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MILITARY COORDINATION COMMISSION HOLDS 28th MEETING IN NAIROBI

The 28th meeting of the Military Coordination Commission (MCC) was held on 17th January 2005 in Nairobi, Kenya. The Force Commander of the United Nations Mission to Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), Major-General Rajender Singh chaired the meeting. The Ethiopian delegation was led by Major-General Yohannes Gebremeskel and the Eritrean delegation by Colonel Zecarias Ogbagaber, Chief Acting Representative, Commission for Coordination with the Peacekeeping Mission (CCPM) in Eritrea. Brigadier-General Otisitswe Tiroyamodimo represented the African Union (AU).

In his opening statement, the Force Commander, Major-General Rajender Singh welcomed the delegations and informed them that the general situation in the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) was stable and calm. The Force Commander stated that the sanctity and the stability of the Temporary Security Zone was being maintained effectively by the UNMEE Force and that incidents of cross border violations, cattle rustling and restrictions on freedom of movement had decreased significantly. The Force Commander informed the delegations that the Sector MCC's were continuing smoothly and many local misunderstandings continued to be addressed during the deliberations, which was a very positive sign. General Rajender Singh thanked both the Senior Military Representatives for their continued support for the holding of the Sector MCC's on a regular basis and the creation of an environment of trust and confidence along the border.

Major-General Rajender Singh informed the delegates that UNMEE would operate on a two-sector configuration from the 20th of January 2005, when INDBAT would take over the responsibility of Sub-Sector East from KENBAT. The troops of KENBAT would be repatriated by the end of January 05 to Kenya. The Force Commander expressed the view that he was fairly satisfied with the security situation in the Mission area and requested both the countries not to take any steps that would jeopardize the situation.

Brigadier-General Otisitswe Tiroyamodimo, representing the African Union, made a brief introductory statement, during which he thanked the Force Commander for his welcoming remarks. He stated that he was optimistic that the MCC's and the Sector MCC's would create a better understanding between both the Parties and lead to a peaceful resolution of the peace process. He urged both countries to abide by the Algiers Agreement and congratulated the Force Commander on UNMEE's efforts at maintaining an environment of peace and stability.

Eritrea's Colonel Zecarias Ogbagaber, Chief Acting Representative, expressed the hope that with the beginning of a new year, there would be fresh impetus which to help move the peace process forward. He agreed that there had been a decrease in the cross border violations / incidents. He however expressed serious concerns about the movement of additional Ethiopian troops towards the northern border of Ethiopia. He said that he did not consider these deployments defensive in nature and interpreted them to be provocative.

General Yohannes Gebremeskel, representing Ethiopia, expressed his gratitude to UNMEE for successfully maintaining the sanctity of the TSZ and creating an environment of cooperation and understanding. He said he was grateful to the Force Commander for ensuring that the Sector MCC's were being held regularly and further, that many issues were being amicably settled at the local level. He noted that it appeared lately that any border incidents occurring in Eritrea were being attributed to Ethiopia. He suggested that until a neutral body like UNMEE had fully completed their investigations, no party should be blamed for such incidents. Finally, General Yohannes clarified that the redeployment of Ethiopian army troops along the Eritrean border was a purely defensive measure and part of the reorganization process of the Ethiopian Army.

During the meeting, the delegations discussed the current military situation and reviewed the functioning of the SMCCs. The discussions were held in a cordial and a constructive environment and both sides expressed their willingness to cooperate fully with the UNMEE to resolve all relevant issues.

The Force Commander concluded by thanking both the Commissioners for the excellent cooperation extended by both countries to him as well as to the UNMEE troops. It was agreed that the next MCC meet would be held on 16th March 2005 in Nairobi, Kenya.

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