



World Chronicle

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GUEST: Legwaila Joseph Legwaila
Head of the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea, UNMEE

JOURNALISTS: Susannah Price
BBC
Abderrahim Foukara
Al Jazeera

MODERATOR: Tony Jenkins

“Keeping the peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea”

Four years ago the leaders of Ethiopia and Eritrea met in Algiers and agreed to stop their war, let in UN peacekeepers, and abide by an international settlement of their border. At the time of this writing, the border settlement is being ignored by one country and a UN Special Envoy, Lloyd Axworthy, is being ignored by the other. Both sides are increasingly reluctant to cooperate with the UN peacekeepers.

Can the situation be turned around? In the face of increased peacekeeping needs across the African continent, how long will the international community continue to support an operation that is costing \$15 million a month? What progress has been achieved, and how will it be sustained once the UN peacekeepers leave the Horn of Africa?

These are some of the issues discussed with the chief of the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), Special Representative Legwaila Joseph Legwaila.

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Executive Producer: Michele Zaccheo
Director: Livingston Hinckley
Production Assistant: Lebe L. Besa

ANNOUNCER: From the United Nations in New York, an unedited interview programme on global issues. This is **World Chronicle**. And here is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

JENKINS: Hello, I'm Tony Jenkins and this is **World Chronicle**.

Disputes between neighbors are often difficult to understand, let alone settle.

Four years ago, the leaders of Ethiopia and Eritrea – in the Horn of Africa – agreed to stop their fighting, to let in the UN peacekeepers, and to abide by an international settlement of their border.

Today - as we record this programme -- the situation looks bleak. The border settlement is being ignored by one country, and the UN Special Envoy is being ignored by the other. Both sides are increasingly uncooperative with the UN peacekeepers. And there is talk, yet again, of war.

Can the situation be turned around?

Our guest today is the chief of the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), Legwaila Joseph Legwaila.

Ambassador Legwaila, welcome to **World Chronicle**.

Badma is a tiny, dusty, fly-blown little town on the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The war between those two countries is being compared to two bold men fighting over a cheap plastic comb. Can you explain to us the symbolic significance of this town? Why are these two countries still refusing to make peace?

LEGWAILA: Well, I am told that Badme, as small as it is, is where the war in 1998 started and therefore it has political significance far much bigger than the size of the village and therefore it is very difficult for people, either who had been there or had not been there, to understand why there should be so much bloodshed over a small village. But the village has the kind of symbolism that you can only ignore at your own peril.

JENKINS: So, is it fair to say that Badme is in fact just an excuse, that there are series of other reasons for why this war went ahead in the first place, for example the fact that Eritrea chose to have a separate currency from Ethiopia, the fact that Ethiopia has no access to the sea now? ...perhaps sibling rivalry between two nations that were once ruled by a single government? Are those factors more important? Do they explain what's going on?

LEGWAILA: Well, I don't know because we don't deal with those factors ourselves because we went there to help the two countries solve a problem and the problem is supposed to be the problem of their border because as you know Eritrea was a part of Ethiopia until the two countries separated in the early 1990s, and they separated amicably, and that's the reason why everybody was surprised when in 1998 they went to war over the border, which they could

have resolved peacefully and I am told actually that they had been discussing how to resolve the border – in other words to make sure that the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea is agreed by Ethiopia and the new independent state of Eritrea. I don't know if all the other variables, you know, have to be taken into account where you want to understand why the two countries went to war.

JENKINS: Well, we will dig into it little bit more. But joining us in the studio are Susannah Price of the BBC, and Abderrahim Foukara of Al Jazeera. Abderrahim...

FOUKARA: Mr. Legwaila, you said recently that you think that the war between, or another war between Ethiopia and Eritrea is unlikely. And obviously a lot of people would like you to be right about that. What makes you so optimistic that another war is unlikely?

LEGWAILA: Well, first of all, I really don't think that there is any reason why these two countries should go back to war. In the first place they agreed in the peace agreement of December 12 to establish a commission to make a determination on their border, on their common border. And the commission made that determination on the 13th of April 2002. And one of the parties, Ethiopia, has a difficulty with some parts of the decision of the Boundary Commission rendered on the 13th of April 2002. And even that can be resolved peacefully. In other words, what I'm saying is that even the war, which ended in 2000, the parties said it was a terrible mistake. And I really don't think that they want to make another terrible mistake by going back to war when they can sit down and make sure that they implement the decision of the Boundary Commission and whatever problems tend to that decision to make sure that they solve them peacefully.

