The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is the United Nations organ that is concerned with the promotion of justice in the world especially as it relates to inter-state disputes and contentious litigation between UN member states. Delimitation disputes – whether of zones or international borders, both maritime and territorial – take up the largest amount of the Netherlands-based court’s preoccupations. Since its establishment in its contemporary form in 1947, the World Court, as it is otherwise known, has looked into frontier disputes that have arisen between countries from almost all continents. The dispute over the Minquiers and Ecrehos Islands between France and Great Britain (1953), the frontier dispute between Belgium and the Netherlands (1959), the 1985 Continental Shelf Judgement between Libya and Malta, as well as the border litigation between Mali and Burkina Faso (1986) are just some examples. Sadly however, perhaps owing to the lack of enforcement mechanisms of the decisions of the Court, less than half of its judgements have been accepted and/or implemented by those they fell in their disadvantage.

Naturally, due to the artificial colonial borders in Africa, the continent has had to deal with a number of such disputes that have, at times, led to military confrontation between the disputant countries. This hostility scenario becomes more apparent when it becomes clear that the disputed area has some significant natural resources. Clearly, one of these is the dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon over the Bakassi Peninsula.

The author did an outstanding piece of work. He provided the reader with a specialist and objective background to the dispute. He then pondered over the legal aspects of the litigation. He acknowledged that the ICJ ruling did not come as a surprise given the legal strengths of Cameroon’s claims and the inconsistency of the successive Nigerian governments on the issue.

Before the ruling, both Nigeria and Cameroon declared that they would abide by the outcome of the court’s decision - whatever it might be. And according to reports, following the World Court’s ruling, the Nigerian
Council of State, comprising all 36 state governors, together with previous holders of strategic national offices, including former Heads of State and Chief Justices, attended an emergency meeting chaired by President Obassanjo himself. They critically and carefully looked at the ruling and all its aspects for and against Nigeria. At the end of the meeting, Mr Tunji Oseni, a senior advisor to President Obassanjo, issued a statement agreed by the delegates that read *inter alia*: “It is apparent that there have been both gains and losses for each side as this is only natural in a case as large and complex as this. It is therefore inappropriate in the government's view for anybody to talk of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’”. Yet, both Mr Donald Duke and Mrs Florence Ita-Giwa, Cross River State Governor (that administers the Bakassi Peninsula on the Nigerian side) and the Senator representing the area respectively, went to Abana, the main city on the Peninsula, and assured the local people that the Federal Government of Nigeria still supported the continued occupancy of the territory by Nigerians. Moreover, as the author noted, the Nigerian government maintains that the ICJ ruling does not affect the oil exploitation licences it had already issued to foreign companies.

The author is right to argue that the argument of Nigerian parliamentarians about “the people of Bakassi” to back their reluctance to hand over the territory to Cameroon is “opportunistic”. However, it is appreciable that the Nigerian authorities throughout this dispute have stuck to their principle of non-violence and opted for diplomacy. This is clearly compatible with Nigeria’s “natural” leadership role in Africa.

This said, the fact that neither Cameroon nor Nigeria took a heed of the rights and the feelings of the people of Bakassi, who are naturally attached to their land, in considering their court case is very regrettable. This compounded with the fact that the Bakassi people feel strongly more for Nigeria than for Cameroon leaves one with no option but to appreciate the author’s conclusion as pragmatic, wise and thoughtful. Thus, “a negotiated settlement” which would leave the Peninsula under Nigerian sovereignty but “guarantee to Cameroon greater oil revenues from the Peninsula [...] would be a more proactive peace deal for both parties, especially for Cameroon”

One may add another recommendation, though. That is, that the African Union should seek to take on more of these disputes, as it may be better placed to provide a pragmatic ruling that is not only consistent with the prevailing norms of international law and legal codes, but also that takes into account the realities on the ground as well as African customs and traditions in conflict resolution by peaceful means.