

**“Pacific Settlement of Border Disputes:
LESSONS FROM THE RESOLUTION OF THE BAKASSI DISPUTE”**

International Conference, New York, July 18, 2007

“Pacific Settlement of Border Disputes: Lessons from the Resolution of the Bakassi Dispute,” a conference devoted to the Cameroon-Nigeria boundary disagreement, was co-hosted by the International Peace Academy, the University of Yaoundé II, the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, and the Commonwealth Secretariat. The seminar, which was also supported by both the Governments of Cameroon and Nigeria, was held at the InterContinental Hotel in New York on Wednesday July 18, 2007.

The conference brought together high level experts from the Commonwealth Secretariat, the African Union, the United Nations, regional security commissions, international analysts and academics, and policymakers from Cameroon and Nigeria. Nigerian and Cameroonian delegations were lead respectively by H.E. Professor Maurice Kamto and H.E. Dr. Joy Ogwu.

Participants discussed the peaceful settlement of the land and maritime boundary dispute between the two countries. This decades-old conflict was eventually resolved through a menu of mechanisms including mediation and the good offices of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and adjudication via the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which in October 2002 ruled variously for both sides on the entire boundary from Lake Chad to the Gulf of Guinea.

“It is possible to draw lessons from the settlement of localized disputes like Bakassi to develop paradigms that are applicable to other conflicts elsewhere, and within given variables,” summarized Professor Kamto, Minister Delegate of Justice of Cameroon. Concurrent with this position was the Nigerian view that “the event, marked by years of painstaking negotiations, was a demonstration of leadership quality, good judgment and a test of political will and uncommon courage,” as expressed by Dr. Ogwu, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The Bakassi settlement demonstrated a) the importance of strong political leadership, perserverance, and commitment to peace even in the face of domestic reluctance, as demonstrated by Presidents Paul Biya and Olusegun Obasanjo; b) the strategic role of mediators, in this case former Secretary-General H.E. Kofi Annan, in providing an environment of trust; and c) the relevance of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission as an instrument for the full realization of the provisions of the ICJ ruling.

A full conference report is being produced and will be disseminated soon.