

PETITION

December 14, 2015

H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-Moon
United Nations Secretary General
1st Avenue, 46th Street
New York, NY 10017

Your Excellency:

We the undersigned Ethiopian political parties and civic organizations have the honor to bring to your attention certain developments which do not augur well for the maintenance of peace and security between Ethiopia and the Sudan. Given that sovereignty lies with the Ethiopian people (and state) rather than with a regime, we feel compelled to put all responsible states and international organizations on notice that the long-term interests of the peoples of Ethiopia and the Sudan are being compromised to advance the interests of the elites who have forcibly usurped the power of the state.

Your Excellency will recall that, almost two years ago, several political parties and civic society organizations had the honor to register with your office a strong protest against a secret border deal that the dictatorial governments of both countries had concluded. Although the exact details of the deal are still shrouded in secrecy, the media in both countries have recently reported that the Ethiopian Prime Minister and the Sudanese President have made public their intention to demarcate the common boundary between the two countries on the basis of that deal.

We wish to recall that the respective territorial limits of both countries were defined by treaty at the turn of the 20th century. The 1902 Treaty provided that the line delimited therein must be demarcated by officers of the two governments. If and when the decisions and recommendations of the Joint Commission were accepted by the two governments, each side was then to undertake to explain the boundary line to their respective citizens.

This, however, did not occur. Instead, Major Gwynn *alone*, representing Great Britain as the colonial power then administering the Sudan, travelled the whole frontier (about 950 miles) in the space of just a few months in 1903 and purported to demarcate the boundary. In this demarcation, the line Gwynn actually marked out departed from that marked on the map attached to the Treaty in several places for reasons which he *alone* deemed adequate. In the event, the reasons for the departure were all self-serving and unsurprisingly ended up favoring the Sudan to Ethiopia's detriment.

It would be carrying coal to Newcastle to point out to Your Excellency that an arbitrary and unilateral demarcation line carried out by a colonial officer a century ago cannot bind the Ethiopian government. It is precisely for this reason that more than four successive Ethiopian governments prior to the current one have rightly and consistently rejected initially British and subsequently Sudanese entreaties to give the boundary line official legitimacy. As early as 1924, Emperor Haile Selassie, when he was still Regent of Ethiopia, declined to accept Gwynn's unilateral acts, calling on the British government instead to demarcate the frontier by a joint Anglo-Ethiopian commission on the basis of the 1902 Treaty. In calling for such a commission, he minced no words in pointing out to the British Prime Minister of the time, Mr. Ramsey MacDonald, the fact that the frontier had not been demarcated in accordance with the 1902 Treaty. Successive Ethiopian administrations have uniformly maintained this position.

Recently, however, Sudan's fortunes have improved dramatically with the apparent decision of the quisling government ruling Ethiopia today to accept Gwynn's line as the basis for a fresh marking of the boundary on the ground. The decision to give legitimacy to the Gwynn line is widely interpreted by the Ethiopian public as a backroom deal intended as a quid pro quo for the Sudan to deny support for the opponents of the current Ethiopian regime. For the Sudan, the Gwynn line offers a vast expanse of territory that historically and under the 1902 Treaty legally belongs to Ethiopia. In return for acquiring Ethiopian territory, the Sudan has pledged that its territory shall not be used by Ethiopian political movements seeking to bring about democratic change in their country.

The rub, however, is that the decision to demarcate the boundary on the basis of a one-sided, outdated, unilateral and illegal arrangement is sure to be a continuing and prolific source of friction and conflict between the sisterly peoples of the two countries and their governments. An arrangement contrived by the extremely narrowly-based, illegitimate, and hated government of Ethiopia and the equally discredited government of the Sudan, led by a war criminal according to the International Criminal Court, will not and cannot stand the test of time.

We have it on good authority that the impending demarcation will deviate from boundary line as defined by the Treaty. Such a boundary will never be accepted by the vast majority of the Ethiopian people. That this is the position of the Ethiopian people has been made manifest by the numerous public demonstrations and press releases, at home and abroad, put out by virtually all political parties, civic organizations, and prominent intellectuals and elders. More importantly, the Ethiopian communities in the border areas who stand to lose their ancestral lands have already put up a stiff resistance in defense of Ethiopian territory and in rightful defiance of the current government's actions.

As such, it defies common sense to believe that the demarcation line concocted by the two governments will stand the test of time as a final boundary. Quite to the contrary.

The effort should be considered as laying a land mine with great potential to destroy relations between the two countries when the shelf life of the current rulers expires. And expire it will, sooner than the leaders are able to realize for they have been blindsided by greed and power.

