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Deadline passes for US to settle online gambling dispute

Monday March 31 2008

by Patricia Campbell

The deadline for the US to put forward a proposal to settle its long running Internet gambling dispute passed yesterday with Antigua and Barbuda reportedly receiving no word from the US.

Up to late yesterday, neither Antigua and Barbuda's attorney in the matter Mark Mendel nor the local Directorate of Gaming had received any communication on the matter from US officials. Minister of Finance and the Economy Dr. Errol Cort had led a delegation to Barbados for a Caricom meeting on flour and was not available for comment yesterday.

In a process that has seen many delays and missed deadlines, the apparent failure of the US to put forward a settlement proposal by the end of the month was met with an air of resignation in Antigua and Barbuda, with officials continuing to adopt a "wait and see" approach to the negotiations process.

The settlement proposal has the potential to end the trade battle over Internet gaming which has dragged on for more than five years.

Mendel has made it clear that any settlement would be expected to address the United States' failure to comply with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) ruling on access for Internet gaming operators as well as Antigua and Barbuda's claim for compensation as the US seeks to withdraw from its commitment to provide market access to the sector under the WTO General Agreement on Trade in Services.

The former issue was the subject of a US\$21 million sanction award against the US by a WTO Dispute Settlement Body arbitrator last December.

On the latter issue Antigua and Barbuda filed a notice in January requesting arbitration by the WTO.

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