

The Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission

The Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission (CNMC) was established following the International Court of Justice ruling on 10 October 2002 on the disputed land boundary between Cameroon and Nigeria. The demarcation process was divided into four different segments: the Lake Chad basin, the land boundary, the maritime boundary and the Bakassi Peninsula, the most contentious because of its offshore oil deposits and fish stocks. The framework for the eventual withdrawal of Nigerian forces and the transfer of authority in the peninsula to Cameroon was agreed upon in the Greentree Agreement of 12 June 2006.

Because of the politically sensitive inter-state scope of its work, the CNMC does not have a formal Security Council mandate, but instead is funded as a special political mission through an exchange of letters between the Secretary-General and the president of the Security Council.⁹ The mandate focuses on the highly technical aspects of the demarcation of the land boundary, as well as the more political and legal transfer of authority, demilitarization, and protection of the rights of those who are affected by the transition—including encouraging cooperative economic and environmental arrangements between the two populations.

Although a separate entity, the CNMC is located within UNOWA and since May 2009, UNOWA's SRSO also serves as both the Chairman of the CNMC and the Follow-up Committee for the Greentree Agreement, which is in place until 2013. The SRSO's good offices role has been critical in ensuring that implementation continues and that sufficient confidence is built and sustained around the process so that it is able to stay on track.

In August 2008, the final handover of the Bakassi Peninsula occurred between Nigeria and Cameroon. Since then, demarcation has advanced along the rest of the 1,950 kilometers of land boundary and, as of early 2010, approximately 300 kilometers of disputed territory are all that remains. In November 2009, the construction of the first permanent demarcation pillars began and will progress throughout 2010. Assessment of the land boundary is set to be completed by 2011, with boundary pillars to be in place by 2012. Throughout this period, the CNMC will continue to provide technical, political and legal guidance to ensure that any remaining areas of disagreement are amicably dealt with, and that implementation and confidence-building continues apace, including the monitoring of the affected populations and their rights.

The CNMC is widely lauded as an example of UN conflict prevention at its best, utilizing the UN's technical, political and legal expertise, and good office functions, to firstly get the commitment to - and then to sustain the implementation of - an agreement between two countries on disputed territory. Compared to other political missions, it also has a very clear exit strategy. While these are certainly valid points, unique challenges also arise from a mission that is highly technical yet managed by a political department; the balance between the political, technical and administrative tasks required has not always been an easy one to find. Moving forward, an important aspect of ensuring that the CNMC remains a success story will not only be replenishing its trust fund to create the financial capacity for completion, but also guaranteeing that the rights and concerns of the populations along the border remain as high a priority as the more technical aspects.