

UN chief welcomes 'first concrete step' in normalizing Eritrea-Ethiopia relationship

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has welcomed the high-level visit of a delegation from Eritrea to neighbouring Ethiopia which began on Tuesday, as "a first concrete step" in the process of normalizing relations between the two countries.

"The Secretary-General notes that [diplomatic overtures](#) to ease tensions and resolve the longstanding dispute between the two countries will have a far reaching positive impact on the whole region," said his spokesperson, Stéphane Dujarric in a statement on Thursday.

"The Secretary-General once again reiterates the readiness of the United Nations to play a role in support of the two countries in the implementation of the boundary decision or in any other area they would deem useful for the United Nations to assist," Mr. Dujarric concluded. Last week, Ethiopia under its new Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, announced its readiness to finally accept and implement a 2002 border agreement with Eritrea, that ended two years of bloody conflict in which thousands died. Since then, the countries have remained on a war-footing.

Mr. Guterres responded to the 21 June thaw in relations by welcoming the "positive step" and commended efforts by the leaders of both countries "to achieve sustainable peace and good neighbourly relations which, in turn, will have positive repercussions in the entire Horn of Africa region."

This week's diplomatic initiative to the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, was led by Eritrean Foreign Minister, Osman Saleh, and according to news reports, Prime Minister Ahmed announced that Ethiopian Airlines would restart flights to Eritrea, for the first time since 1998.