

UN chief concerned at troop buildup along Eritrea-Ethiopia border

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"The continued stalemate on this issue (demarcation), the tension between the two parties and the military buildup along the border area are matters of serious concern," he said in his latest report, released here Wednesday.

"There is no other option but for the two parties to find common ground that would allow the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission to proceed with the demarcation of the border," he added.

Ban renewed his call on the two Horn of Africa neighbors to show "the utmost restraint" and to pull back their forces and reduce military activities in the border area.

Tension has been growing between the two countries which have been at odds since a 1998-2000 bloody border conflict in which some 70,000 died, many in brutal First World War-style trench warfare.

In recent weeks, Eritrea has repeatedly accused its bigger and more powerful neighbor of preparing for a new border war, a claim dismissed by Addis Ababa as a bid by Asmara to divert attention from its internal woes.

Both sides have been flexing muscles and exchanging increasingly bitter rhetoric ahead of the expected closure of the UN-appointed boundary commission later this month.

The disputed frontier will then be fixed on maps, with the panel complaining that uncompromising stances on both sides have prevented it from physically demarcating the border on the ground.