

UNITED NATIONS  
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM



NATIONS UNIES  
MEMORANDUM INTERIEUR

TO: Mr. Vijay Nambiar  
A: Chef de Cabinet  
Executive Office of the Secretary-General

DATE: 30 May 2007

REFERENCE:

THROUGH:  
S/C DE:

FROM: Horst Heitmann, Director  
DE: Security Council Affairs Division, DPA

SUBJECT: Security Council: Report on activities  
OBJET:



Attached please find, for the information of the Secretary-General, a note on the informal consultations of the Security Council on Tuesday, 29 May 2007 (p.m.).

cc: Mr. Pascoe



PROCEEDINGS OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Tuesday, 29 May 2007 (p.m.)

INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS

**Eritrea/Ethiopia**

The Council heard a briefing by Mr. Hédi Annabi, ASG for Peacekeeping Operations, on the developments since his last briefing on 8 May. ASG Annabi reported that Eritrea had continued to take control of larger parts of the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) and had reinforced its military positions. He stated that Eritrea had recently placed new restrictions on UNMEE's freedom of movement in Sector Center near Mendefera where a UN patrol had been detained at gunpoint by the Eritrean police for a few hours on 18 May. Also, there had been "numerous reports" of incidents of EDF and militia firing warning shots at UNMEE. While the restrictions seriously handicapped the mission in Sector West, he indicated, UNMEE still retained a limited capacity to follow Eritrean movements in and out of Sector Center and Sub-sector East.

ASG Annabi reported that since October 2006, as monitored by UNMEE, Eritrea had deployed some 2,000 troops and 1,200 militia personnel in Sector West, along with 16 tanks and other equipment. Also, since December 2006, it had deployed additional troops in Sector Center, bringing the total number to 1,900 military personnel. On the other hand, he stated, Ethiopia's armed forces appeared to be reinforcing their positions near the southern boundary of the TSZ. In April 2007, UNMEE had observed some 45 Ethiopian tanks moving in Sector West to an area south of Humera, where the Ethiopian strategic reserves were reportedly formed.

ASG Annabi observed that as both sides were engaged in military preparations, there was a serious risk that a relatively minor incident could lead to a military confrontation. The Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission (EEBC)'s November deadline added another factor of uncertainty. The situation was exacerbated by hostile public statements from both sides. On 24 May, the Eritrean President called the TSZ "meaningless". He stated that the Secretary-General would continue engage both parties in order to overcome the present stalemate and proceed with the demarcation of the boundary. In this context, the Secretary-General would consider the appointment of a new SRSG to lead UNMEE. He urged Member States to renew their appeals on the parties to stay faithful to the Algiers Agreements and to do everything possible to defuse the situation.

Council members shared the concern about the heightening of tensions along the TSZ, which could escalate into armed conflict. They called on the parties to exercise restraint and make every effort to solve their differences through dialogue. However, few members appeared to have new ideas which might contribute to breaking the current impasse.

France and others reiterated that the restrictions imposed by Eritrea on UNMEE were unacceptable. The United States demanded anew that Eritrea lift the restrictions immediately and that the two sides withdraw their troops. Italy and Congo, echoed by others, stated that a settlement of the border dispute was the only way to ensure sustainable peace between the two countries. For its part, Italy underlined the need to produce tangible progress at the EEBC and contended that singling out Eritrea for violating the cease-fire would only deepen Asmara's isolation. Congo believed that the border issue should be addressed in a "dynamic manner" involving international and regional organizations. Peru wondered if there could be an "alternative solution" to the border issue through new negotiations.

Qatar argued that the Council should develop a clear strategy and that rather than reducing the mission, it should strengthen UNMEE. The Russian Federation reiterated the need to maintain the UN's monitoring capacity in place. However, South Africa noted that UNMEE was not there to prevent war, stating that if they so decided, the parties would start war with or without the mission. Instead, he stressed the need to launch a "bold political initiative". Likewise, the United States doubted if the presence of UNMEE would make any difference. In view of the inaction of the parties, Ambassador Sanders argued, the question was what the Council could do to change the status quo. The United Kingdom characterized the conflict as a family-type dispute, which provided "one of the most barren grounds" to find a solution. Ambassador Jones Parry noted, somewhat sarcastically, that both sides were "stupid enough" to initiate an attack and, thus, inflict disastrous consequences not only on them but also on the whole region. Citing the lack of cooperation by the parties, he regretted that the leverage of the Council on them was very "scant".

Council members were unanimous in supporting the appointment of a new SRSG as soon as practically possible. In this context, Qatar, Peru, South Africa and Ghana wondered why it took so long to appoint a new SRSG. China, Indonesia and Ghana urged the Secretary-General to step up his mediation efforts.



Responding to questions, ASG Annabi stated that the Secretary-General was actively considering the appointment of a new SRSG and would interview candidates shortly. In this context, he alluded to the inherent difficulties of identifying an SRSG who would be acceptable to both sides. Commenting on the current situation, he stated that there was no magic formula to break the impasse but that it was the duty of the Secretariat to inform the Council of negative developments. He shared the concern that a resumption of fighting would be disastrous not only for the parties but also for the whole region.

ASG Annabi stated that pursuant to resolution 1741, the Secretary-General had initiated contacts with both sides, including his meetings with the Ethiopian Foreign Minister in late April and the Eritrean Foreign Minister on 11 May as well as with the PRs. However, he reported that the outcome of these contacts was not encouraging, as both sides remained adamant in sticking to their irreconcilable positions. Asked if he had any suggestion that the Council could adopt at this stage, ASG Annabi recalled that the Council had just decided to downsize UNMEE at the beginning of the year and expressed doubt that this was the time to look for alternatives. Instead, he said, the Secretariat would provide the Council with some options before the expiration of UNMEE's mandate at the end of July. He reiterated that the presence of UNMEE still had a "deterrence value". However, he indicated that it would be difficult for the mission to go much below the current strength of 1,700 if it were to maintain its monitoring capacity.

ASG Annabi stated that he was not sure what would happen when the mandate of the EEBC expired in November. He noted in this context that what was expected from the EEBC was physical demarcation of the border between the two countries and that the mere determination of coordinates was not sufficient. He agreed that the Military Coordination Commission should be convened as soon as possible, as this was the only formula under which the two sides could meet at a senior level. However, he said that the Ethiopian side was refusing to participate in the Commission's meeting until Eritrean troops left the TSZ. The Secretary-General had raised this issue when he met the Ethiopian Foreign Minister, who promised to resolve the problem.

Kiyotaka Kawabata/SCSB/SCAD  
29 May 2007