FOUKARA: But does that mean that should the UN peacekeepers decide to pull out tomorrow, the war would still be unlikely?

LEGWAILA: But to be honest with you, I think the pulling out of the United Nations can only be decided by the parties themselves - by not cooperating with the United Nations, by not demarcating the border. And then of course the United Nations has to reconsider the presence of UNMEE there, and all we have to do is to make sure that we can help them to demarcate the border so that that eventuality will never come to pass -- the eventuality of the United Nations deciding to leave the two countries to their own devices. But I am not going to swear to heavens that there will never be war between Eritrea and Ethiopia. All I am saying is that at the present moment they are telling us that they want to resolve whatever difficulties they have encountered in so far as the demarcation over the border is concerned – peacefully.

PRICE: Your peacekeepers aren't having a very easy time there. We have heard talk of relations deteriorating, finding difficulty in access to certain roads and routes. Can

you describe some of the problems you're having? And how much do you think this will impact on the hope of breaking this deadlock?

LEGWAILA: Well, you know we have been having problems with freedom of movement of course since the inception of the mission. We all have seen the creation of the temporary security zone on April 2001. We have been having a denial of freedom of movement, mainly on the Eritrean side, but occasionally on the Ethiopian side. And then unfortunately the Eritrean side doesn't accept the concept of adjacent areas; these are areas 15 kilometres on both sides of the border, so that the temporary security zone, in other words 15 kilometres only for Ethiopian side, 15 kilometres on the Eritrean side. I think the occasional denial of freedom of movement in a peacekeeping operation is almost normal. The only problem of course is that if you make it a practice that you denied the peacekeepers the right to move where they're supposed to move then the peacekeepers becomes useless to you. They become useless to Eritrea, useless to Ethiopia if we cannot move freely to do the job for which we have been invited to Ethiopia and Eritrea to do.

JENKINS: I admire your confidence but, to paraphrase Winston Churchill, he once said that the alternative to war war was jaw jaw. These people have to talk and the Eritreans won't even meet with the special representative of the Secretary General. I guess I should explain for our viewers that your mission is essentially split into two: you and the peacekeeping mission. Kofi Annan has appointed his own special representative to try and negotiate a solution between these two sides and Eritrea won't meet with him. And for their part the Ethiopians signed on to this agreement that was negotiated. They said they would accept the border commission's findings and now they've said they won't. How do you see a way out to this? Where do you get your optimism from?

LEGWAILA: Well I am not saying that I'm a die-hard optimist; of course as a peacekeeper I have to be an optimist otherwise I have no right to accept the appointment by the Secretary General to head the mission. So I'm optimistic because I believe that it is still possible for the international community to put pressure on the two countries to sit down and resolve their differences peacefully. And therefore, the fact that this special envoy has not been received by Eritrea I think shouldn't convince us that there will never be any talks between Ethiopia and Eritrea. We have to continue to put pressure on Eritrea to receive this special envoy, listen to him, engage him in discussions as to the way forward.

FOUKARA: Actually a follow up on what Tony was saying -- obviously, the Secretary General's Special Envoy, Lloyd Axworthy -- I understand that his mandate is different from yours, but as a whole now you were a little while ago talking about putting pressure. What

bargaining chips does the UN hold in its hand to bring pressure to bear on either Ethiopia or Eritrea to come to a settlement?

LEGWAILA: You know, I have always told that the reason why the peacekeeping side of the mission has been very successful, it is not because of the brilliance of the peacekeepers, it is because of the cooperation we have received from Eritrea and Ethiopia. If it were not for the fact that one of the parties has rejected some parts of the decision of the Boundary Commission – we would be out of that region because we have enjoyed tranquillity since we created the temporary security zone. Actually since we went there in 2000, we have never had any problem with the ceasefire, and therefore, if you can only solve the problem, which unfortunately I don't have responsibility over, that is the problem of the EEBC in implementing its decision through the demarcation of the border, then the conditions for demarcation of the border have been created – they have been there for a very long time. The Boundary Commission can go there and demarcate the border because we have created the conditions conducive to the demarcation of the border. In other words, the only problem that we're having is the problem of demarcating the border, which has to be resolved.

