

# Jurisdiction ruling in Nicaragua-Colombia row Dec 13

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AMSTERDAM (Reuters) - The U.N.'s International Court of Justice (ICJ) will rule on December 13 whether it has jurisdiction to decide a border dispute between Nicaragua and Colombia over a tiny group of Caribbean islands.

Nicaragua asked the ICJ, the United Nations' highest court based in The Hague, to grant it sovereignty over the archipelago and end the row that Colombia says started nearly 200 years ago and was settled nearly 80 years ago.

"The judgment will deal solely with the preliminary objections raised by Colombia regarding the jurisdiction of the court," the ICJ said in a statement late on Friday.

The two nations, separated by Panama and Costa Rica, lay claim to the isolated Caribbean Islands San Andres and Providencia off Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast, as well as several keys and some 50,000 sq km of fishing waters.

Colombia told the court in June border disputes were inevitable after the fall of the Spanish Empire in the Americas and the one in question was "definitively settled" in 1928, when Nicaragua and Colombia signed a treaty granting Colombia sovereignty over the islands.

But Nicaragua's Sandinista government in the 1980s annulled the accord and argued it was signed while Nicaragua was under U.S. military occupation.

Many Nicaraguans consider the treaty a U.S. payoff to Colombia for arranging the independence of Panama from Colombia in order to build the Panama Canal.

The islands and keys in question also fall within the maritime borders of Costa Rica, Honduras and Jamaica.

The ICJ, or World Court, opened the hearing in this case in March and finished it in June. The court hears disputes between states and its decisions are founded in international law.

Its final rulings are binding and without appeal.