



## Security Council

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### Letter dated 30 July 2021 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to paragraph 33 of Security Council resolution [2551 \(2020\)](#), in which the Council requested me to provide it with an update on any further developments towards the normalization of relations between Djibouti and Eritrea. This is the fourth update that I have provided to the Council since the adoption of Security Council resolution [2444 \(2018\)](#) in November 2018.

As I have previously emphasized, the rapprochement between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 2018 and subsequent diplomatic exchanges between Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia created a genuine opportunity to transform the political landscape in the region and generate positive momentum for peace, security and cooperation, for the benefit of all the peoples of the region. However, a multiplicity of obstacles, including armed conflict, population displacement, desert locusts, drought and other climate shocks, together with the persistent threat posed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, continue to hinder the quest for enduring stability and shared prosperity in the region. The United Nations will continue to help local stakeholders to tackle these challenges, chart a positive future for the region and make progress towards achieving shared sustainable development. The normalization of inter-State relations is a crucial part of this endeavour.

While we are not aware of any high-level bilateral dialogue having taken place between the two countries since I submitted my previous update to the Council in July 2020 ([S/2020/759](#)), I wish to highlight that they have continued to act responsibly towards one another and, while there has been no notable progress on the outstanding issues between them, we have not seen any deterioration in the situation either.

Djibouti and Eritrea have continued to maintain security along their shared border, where the situation has remained stable. There has been no negative rhetoric from either side, and the two countries have continued to maintain diplomatic relations. I am pleased to note that the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the embassy of Eritrea in Djibouti attended the inauguration ceremony for Ismaël Omar Guelleh, on 15 May 2021, following his re-election as President of Djibouti on 9 April 2021.

The perspectives of the two countries remain divergent at this time. Djibouti continues to see the border dispute with Eritrea as a source of tension and remains committed to having it resolved either through bilateral dialogue, mediation or binding international arbitration. Djibouti is of the view that, since the first two options have been attempted but have not resulted in significant progress, international arbitration might be a useful mechanism to permanently settle the dispute at this stage. It also remains concerned about the fate of the 13 soldiers from



Djibouti who have been missing since the border clashes of June 2008. Furthermore, in recent consultations with the United Nations, Djibouti raised concerns about the continuing existence of the Anda'ali camp on the Eritrean side of the shared border, which has allegedly been used as a training base by members of an anti-Djiboutian armed group in the past. Djibouti believes that dismantling the camp would be a positive confidence-building measure for the two countries.

For its part, Eritrea is of the view that the process of normalizing bilateral relations, by its very nature, requires time. However, it has expressed confidence that the process is moving in a positive direction. Eritrea has stressed that Djibouti plays a key part in the revitalized regional dynamics that emerged in 2018. It maintains that past tensions concerning the border have now subsided and that the status of relations between Djibouti and Eritrea should no longer be a cause for concern, in particular at a time when the Horn of Africa is facing serious challenges. Eritrea considers that any differences between it and Djibouti can be resolved bilaterally and asks that the two countries be accorded the necessary time and space to do so undisturbed. Eritrea has also strongly denied providing any form of support to anti-Djiboutian militants in the past and has stated that it wishes only to resume and advance development projects along the shared border. Eritrea has also indicated that it has no Djiboutian prisoners of war in its custody at present.

Despite these differences, Djibouti and Eritrea have continued to express their desire to pursue regional integration and cooperation, and I welcome the participation of both countries in regional frameworks established to coordinate action on common challenges, such as the Council of Arab and African Coastal States of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, which aims to enhance the security of regional waterways, and the Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region, a body of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

I hope that cooperation within the framework of these regional mechanisms will be a positive starting point for deeper engagement and concrete progress on the unresolved issues between the two countries that will ultimately lead to the complete normalization of relations. I appreciate the offers extended by friends of both countries to facilitate dialogue to that end, and I encourage Djibouti and Eritrea to embrace such opportunities. I also wish to reiterate my availability to provide my good offices, should both parties desire them.

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

*(Signed)* António **Guterres**

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