JENKINS: That is the problem, which gave origin to the war. Sorry to butt in, but you say it's the only problem as if it was not a very significant thing, but it is a significant thing, and it led to a war in which tens of thousands of people died. I've never actually seen an accurate figure; do you have an accurate figure?

LEGWAILA: No, I don't know of an accurate figure...well the problem [is], as I explained at the beginning, the parties fought over the border. But what we are talking about now is the decision of the Boundary Commission, the decision of the Boundary Commission, which as you know was accepted by both parties on the 13th of April, and all we have to do now is to convince the parties to get on with the implementation of that decision. And one party says he does not accept some parts of that decision and that party must be persuaded to accept those parts of the decision so that the border can be demarcated.

FOUKARA: But if I may...just a sound bite if you will allow me...these are two very poor countries both Ethiopia and Eritrea. Now you have the United Nations trying to exert pressure, you have giants like the United States trying to exert pressure, you have Britain, you have Germany. What makes it possible for these two poor countries to resist this pressure and play the game according to their own terms?

LEGWAILA: Well, actually that's a question, which can be put to them. But I hope that the United States, the United Nations, the EEU, the AU will successfully exert pressure on them to demarcate the border, allowing the Boundary Commission to demarcate the border.

But, in the first instance, for Eritrea to accept the good offices of the Secretary-General. Sit down and discuss the way forward.

PRICE: Do you think they're aware there that patience may be running out, that you have your 4,000 peacekeepers, they're really not able to do very much and with all these expansion of peacekeeping operations to the UN they could probably be better employed elsewhere in Africa?

LEGWAILA: Well, it would be tragic if they were not aware that the patience of the international community is running out. I'm sure when they read Resolution 1531, which was adopted recently, they will be able to realize that time is running out for them because in that resolution there is also the prospect of UNMEE's effectiveness being reconsidered, the future of UNMEE in the area - being reconsidered.

JENKINS: You're costing the UN community 15 million dollars a day, is that what it is roughly?

LEGWAILA: Well, I know that it costs the United Nations \$200 million a year.

JENKINS: It's a lot of money. (Inaudible)

LEGWAILA: By the way, it's not just zero results because we have maintained peace and tranquility between them. We have created a zone of separation, which they respect. And therefore it is not zero success by the United Nations. The peacekeeping operation has been brilliantly successful. If only we... the parties could allow the Boundary Commission to demarcate the border, which is the last phase of the peace process, then this will be a brilliant success as a peacekeeping operation in its entirety.

JENKINS: This is World Chronicle and we're talking about peacekeeping in the Horn of Africa. Our guest is Legwaila Joseph Legwaila, the UN special representative in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Here's the report on what the UN mission has been doing to help people affected by the war:

**VDIEO ROLL – IN (TRT: 2'50")
UN IN ACTION # 879**

NARRATOR: For two years, Eritrea and Ethiopia fought a bloody and destructive border war in the Horn of Africa. In 2000, a ceasefire was agreed.

Today, with hostilities ended, the bitter legacy of the conflict is still evident on both sides. Homes, schools and hospitals are destroyed. Fields are abandoned because of landmines.

To consolidate peace and help the local population of both sides rebuild their lives, the United Nations Security Council in 2000 established the U. N. Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea, known as UNMEE, to monitor the ceasefire.

Through its Civilian Military Cooperation programme, UNMEE has assisted both countries to rebuild vital infrastructure. Here in Senafe on the Eritrean side, a heavily damaged hospital is being demolished by UNMEE to make room for a new one. Captain Bhagyeshwari Edalli from India is one of UNMEE's engineers.

CAPT. EDALLI: "There is no other place for providing medication for the people. So, it is required, or it's a must, to remove this completely, and make a provision for the construction of a new one."

NARRATOR: Schools were also among the casualties of the war. The elementary school of the Eritrean town of Adi Keih was heavily damaged. With UNMEE's assistance, work is now under way to renovate the school premises.

And in Adigrat on the Ethiopian side, local people converge on UNMEE's regional headquarters seeking medical treatment, a free service only UNMEE can provide.