Your Excellency knows the Horn of Africa is a region already plagued by extreme insecurity and instability, owing among other reasons, to its location astride the Red Sea, its proximity to the conflict- ridden Middle East, and the rivalries of great and aspiring powers alike arising from their desire to control the Nile basin and to exploit the natural resources of the region. Sadly, the Al-Bashir government has become the gateway and proxy for some of these powers and is intent on leveraging its friendly relations with Ethiopia's historic enemies to obtain undue territorial concessions. The territories it seeks to acquire happen to be extremely fertile and close to Ethiopia's major river systems, which it will then dole out to rich investors from the Middle East.

Recent developments along the Ethio-Sudanese border are harbingers of what we fear will come to define relations between the peoples of the two countries. Just a few months ago, thirty-three Ethiopians were taken prisoner by the Sudanese forces and a further eight Ethiopians were abducted from the border region by Sudanese militia and cruelly slaughtered like sheep near the Sudanese town of Gallabat. Following this massacre, the border has witnessed a rash of clashes between Ethiopian citizens and Sudanese militia as well as citizens. The Sudanese Ministry of the Interior has claimed that sixteen Sudanese civilian were killed and seven abducted in October by armed Ethiopian groups in reprisal raids. Needless to say, this cycle is likely to escalate with the implementation of the demarcation plan.

The feckless and illegitimate government of Ethiopia has chosen to sweep news of these clashes under the rug. Sudanese media, however, have carried several candid and strident interviews including, for example, with the Sudanese Ambassador to Ethiopia revealing the seriousness of the deteriorating situation on the border. The ambassador's interview confirms our worst fears. Many innocent citizens of both countries have lost their lives and properties as a result of the rising tension on the border. Incredibly, however, the Ambassador seeks to blame the tension squarely on the shoulders of what he refers to as "the neighboring region's government" - a thinly- veiled reference to the so-called Amhara Regional State- which he accuses of opposition to the demarcation on the basis of the Gwynn line. Yet, the planned demarcation is not confined to just the territory of the Amhara Regional State but extends to the entire frontier between Ethiopia and the Sudan. Therefore, since the boundary question concerns an issue of Ethiopian- not regional - territorial sovereignty, it is bound to involve the entire nation. Ethiopia's history is replete with examples of its citizens coming together whenever the country's territorial sovereignty is threatened.

We recognize that our legal standing to lodge complaints of this nature to Your Excellency is somewhat hampered by current international norms. Yet, in as much as festering border problems so often lead to conflicts between states and/or their citizens and since one of the principal purposes of the United Nations is to maintain international peace and security, we believe that it is entirely appropriate for the Secretariat of the United Nations to apprise itself of the current situation on the Ethio-Sudan border.

The border situation has all the elements and hallmarks of a brewing conflict which calls for Your Excellency's attention. Some may indulge the hope that as long as the current governments of Ethiopia and Sudan are in agreement as to the basis on which the border is to be demarcated there would be little or no threat to the peace and security of the region. That view is in error. Because the current government is wholly unrepresentative of the views and interests of the Ethiopian people and is bereft of any semblance of legitimacy, its commitments and agreements do not carry weight with the people.

The Ethiopian people view the government's decision to demarcate the boundary on Sudan's terms as nothing less than a sellout. If the demarcation goes as planned, thousands of people all along the frontier will be uprooted from their homes, farms and investments, a result they will not take lying down. Ethiopians demand that the proposed demarcation of the boundary line be effectuated in compliance with the provisions of the 1902 Treaty. Anything short of that which is concocted as a political expedient for the ruling clique to prolong its power by ceding Ethiopian territory will never be honored by the Ethiopian people and is bound to provoke serious backlash.

In any case, we wish to go on record to affirm Ethiopia's right to territorial sovereignty as defined by the 1902 Treaty – and not any other agreement that is reached behind the back of the Ethiopian people. We wish the UN Secretariat to know that the Ethio-Sudan border is pregnant with a situation calling for Your Excellency's attention. We would appreciate registration of our petition with the UN offices and its circulation among member states.

Please accept the assurances of our highest consideration.

Sincerely,

1. Ethiopian Democratic Hibre Hizb Unity Movement
2. Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party
3. Ethiopian Borders Forum
4. Ethiopiawinnet: Council for the Defense of Citizen Rights
5. Gasha LeEthiopia
6. Gonder Hebret
7. International Women's Organization

cc. Dr Nkosazuma-Dlamini Zuma

Chairperson of the Africa Commission
P.O.Box 3243
Addis Abeba, Ethiopia

The Government of the Republic of Sudan
C/O The Embassy of the Republic of Sudan
2210 Massachusetts Avenue
Washington, DC, 20008

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
C/O The Embassy of Ethiopia
3506 International Drive, N.W.
Washington, DC, 20008