

THE PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION

The Second Country Specific Meeting on Burundi

12 December 2006

Statement by Mr. Youssef Mahmoud

Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for  
Burundi

Mr. Chairman,

1. I wish to thank you for this opportunity to speak at this Second Country-Specific Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission, both in my capacity as Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Burundi, as well as Resident Coordinator in that country. My presentation focuses on how the United Nations in Burundi has been working to assist the Government in its peacebuilding efforts since the last meeting of your Commission on 13 October.

2. However, before addressing how we have organized ourselves to provide this assistance, I would like to use this occasion to briefly bring you up to date on the main developments in Burundi, since last October.

3. On the security front, there has been regrettably, no progress in the implementation of the Comprehensive Ceasefire Agreement, signed in September between the Government and the FNL. The FNL leadership has refused to return to Burundi or participate in the Joint Verification

and Monitoring Mechanisms, before certain conditions are met by the Government, including the release of FNL prisoners. The Government has taken action to address some of the obstacles in the talks, and the South African Facilitation of the Burundi Peace Process has continued its efforts to help resolve the outstanding differences. Meanwhile, the African Union has authorized the establishment of a Special Task Force, as provided for in the Agreement, which will be expected to protect the FNL leadership once it returns to Burundi and support the DDR process. As a result of these delays, ONUB, the departing peacekeeping mission in Burundi, will not be able to carry out the tasks envisaged for it, under the Agreement, before its military contingents are repatriated by the end of this month. However, the South African battalion, currently part of ONUB's military component will be re-hatted to form part of the African Union Task Force, as of 1 January 2007.

4. Since last October, the Government has continued its efforts to promote political dialogue, including the organisation of meetings with political parties, civil society and the media. It also has taken a number of important steps towards stabilizing the macro-economic situation and creating the necessary conditions for improved cooperation between the Government and the international financial institutions. I would leave it to my colleagues from the WB and the IMF to elaborate on this point. Moreover, the recent adoption of an anti-corruption law and the ongoing review of the Penal Code to make it more consistent with international norms are additional steps in the right direction.

5     However, these positive developments have been overshadowed by the slow judicial process in the case of the seven individuals jailed in connection with the alleged coup plot and the arrest of several journalists over the past few weeks. Moreover, the brutal killing of a number of civilians in the province of Muyinga, several months ago, and the impunity the alleged perpetrators seem to enjoy continue to be of concern to national and international human rights observers and to the international partners on the ground. In his connection, these partners have had several meetings with Government authorities at the highest level on these issues. The Government for its part, has reiterated its intolerance for human rights abuses and has explained privately and publicly the reasons for the detention of the journalists, while giving assurances that due legal process will be observed in all cases, notwithstanding the weaknesses of the judicial system it has inherited. In the meantime, the Government has made court proceedings in the case of alleged coup plotters public for the first time and allowed visits to the detained journalists. The Government is also of the view that having taken major steps towards democratization, the international community should show "patience" given the lack of resources, the huge capacity deficits of the governance structures, and the legacies of a tragic past, including deep distrust among key national stakeholders and their followers. In this connection, the Government highlighted the hundreds of soldiers and other uniformed personnel who were severely sanctioned or summarily dismissed as the result of investigations into human rights abuses they have committed. It reaffirmed its determination to accelerate the integration of human rights sensitization

programmes for security forces, particularly those that address the rights of woman, girls and other vulnerable sections of the population.

6. As you are aware, the conflicts over land in Burundi are being exacerbated by the increased rate of refugee returns, who are claiming back the lands they had left behind but are now occupied by others. The newly-established National Land Commission therefore has major challenges which it will have to address through its various Sub-Commissions.

7. The humanitarian situation in Burundi continues to be worrisome. The recent drought, the ongoing torrential rains and the resulting mud slides have increased food shortages. These shortages, if not promptly addressed, could provoke significant population displacements, which in turn could have a serious impact on peace consolidation efforts. The United Nations and other partners are examining with relevant national actors how this situation could be effectively addressed.

## **II. United Nations support to the Government in identifying critical peacebuilding interventions**

Mr. Chairman,

8. After supporting Burundi through the Arusha peace process, the organisation of elections in 2005, and the successful conclusion of the transitional period, the

United Nations, building on ONUB's achievements, has started assisting the Government and People of Burundi in transforming their hard-earned, but fragile stability into a foundation for durable peace. The critical priorities and gaps outlined by the Government in its presentation are the result of a long and laborious process of joint strategic planning between the Government and the United Nations.