Every day hundreds of patients line up to be examined by UNMEE's doctors. Children and men and women of all ages come from afar seeking medical treatment for all types of illnesses. Major Upasana Thakur is one of three doctors serving with UNMEE.

MAJ. THAKUR: "See their problem basically is because of the poor living conditions, unhygienic habits, malnutrition and lack of education and lack of health care facilities. So if a person comes to you, he is actually himself, he is a complete hospital in himself with a lot of disease starting from top to bottom."

NARRATOR: UNMEE also supports local medical facilities. This clinic in the town of Edaga Hamus, South of Adigrat in Ethiopia, serves 130,000 local people. UNMEE donated a small laboratory. Now basic tests can be done on the premises - a service unavailable before.

VIDEO OUT

JENKINS: Is that sort of a band-aid? Are these sorts of humanitarian projects, things that you put in over the surface while you hope the wound is going to heal underneath? Are these things going to be sustainable after the UN pulls out?

LEGWAILA: I guess they might not be sustainable, but at least they are part of the mission. The mission is not just being seen through the military people parading in the temporary segregates or in the adjacent areas patrolling, but that we are doing something that is very dear to the local people, particularly in those areas which were devastated by war. And by the way, we are the first mission to engage in what is called quick-impact projects, those are quick-impact projects. Of course some of the humanitarian services that you see on the screen there are offered by the contingents themselves, the Indian battalion, the Kenyan battalion and the Jordanian battalion. They are not part of the quick-impact projects, which are part of the

Ibrahim report as you know, and therefore we are not worried as to whether they would be sustained after we have left but at least the people of Ethiopia and Eritrea remember that we didn't just go there and simply separated the forces but we also contributed to the re-construction of the villages.

JENKINS: I hear what you're saying, but one would expect those projects to be popular. These are people who have had nothing, but have been devastated by the war. I guess what we're all digging at is the fact that at the moment there is no reason that we can see this, there's no reason to be optimistic, there's no way out of this situation, and in some point or the other the international communities are going to say, "Why should we spend 200 million dollars a year if you guys are not going to make peace, and if one government is not even prepared to speak to the UN's envoy, and the other is saying that they will not sign the treaty on the basis of a commission which they previously agreed to, where are we? Is there any way out of this?"

LEGWAILA: Well, as peacekeepers there is no situation without hope, or you are still hopeful that the parties can be persuaded to realize that it is in their best interest to implement the Algiers agreements towards their logical conclusion because the alternative is too ghastly to contemplate. This is the message that we make sure they understand every time we meet them. To understand that we are not there as a permanent arrangement, and that their own future is in their own hands. We are there to help them and if they don't want to help them, well, unfortunately there are people who are going to live in perpetual conflict.

FOUKARA: You say that you're not there permanently, but obviously the local people are there permanently, in this little disputed town of Badme. How do people in that particular town or village, whatever you may chose to call it...how do they feel? Do they feel Ethiopian or do they feel Eritrean?

LEGWAILA: Well, if Badme is currently administered by Ethiopia and obviously the people who are there feel that they are Ethiopian. But that is beside the point; to be honest with you. What is important is that those people must have the opportunity to live in peace with their neighbours, the Eritreans. That is all...that is important to us that we must help them achieve peace so that they can live in peace even when the United Nations withdraws.

PRICE: In the film we saw the troops carrying out some humanitarian activities there. Should this not really be the role of the UN humanitarian agencies especially as it is sort of a medical side? And would it not be more useful to bring those in to do that job and be a bit more clearly demarcated?

LEGWAILA: Well, I'm glad that you mentioned that because we are doing quick-impact project as a peacekeeping operation with the hope that when we leave the UN agencies who

are there permanently and who have been doing some of the things we are doing will continue to do those things; in other words when we leave, it doesn't mean that all the activities that you saw on the video are going to end because the agencies will continue to carry them out.

JENKINS: Let's get a bit into why there is still a stalemate. For example, are the Eritreans right to be suspicious of the Secretary General's envoy? In other words presumably the reason they don't want to meet with him is because they suspect ...he already said he wants to talk about how to resolve this problem with the border, presumably they must fear that he's going to say, "Well we've got -- having problems with Ethiopia. Why don't we reconsider some aspects of what the commission has agreed to?" Are they right to be concerned that if they meet they're going to open the whole can of worms again?

