

Ethiopia reaffirms position to resolve disputes

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Ethiopia reaffirms position to resolve disputes with Eritrea peacefully
Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi on Wednesday reaffirmed the position of his government to resolve the disputes with Eritrea peacefully through dialogue.

He said this while meeting with senior officials of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), who completed their terms.

During their talks, Meles and the UNMEE officials discussed ways to resolve the Ethio-Eritrea boundary dispute. He expressed hope that the disputes would be settled peacefully.

After talks with Prime Minister Meles, Legwaila Joseph Legwaila, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's special representative, told journalists that there is hope that the boundary dispute would be peacefully resolved.

Legwaila said the Ethiopian government has been very cooperative to enable him discharge his duties and responsibilities.

Legwaila, who have been exerting efforts since 2000 to peacefully resolve the problem, said he has given detailed explanations to Meles, concerning the status of the Ethio-Eritrea boundary dispute.

Meanwhile, UNMEE Force Commander Major General Rajender Singh also hoped the disputes would be settled peacefully.

Singh said he is satisfied with what he accomplished during his stay in the area.

Eritrea won independence from Ethiopia in 1993 but relations between the two remained tense and exploded into war in 1998, which cost about 70,000 lives.

As part of a peace agreement reached in 2000, both sides agreed the boundary panel's 2002 ruling would be "final and binding." But Ethiopia later rejected the decision and insisted on further talks.

Eritrea then imposed restrictions on UN peacekeepers' movements, including a ban on helicopter flights over its territory, reducing UN capacity to monitor the 1,000 km border.

UNMEE has about 3,350 troops and observers, who are maintaining a buffer zone separating the two sides since the border war.

The UN mission's mandate is due to expire on April 15, and some members of the Security Council have called for the force to be scaled back if the peace process remains deadlocked. But diplomats here say the council is likely to extend the mandate for another month to let diplomatic efforts continue.

Source: Xinhua