

settle differences

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UN envoy departs Ethiopia, Eritrea with call for them to settle differences 6 April 2006 – The senior United Nations envoy to Ethiopia and Eritrea gave a farewell press conference today urging the two countries to settle their remaining differences by demarcating the border between them.

“I leave Ethiopia and Eritrea the way I found them in 2000,” said Legwaila Joseph Legwaila, recalling that the UN peacekeeping mission (UNMEE) he headed was specifically designed to create conditions conducive to the demarcation of the border.

That task, he stressed, was never the UN’s responsibility. “It is not for UNMEE, but for the Boundary Commission and the Parties – Ethiopia and Eritrea – to do,” he said.

He also called on the international community to redouble its efforts to try to break the current impasse. “You have to break the stalemate, the border has to be demarcated because that is the only way you can have peace between these two countries and peace in the Horn of Africa.”

Mr. Legwaila stressed that UNMEE had succeeded in separating the forces of the two sides, monitoring the places where they are redeployed, and protecting the integrity of the Temporary Security Zone. “We did that job despite the restriction imposed on us,” he said. Eritrea has restricted UNMEE’s flights in the area.

While underscoring the mission’s accomplishments, he spoke with emotion of the unfulfilled tasks. “I leave with sadness that the border has not been demarcated, but with pride that I have led this mission for five and a half years even under difficult circumstances and that I was able to implement the mandate entrusted to me and my colleagues by the Security Council.”

He welcomed the fact that many internally displaced persons had returned to their homes while voicing regret that others remain in camps. “You have to go to some of these IDP camps and your heart will bleed for these poor people who are still living in misery and squalor simply because the war has not ended yet – there is only a pause, and I hope this is a pause which will not be [broken by] another war.

“But the fact is that as long as the border is not demarcated, we will continue to languish in this transitional phase, from a real hot state of war to peace,” he added.

The envoy voiced hope that “Ethiopia and Eritrea will finally rediscover the courage” which had motivated them to sign peace accords and achieve a final settlement “so that Ethiopians and Eritreans can again visit each other, so that diplomatic missions between the two countries can be re-established, so that the leaders of these two wonderful countries can pay state visits to each other.”

source: UN News Centre