



# SECURITY COUNCIL REPORT UPDATE REPORT



13 March 2006 No. 2

## ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA

On Tuesday, the Council is expected to adopt a technical rollover of the mandate of the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), which expires on 15 March, for another 30 days.

The rollover comes in response to the parties' agreement to arrangements for the demarcation of the boundary at the meeting of the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission (EEBC) in London on 10 March. Council members are in agreement that more time will be needed for allowing the initiative to bear fruit and for deciding on the future of UNMEE.

The EEBC meeting -- the first with the participation of both parties in more than two years -- took place after intense international pressure, particularly from the US. The new agreement includes the appointment of liaison officers, the reopening of EEBC field offices, the submission of security plans for EEBC staff from both sides and the procurement of new contractors. Eritrea reportedly did not object to the appointment of a neutral facilitator, expected to be American, but there were no indications that it will lift the restrictions against UNMEE. The parties agreed to a second EEBC meeting on 28 April.

It remains unclear, however, whether there has been a fundamental change in the parties' positions. Both parties' delegations indicated that they would need to seek further guidance from their respective capitals, since they mostly consisted of technical teams. Therefore, it is unclear whether there has been a softening of Ethiopia's reluctance to accept the delimitation decision. Eritrea, in turn, has continuously indicated that it will not accept revisiting the 2002 Delimitation Decision in order to accommodate Ethiopia's demands.

Even if the demarcation actually resumes, important challenges would still remain:

- It is uncertain whether Eritrea will lift the restrictions imposed on UNMEE at once. The Witnesses to the Algiers Agreement and the Council have noted that the demarcation cannot proceed unless UNMEE is allowed full freedom of movement.
- The demarcation process requires a number of technical steps to be taken over time. Previous EEBC reports have estimated that the whole process could take up to a year, during which objections that could delay the demarcation could be raised.
- Funds will be required for the EEBC to resume its activities in the field. Both parties are expected to bear those costs with the assistance of key international partners. The parties are also expected to need economic incentives in the effort, with increased importance of Ethiopia's access to the sea through the use of Eritrea's port facilities.

Meanwhile, the situation on the ground remains tense, with fresh reports of preparations for the re-registration of demobilised Eritrean soldiers and arrests of local UNMEE staff. A UNMEE peacekeeper died in early March as a result of difficulties with medical evacuation created by Asmara's restrictions on UN movement. The issue triggered a strongly worded Council press statement and its subsequent dismissal by Eritrea, in the midst of increased concern from UNMEE's troop contributing countries.

In his March report, the Secretary-General indicated that UNMEE could engage in supporting the demarcation, suggesting that a decision on UNMEE's future could be delayed by two or three months to allow the border talks to develop. But he also stressed that the options outlined in his January report are being used in ongoing contingency planning, in the eventuality of the continued deterioration of the situation.

For background information, please refer to our February Forecast.