10. Since the last country specific meeting on Burundi in October, the United Nations has worked closely with the Government in the identification of critical interventions within each of the priority area outlined in the Chairman's Summary and which are deemed vital for the consolidation of peace in the short-term. These areas of support were identified on the basis of a comprehensive mapping of the various initiatives currently underway or planned, either by the Government or the international community. This mapping exercise, a copy of its results has been made available to you, revealed a certain amount of fragmentation of peacebuilding efforts in Burundi. It also revealed a number of specific areas which are critical components of the peacebuilding vision articulated in the PRSP, but which, for one reason or another, have been neglected or insufficiently addressed until now. These have been outlined in the Government's presentation. They include support for political dialogue, revitalization of consultations on the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms, as well support for initiatives that promote economic incentives for peace, particularly among the masses of unemployed youth.

11. On the basis of this mapping, the Peacebuilding Priority Plan that the Government has just submitted to the Peacebuilding Fund contains a number of concept notes with budgetary estimates aimed at addressing some of these peace consolidation gaps.

## **II Integrated UN approach to supporting peace consolidation in Burundi**

Mr. Chairman,

12 In Burundi, the requirements for the successful implementation of the various critical peace building tasks, and the peace dividends we hope to reap from these efforts, are clearly the responsibility of the Government. But these peacebuilding dividends cannot be achieved without the support of the United Nations and the international community. In this penultimate part of my presentation, I would like to briefly share with you how, we, as United Nations on the ground, intend to shoulder our part of this responsibility.

13. As you are aware, by resolution 1719 (2006) of 25 October, the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to establish a United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi (Bureau Intégré des Nations Unies au Burundi, BINUB), following the conclusion of ONUB's mandate.

14. Drawing on the lessons from the establishment of UNIOSIL in Sierra Leone, the objectives and structure of BINUB reflect the United Nations' reform agenda. It is based on a common strategy for action, a single process for

mobilising efforts around shared objectives, and an integrated structure to ensure the coherence of our support.

15. Our support in Burundi will be guided by a number of core, practical principles, notably:

- The need to ensure that all United Nations actions over the next two years are firmly anchored within the national framework for peace consolidation, notably the PRSP and the Common Action Plan;
- The recognition that peace consolidation necessitates that we simultaneously address political, security, rule of law and socio-economic dimensions of conflict, as one single agenda;
- That the support to be provided will be oriented towards achieving immediate and visible impact within a 2-year period;
- That the activities we directly implement must also facilitate the transfer of expertise and knowledge, and thus simultaneously contribute to capacity development;
- That we must focus our activities in areas where the United Nations can demonstrably add value in relation to other actors, thus reducing the fragmented scope of our engagement, while deepening our reach;
- Ensuring that the United Nations engages in peacebuilding activities only if it has readily available capacities and expertise that it can immediately deploy. We cannot afford to wait a year to develop our own capacities;

- That through our contribution we must help ensure that important cross-cutting themes, such as HIV/AIDS and gender are integrated, and that we address the special needs of vulnerable segments of the populations, including the war-affected and displaced, women, children and youth.

16. Based on these principles, we have been reconfiguring and re-orienting the strategic, programmatic and structural components of the United Nations country assistance in Burundi. They will be too long to outline here. But we will be happy to discuss them at the next meeting of the Commission, which I hope, as the Government stated, will take place in Burundi, in conjunction with the March 2007 Round Table.

### **III Conclusion**

Mr. Chairman,

17. By way of concluding allow me to make a few remarks about where we should go from here and how we should engage with this post conflict country.

- I believe, now that we have successfully completed the first stage of the peacebuilding process, we need to move from plans to action. We need to secure the means and ways to deliver immediate and visible peace dividends to the people of Burundi, recognizing that peace consolidation is a long and painstaking process, with few advances and many setbacks. The speedy disbursement of resources from the Peacebuilding Fund and the provision

of the budgetary support requested by the Government would go a long way in consolidating the advances and reducing the risks.

- While we, as the international community, have an important contribution to make, it is national actors who will play the determining role in the future of peacebuilding in Burundi. For this reason, the political will and capacity of national actors to assume their responsibilities in creating a conducive environment for peace are critical.
- Additionally, we must ensure that our terms of engagement with Burundi reflect the complexities and the dynamics that characterize post conflict situations. This engagement necessitates that we interact with the Government and other national actors in a manner that is different from the way we approach them during peace-making, peacekeeping or in traditional development contexts. We must recognise the fragility of the situation and the enormous internal contradictions and external pressures confronting the Government, after nearly forty years of instability and violent conflict, in a context of abject poverty. And while we, as an international community, should not hesitate to bring to the attention of local authorities issues of concern to us, I believe that we should frame our advice and recommendations on what can be done better, in a principled but constructive manner, that reflects our shared responsibility and accountability in making the transition from violence to peace, less reversible.
- Finally Mr. Chairman, I wish to express the hope that this and subsequent country specific meetings of the

Commission, under your able leadership, will help us chart a course that would reconcile our collective thirst for speedy progress and the patient and sustained partnership that the bedevilling realities of post conflict situations, invariably require from all of us.

Thank you for your attention.