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UN SECURITY COUNCIL ENDS MISSION TO ETHIOPIA, ERITREA

All 15 members of the Security Council headed back to New York on Monday having completed a mission to Ethiopia and Eritrea during which Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki agreed to work with the United Nations to move the peace process forward.

“The Security Council, having had very useful meetings with the leaders of the two countries, is very pleased that a final legal settlement of the border issue is about to be reached in accordance with the Algiers Agreements that opened the way to peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea,” said Ambassador Ole Peter Kolby of Norway, Chairman of the Council mission.

“The Security Council mission expressed to the parties the commitment of the United Nations to assist in the implementation of the upcoming ruling by the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission on the border between the two countries and the completion of the peace process,” Ambassador Kolby said. “In our meetings, both leaders stated their desire to continue to work closely with the United Nations to this end.”

The decision by the independent commission based in The Hague is expected to be announced in about a month’s time.

“The implementation phase ahead should move forward expeditiously through close cooperation between the parties, the Boundary Commission and the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) with a view to further improve the lives of the people,” the ambassador said. “The process should proceed in an orderly manner and maintain stability in the affected areas.”

During the extended weekend visit, the Council delegation accompanied by the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Ethiopia and Eritrea, Legwaila Joseph Legwaila, travelled to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where they met with Prime Minister Meles and to Asmara, Eritrea, where they met with President Isaias.

The Security Council delegation on Saturday crossed the border between the two countries over the Mereb River Bridge and saw first hand the scars of war and the ongoing suffering of the displaced people.

At a ceremony on the bridge, Ambassador Kolby said, “This is a physical bridge, but there is also another bridge, and this is a bridge between minds.” He said he hoped that “through our efforts here jointly with you, the people of the two countries can build this bridge” and “a common future.”

The delegation then visited a tattered tent camp of internally displaced persons on the rocky mountainside of the Eritrean town of Senafe, an area still littered with mines. The Council members also travelled to a nearby mine awareness school where the risky challenges of dealing with mines were demonstrated.

Earlier Saturday, the delegation visited the installations of the Indian troops of the UN mission tasked with monitoring of the Central Sector of the 1,000-kilometer long buffer zone known as the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ). In addition to patrolling the harsh terrain, they reach out to the community offering a range of services from health to education. The Council members thanked the peacekeepers for a job well done.

In both capitals, the delegation met with a group of religious leaders from the respective countries. The Council members applauded the recent visits by the religious leaders to each other’s capitals and their efforts aimed at building trust between the people of Ethiopia and Eritrea. They encouraged the religious leaders to continue along that track.

The mission is scheduled to be back in New York on Monday evening.

The Security Council has scheduled closed consultations on Wednesday afternoon to discuss the mission. The Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea for another six months. The current mandate expires on 15 March 2002.

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