

'Wind of hope' blowing through Horn of Africa says UN chief, as Ethiopia and Eritrea sign historic peace accord

There is a powerful wind of hope blowing across the Horn of Africa region, said UN chief António Guterres on Sunday, in Saudi Arabia to witness the signing of a peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea, ending decades of simmering conflict.

Saudi Arabia facilitated the agreement, and in a message on Twitter, the Foreign Ministry said that the accord, signed in Jeddah "is a historic milestone for the peoples of Ethiopia and Eritrea, and will contribute to strengthening security and stability in the region at large".

"The signature of the peace agreement between the President of Eritrea and the Prime Minister of Ethiopia is indeed a historic event," said the Secretary-General, speaking at a press conference following the signing in Saudi Arabia's second-largest city, on the Red Sea coast, with Foreign Minister Adel Aljubeir.

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UN chief, António Guterres

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He expressed his "deep appreciation" for the role played by Saudi Arabia, before paying tribute "on one hand to the courage, the vision, the wisdom of the Prime Minister of Ethiopia – who has had the capacity to overcome enormous resistance from the past and open a new chapter in the history of his country – and also the way the President of Eritrea has promptly responded to his peace initiatives."

The thaw in relations between the neighbouring countries, who fought a bloody, unresolved war in the late 1990s, began in earnest in June, when Ethiopia's newly-elected leader, Abiy Ahmed, made peace overtures to his counterpart, which have now come to fruition.

Seizing on the implications for the whole region, Mr. Guterres said that the agreement meant that "there is a wind of hope blowing in the Horn of Africa. It is not only the peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea – it is the fact that tomorrow and the day after tomorrow we will have, here in Saudi Arabia, the President of Djibouti and the President of Eritrea – two countries that have

also been at odds with each other.”

According to news reports, Eritrea and Djibouti announced on Friday that they would also normalize diplomatic relations with each other following a falling out on the border, in 2008, which left several dead and resulted in prisoners being taken on both sides.

The UN chief also noted the peace agreement between the President and his former Vice President in South Sudan, that was signed on Thursday – in Ethiopia’s capital Addis Ababa – as another indicator of real diplomatic movement across the Horn of Africa and its borders.

“I want to say that this window of hope is enormously important in a world where, unfortunately, hope has been very scarce,” added the Secretary-General.