of the
Statute of the Court. These are respectively the Articles providing for
the establishment of a chamber to deal with a particular case and the
right of a Party, when there is no judge of its nationality upon the
bench, to choose a judge ad hoc to sit in the case.

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The Parties were duly consulted, and the Court had already been notified in a letter from the Parties accompanying the submission of the case that, since the Court did not include upon the bench a judge of Canadian nationality, the Government of Canada intended to choose a judge ad hoc.

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Following a decision in principle to accede to the Parties' request to form the special chamber, and an election held on 15 January 1982, the Court

- composed as follows: Acting President Elias; Judges Forster, Gros, Lachs, Morozov, Nagendra Singh, Ruda, Mosler, Oda, Ago, Sette-Camara, El-Khani and Schwebel -

adopted, on 20 January 1982, by 11 votes to 2, an Order whereby it duly constituted a special chamber to deal with the delimitation of the maritime boundary between Canada and the United States in the Gulf of Maine area, with the composition having resulted from the above-mentioned election: Judges Gros, Ruda, Mosler, Ago and Schwebel. The Order notes that, in application of Article 31, paragraph 4, of the Statute of the Court, the Acting President had requested Judge Ruda to give place in due course to the judge ad hoc to be chosen by Canada, and that Judge Ruda had indicated his readiness to do so.

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Judge Oda appended a declaration to the Order of 20 January 1982.

Judges Morozov and El-Khani voted against the Order as a whole and appended dissenting opinions giving their reasons.

Summary of the declaration appended to the Order

Judge Oda indicated that, while he voted in favour of the Order, it should have been made known that the Court, for reasons best known to itself, had approved the composition of the Chamber entirely in accordance with the latest wishes of the Parties.

Summary of dissenting opinions appended to the Order

In his dissenting opinion, Judge Morozov stressed that in substance the Special Agreement between the United States of America and Canada clearly took as point of departure the erroneous presumption that, contrary to Article 26, paragraph 2, of the Statute, the Parties who presented a request to create a Chamber for consideration of a particular case might not merely choose what should be the number of the members of the Chamber, but also formally decide and propose the names of judges who should be selected by secret ballot, and even present those proposals to the Court in the form of some kind of "ultimatum".

In that situation, the sovereign right of the Court to carry out the election independently of the wishes of the Parties, by secret ballot in accordance with the provisions of the Statute and Rules of Court, became in substance meaningless.

From his point of view, the matter could have been successfully settled by the Court in February 1982 in its new composition.

Judge El-Khani voted against the Order and stated in his dissenting opinion that in his opinion the imposition of an unduly close time-limit for the Chamber's formation and of a particular composition rendered the Court no longer master of its own acts, deprived it of its freedom of choice and was an obstacle to the proper administration of justice. Furthermore it diminished the prestige of the Court and was harmful to its dignity as the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. It resulted in its regionalization, by depriving it of its basic and essential characteristic of universality, and produced the indirect result of two judges of the same nationality acting in the name of the Court, one in the Chamber and the other in the Court, which did not correspond to the Statute. On those grounds he found that it ought not to constitute a precedent, as it would be a dangerous course to follow in the future.
