



PRESS RELEASE

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The Special Representative the Secretary-General of the United Nations in Burundi comes to end of Mission

Bujumbura, Burundi – On the eve of her final departure from Burundi, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations spoke to journalists at the weekly press conference of the United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB). Ms McAskie arrived in Burundi in June 2004 and will be leaving the country at the end of March 2006.

In her address, Ms. McAskie recalled that the “Burundi peace process has been characterized by exceptional partnership.” Indeed, Burundi has received support from the Regional Initiative, the South African Facilitation Team, the African Union (which deployed its first peacekeeping force here) and the United Nations.

Burundi has also been assisted by a number of faithful donors, including France, the European Union, the Netherlands, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and many other others - all working in an absolutely remarkable partnership to help the country overcome its crisis, SRSG McAskie said.


She pointed out that in spite of all the positive strides, Burundi still has huge challenges to tackle, including the negotiations between the Government and PALIPEHUTU-FNL, which are yet to be concluded, the humanitarian crisis that the population is experiencing, and the crucial issue of economic recovery in the country as it emerges from more than 10 years of civil war.

In view of these challenges, Ms. McAskie said that her departure should not be perceived as premature, nor considered as an acknowledgement of failure. “There will always be many things to do. In the case of Burundi, we have a Government which has shown its worth. Its job is to resolve these problems, and I am convinced that with the support of the international community it will succeed,” she reassured. “Even when I leave Burundi, I will plead for the international community to continue to support this country,” she promised.

Concerning the human rights violations blamed on FNL or the National Defence Forces (FDN), the special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations was unequivocal and firm: “I appeal to FNL to stop its attacks on the population. As for the

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Government, we expect it to maintain standards of behaviour worthy of a country where the rule of law exists. The Government must continue to make efforts on this issue.”

Concerning the ongoing discussions for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a Special Chamber, SRSG McAskie said that she understood the impatience of the population, but acknowledged that the process would be long and complex. “It’s a long road. I know that people are impatient and want to see the results of the issue. The Government, with the support of the UN delegation, will issue a statement on the progress achieved after the discussions this week. Then, the Burundian delegation will surely be invited to New York to continue discussions. The outcome of those discussions will then be forwarded to the Security Council, after which funding will be sought, the commissioners chosen and the necessary support system put in place. It will be an enormous task to manage,” she explained.

Ms. McAskie confessed that she had kept fond memories of the long electoral process which had started with a referendum in February 2005. “Voters stood on long queues in order to vote. When I asked women ‘Why are you voting?’, they would flash beautiful smiles and say ‘We’re here to vote for peace, for a real government!’ It was then that I realized that the thirst for peace, the thirst for justice and the thirst for the return of normal life was very strong among the people of Burundi. I was highly inspired by that and greatly encouraged to carry on with my work. These are the memories that I’m coming away with of this beautiful country with enormous potential,” she concluded.

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