



# SECURITY COUNCIL REPORT UPDATE REPORT



12 April 2006 No. 3

## ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA

Tomorrow, the Council is set to adopt a technical rollover of the mandate of the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) until 15 May. The resolution will also reiterate the demands from resolution 1640, especially that:

- the Government of Eritrea “reverse, without further delay or preconditions, its decision to ban UNMEE helicopter flights, as well as additional restrictions imposed on the operations of UNMEE, and provide UNMEE with the access, assistance, support and protection required for the performance of its duties”; and
- “Ethiopia accept fully and without further delay the final and binding decision of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission [EEBC] and take immediately concrete steps to enable, without preconditions, the Commission to demarcate the border completely and promptly.”

The resolution is also likely to strongly signal that the Council’s patience is near an end. The Council will make clear its intention to downsize UNMEE should no progress be made on both issues by the beginning of May. The main option in consideration is to transform UNMEE into an observer mission on both sides of the border.

The inclusion of a deadline for compliance with the demands in resolution 1640 was a possibility that had been considered among Council members for some time. Previously, members had held back out of concerns that too much pressure could derail efforts to breathe life back into the EEBC process.

The language of this new resolution will highlight the general frustration of Council members with the lack of progress in both demarcating the border and Eritrea’s lifting of the restrictions against UNMEE. It will also convey the urgency with which members see the issue by giving the parties less than a month to make progress on both issues.

An EEBC meeting is scheduled for 28-29 April.

Both sides gave a lukewarm response to the 10 March EEBC meeting, where discussions focused on procedural arrangements for the demarcation, including the appointment of field liaison officers and the reopening of EEBC field offices.

Prime Minister Meles Zenawi reportedly stated in a report to the Ethiopian parliament on 28 March that the EEBC was not a suitable forum for finding a long-lasting solution to the border standoff. The

1

legal advisor to the Ethiopian team at the EEBC meeting further stated that “the delegation accepted the procedural arrangements for they were in compliance with the Five-Point Peace Initiative Ethiopia offered. Ethiopia’s stand for the resolution of the border dispute is unchanged... Nothing has been raised that obliged Ethiopia.”

The Five-Point proposal, however, was very qualified acceptance of the 2002 EEBC delimitation decision. It constituted acceptance only "in principle" and argued that implementation should be made "in a manner consistent with the promotion of sustainable peace and brotherly ties between the two peoples." The absence of unconditional acceptance of the EEBC decision in the Ethiopian proposal has been interpreted by most observers as indicating a desire for a new agreement which might vary the border line during demarcation.

Eritrea vigorously opposes this possibility, reminding that the EEBC decision was agreed to be “final and binding” by the parties in 2000. Asmara circulated a letter to UN Member States on 10 April, criticising the international community – and the Council in particular – for abrogating its responsibilities to enforce the EEBC decision and expressing fears that the current initiative would “snatch the process” from the EEBC and result in altering the final decision. A particularly sensitive point in this regard was the proposal to appoint a US Special Envoy to the process.

Despite its harsh tone, the 10 April communication from Asmara does, perhaps, signal some new thinking from Eritrea. It, for the first time, expresses an interest in a “genuine initiative” which it says would (i) ascertain respect for the EEBC decision first and foremost; (ii) secure agreement to a demarcation that implements the delimitation decision in its integrity; and (iii) establish details for the demarcation that avoid delaying objections.

It seems, therefore, that Eritrea might be prepared to lift the restrictions on UNMEE once there is agreement on a framework for the demarcation rather than waiting until the demarcation actually starts.

This is significant because most Council members oppose the carrying out of the demarcation without the complete lifting of the restrictions. However, time is now critical. If there is no breakthrough on a framework for demarcation and if the restrictions are not lifted by the beginning of May, the plan for scaling down UNMEE seems likely. And, with Asmara’s rejection of all recent proposals for envoys, it is unclear who will be in a position to suggest the elements for a framework.