LEGWAILA: Actually no, let me boldly say that...actually they are not right to be concerned because the special envoy was appointed at the same time that the Security Council issued the statement on the 7th of January saying the special envoy's appointment was not the introduction of an alternative mechanism, but is alternative to the EEBC process. And that was followed by a statement by the United States of America on the 21st of January, that the decision of the Boundary Commission is final and binding and it must be implemented "without qualification."

JENKINS: So why won't they meet with him?

LEGWAILA: Well, that is...that's what we are asking them. When you have all these pronouncements by the international community that we are not reopening the decision of the Boundary Commission, why are the Eritreans not receiving the special envoy to hear what he has to say?

FOUKARA: Can I just quickly raise the regional dimension of the conflict, because obviously the Horn of Africa is one of those points where Africa meets the Middle East, and we know that the Sudanese together with the Yemeni and the Ethiopians have accused Eritrea of stirring up the trouble in the region. First of all, does that make your mission more complicated and what's the way out of that?

LEGWAILA: Well, you know, we are not there trying to resolve regional problems. We are there to resolve a problem between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and therefore it is a pity that the two countries that we are trying to help are also involved in other conflicts. Because as neighbors, if Ethiopia is a neighbour of Somalia, Eritrea, is a neighbour of Sudan, obviously the conflict in the Sudan and the conflict in Somalia affect the two countries. But what we are there to help them to resolve is their own conflict – the bilateral conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

FOUKARA: And on the Pan-African dimension, how come that this is an African continent, this is the African conflict and yet the biggest contingent you have is actually Indian?

LEGWAILA: Well, I think it would be unfortunate if an African conflict was to be the sole responsibility of Africans because Ethiopia and Eritrea are members of the United Nations. All the 53 members of the AU are members of the United Nations and therefore peacekeeping by the United Nations is not a tribal matter, it is an international matter, and therefore that is the reason why you have Kenyans in the East, you have in the center, Indians, you have in the West – Jordanians. That is as it should be.

JENKINS: Do you have any fear that these two sides might prefer to have the problem rather than have the solution? There are occasions when nations find it convenient to hold on to a casus belli -- it's a way of stirring up patriotism, of rallying people, of helping sustain a government in power. Do you have any concern that there's any of that in this situation – that these two sides don't actually really want peace?

LEGWAILA: Well I respect the intelligence of the people of Ethiopia and Eritrea, and I don't think that ...

JENKINS: The people in the government, they said the other things.

LEGWAILA: Well even the governments, I don't think it is their wish that they should be mired in conflict for eternity, which of course with the consequence that they'll be mired in poverty for eternity. The two countries have been fighting wars for many, many, many decades. The war between 1990 and 2000 is not the first one. You know that in 1991 they emerged out of long liberation struggles, and therefore not only the people, even the governments of the two countries yearn for peace, and therefore we should have them achieve that peace. But the most important thing is that the major contribution must be made by them.

PRICE: But you just said... may I just remind you of the current situation, the stalemate? What effect does that have on the population? Of course the war caused tens of thousands of casualties. Now there's this uneasy peace. What kind of impact does that have on all the...

LEGWAILA: A very serious impact, very, very deleterious impact in the sense that...you know, as I said they, they emerged from war in 1991, in 1998 - another war to destroy what they were reconstructing and right now they are busily reconstructing, and that's why I keep telling their government, 'you know, these people have just left the IDP camps. Some of them are still in the IDP camp...

JENKINS: The internally displaced people.

LEGWAILA: The internally displaced people. And now why are you talking about war when people have just begun to reconstruct their destroyed villages.

JENKINS: Tragic situation. Unfortunately that's all that we have time for. Mr. Legwaila, thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**. Our guest has been

Legwaila Joseph Legwaila, the head of the UN mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea, UNMEE. He was interviewed by Susannah Price of the BBC, and Abderrahim Foukara of Al Jazeera.

I'm Tony Jenkins, thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

ANNOUNCER: Electronic transcripts of this programme may be obtained free of charge by contacting World Chronicle at the address on your screen:

World Chronicle

United Nations, Room S-827

New York, N.Y., 10017.

Or by email at: besa@un.org

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