

Djibouti ask United Nations to end border dispute with Eritrea

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Between 2010 and 2017 Qatar attempted to mediate a settlement but that effort failed, and Qatar withdrew its 450 peacekeeping troops from the border. (Source: Google Maps)

United Nations: Djibouti is asking Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to help peacefully resolve a border dispute with Eritrea following the recent end to that nation's 20-year border dispute with Ethiopia. Djibouti's UN ambassador, Mohamed Siad Doualeh, asked Guterres in a letter circulated Wednesday to work with the Security Council to bring his tiny port nation and Eritrea together "with the aim of facilitating an agreement between them upon a mutually acceptable means of peaceful dispute settlement."

He said Djibouti's preference would be to refer the dispute "to judicial settlement or arbitration" that would be legally binding.

Djibouti's appeal to the U.N. chief follows the dramatic diplomatic thaw to one of Africa's longest-running conflicts that began last month when Ethiopia's reformist new prime minister fully accepted a peace deal that ended a 1998-2000 border war with Eritrea that killed tens of thousands.

Doualeh recalled that the Security Council imposed sanctions on Eritrea in 2009 "because of its aggression against Djibouti and its refusal to withdraw its troops from the disputed area, and its rejection of all efforts aimed at mediating between the two parties."

Between 2010 and 2017 Qatar attempted to mediate a settlement but that effort failed, and Qatar withdrew its 450 peacekeeping troops from the border. Djibouti accused Eritrean troops of occupying the Dumeira mountain area shortly after the peacekeepers left on June 13, 2017, and lodged a formal complaint with the African Union.

"Eritrean forces continue to occupy Djiboutian territory, prisoners of war remain unaccounted for, threats of force continue to emanate from the Eritrean side and the risk of violent confrontation is once again high," Doualeh said. He warned that without any effort to end the border dispute, the U.N. monitoring group has said "the situation on the ground remains vulnerable to provocation by both parties, which could result in the rapid escalation of conflict."

"There is thus an urgent need for a new dispute settlement mechanism," Doualeh said.

He said Djibouti applauds the secretary-general's recent decision to refer a longstanding border dispute between Venezuela and Guyana to the International Court of Justice. He also noted that Eritrea had successfully resolved a dispute with Yemen over their sea boundary and a Red Sea island through binding international arbitration.

Doualeh said Djibouti will "consider in good faith any proposals that you or the Security Council might make with regard to the appropriate means of peaceful dispute settlement."

- AP