

ETHIOPIA-ERITREA: UN calls for resolution of border stalemate

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Badme where the conflict started.

NAIROBI, 27 Feb 2006 (IRIN) - Ethiopia and Eritrea should define their common border as decided four years ago and meet with the commission charged with implementing the demarcation, the United Nations Security Council has said.

The Council, in a statement read by its current President, John Bolton of the United States on Friday, called on both countries to meet the independent boundary commission and work with it "to implement its decisions without delay".

"We strongly urge the parties to attend the meeting and to co-operate with and abide by all requirements specified by the commission in order to successfully conclude the demarcation process," it said.

The statement noted that "both Eritrea and Ethiopia have agreed to accept the delimitation and demarcation decisions of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission as final and binding".

The Algiers peace agreement - signed in December 2000 - ended a two-year border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The border commission made its proposal in April 2002, but Ethiopia has since refused to accept the decision, which grants Eritrea the town of Badme, where the war started.

Relations between the two neighbours have, in the past few months, become more strained.

Eritrea believes the international community is favouring its larger neighbour. Since October, it has restricted UN peacekeepers patrolling its border with Ethiopia by banning helicopter flights and the movement of other vehicles at night over its territory.

The Council echoed a call to both countries made earlier by the United States, the UN, the European Union, the African Union and Algeria - who witnessed and guaranteed the peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea - to accept the border ruling and end all restrictions on peacekeepers.

The statement called on Eritrea to lift the restrictions, saying the border could not be demarcated unless the UN "is allowed full freedom of movement throughout its area of operations".

It also urged Asmara and Addis Ababa "to resolve the current impasse in the peace process ... in order to promote stability and good relations between the parties and lay the foundation for sustainable peace in the region".

Eritrea gained independence from Ethiopia in 1993 after a 30-year guerrilla war, but their 1,000 km-border was never settled.

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