

31st SESSION OF THE CAMEROON-NIGERIA MIXED COMMISSION

Opening speech of the President of the Mixed Commission

Mr. Said Djinnit

Yaoundé 25 April 2013

His Excellency, Mister Amadou Ali, Vice-Prime Minister, Minister Delegate at the Presidency in charge of Relations with Parliament, Head of the Cameroonian Delegation;

His Excellency, Mister Mohammed Bello Adoke, Minister of Justice and Head of the Nigerian Delegation;

Representatives of Institutions,

Members of Government;

Members of the Diplomatic Corps and Representatives of International Organisations;

Members of the Mixed Commission;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is always a renewed honour for me to come to Yaoundé on the invitation of Cameroonian authorities, and on this occasion, to preside over this thirty-first Session of the Mixed Commission.

Permit me therefore thank our host, His Excellency Amadou Ali and through him, the Government of the Republic of Cameroon for the generous hospitality my delegation and myself have enjoyed since our arrival, and for the measures taken in order to ensure the success of this meeting.

I also like to address my warm regards to the Head of the Nigerian Delegation, Minister of Justice Adoke as well as his entire delegation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will obviously add my voice to the wisdom-packed words that my two brothers have spoken from this podium.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It has been a long road, the Heads of State of Cameroon and Nigeria, in their wisdom, with the support of the United Nations Systems, decided to embark on the demarcation process of the common border between the two countries, thereby courageously opting for a peaceful resolution of their disagreement.

As usual, let me take time off to assess the work accomplished, before fixing new challenges.

I will like to begin by congratulating the three delegations of the Joint Technical Team which have recently again accomplished an exploit: that of successfully assessing the Gotel Mountains, hence leading to a likely demarcation of 62 additional kilometres. Their efforts therefore give room for the extension of the distance of land border which Cameroon and Nigeria have agreed on, to 1.893 Kilometres. I understand the courage and collective determination their action required, considering that the previous two attempts at assessing the Gotel Mountains prove unfruitful due to the specific dangers incurred by virtue of the steepness of the slopes.

We have also succeeded in agreeing on difficult questions, such as the identification of Mount Tosso and the Mada village.

I was particularly pleased to learn that the distance pending our common agreement represents only 90 kilometres out of an estimated 2100 Km border between the two countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are getting closer to a time when we will finish assessing the border. I will therefore like to direct our reflexions towards the two outstanding challenges: the final mapping and the border agreement.

With regard to the first question, our three delegations will be invited in the following weeks, to take part in a workshop organised by the Cartographic Section of the United Nations in charge of producing maps representing the land and maritime boundary between Cameroon and Nigeria.

These maps are expected to be formally registered with the Treaties' Department of the United Nations, so that they may be enforceable to all.

To ensure the sustainability of this demarcation effort, it is also necessary to envisage a demarcation agreement. A drafting Committee will therefore be created to this effect.

I will also like to broach on the pillar-placement project. As you all know, pillars have been placed on a first part, stretching to the North of the border with the support of UNOPS. The said contract was terminated at the request of Cameroon and Nigeria in order to apportion more responsibilities to the Parties in the management of activities. A meeting held at the beginning of this year, made it possible to formulate a series of recommendations aimed at setting up a Tripartite Steering Committee for the resumption of pillar-emplacement work. These recommendations will be discussed during this session and I have great hopes that a future contract will lead to the resumption of pillar placement.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I must also express my joy today, to have recently been part of an independent assessment mission on the demarcation project, led by the European Union in February.

The report commends the exemplary success of our action as well as the reality of appropriation of results by the Parties concerned. It specifically notes that the process of the Mixed Commission has been able to develop an atmosphere of confidence between Cameroon and Nigeria, hardly imaginable in 2003. The report also states that (I quote) "patience and the resolve of Parties have finally had the better of difficulties which seemed insurmountable between 2006-2007, each one having accepted to give it the consideration it required".

The task is however not over- and I dare to think that we can count on the support of our partners to continue helping us in this enterprise.

I will therefore like to conclude on long term development initiatives to strengthen confidence between the two countries and the border populations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I do not deem it necessary to convince you about the rationale for a broad participation in the confidence measures designed for both countries. The

assessment report I just mentioned commends national appropriation and suggests methods for the resolution of problems on access to development in the border areas.

I have in the course of the past weeks taken the initiative to draw the attention of the European Union as well as the senior authorities of the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the United Nations Development Program, on the need to associate them to the work of the Mixed Commission so that new means be allocated us in order to convince the affected people to adhere to the objective of cooperation and friendship between Cameroon and Nigeria.

The presence amongst us of foreign partners, who share our ideals, will constitute a decisive support in view of carrying out an ambitious and balanced development program between the two countries.

Undoubtedly, to successfully accomplish this goal, besides time and means, there is need to adapt our methods to the security conditions that apply on either side of the border.

These past weeks' events reminded us that the threats looming over societies have never been more interwoven as now and that our freedom is no longer protected by international borders. I therefore encourage Cameroon and Nigeria to further strengthen their cooperation as partners.

With regard to the abduction a French family on excursion in the Far North of Cameroon recently suffered, I will like to salute the efforts of both countries which led to last week's happy ending. It is within this context that border cooperation between Cameroon and Nigeria in terms of security portrays distinct singularity. I add to the congratulations addressed to President Paul Biya for the role he played in the outcome of this issue, and seize this opportunity to assure the Heads of State of Cameroon and Nigeria of the United Nations' support in combating terrorism. The development of trans-border criminal activities constitutes a threat to peace and international security. They call for an appropriate action.

Terrorism thrives as much through the absence of development perspectives as through insufficient means required for border surveillance. The requests I recently forwarded to our partners, seek to support the social and economic integration of border populations. The proposed program aims at fostering a

relationship of good neighbourliness and an open, prosperous and democratic society.

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Finally, I will like to seize this opportunity, from this podium, to reiterate my gratitude to all States and International Organisations which contributed in one capacity or another to the efforts of the United Nations through the Mixed Commission, namely: the European Union, Norway, Germany, the United States, France and the United Kingdom.

Thank you for your kind attention and I declare open, the 31st Session of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission.