



**The statement of Under Secretary-General/Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide  
Adama Dieng on the Situation in Burundi**

**4 June 2015**

Mr. President, Members of the Council, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

I thank the Security Council for inviting me to brief you on the situation in Burundi from the perspective of my mandate, following my recent visit to the country.

Mr. President,

My Office has been closely following the situation in Burundi since early last year (2014), after the United Nations received reports that the Government was arming a youth group affiliated to the ruling political party CNDD-FDD, the youth group that is commonly known as *Imbonerakure*; I was also concerned at the shrinking political space, reports of the intimidation and arbitrary arrest of opposition supporters and crackdown on independent media, human rights defenders and other members of civil society.

In April 2014, after the events to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rwanda Genocide in Kigali, the Secretary-General asked me to stop by Burundi and urge the government to investigate reports of the arming of the *Imbonerakure* and encourage it to open dialogue with the opposition parties in order to de-escalate increasing political tensions in the country. I relayed the messages to the authorities, including to President Nkurunziza, other senior government officials and leaders of key political parties and civil society.

Since my April 2014 visit, the situation has deteriorated further, especially after President Nkurunziza declared his intention to run for a third presidential term in the forthcoming elections. I undertook last week's visit to Burundi as a result of serious concern at escalating tensions since the attempted *coup d' état* on 13 May; reports of serious human rights violations, including excessive use of force against demonstrators, extra-judicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, continued restrictions on the fundamental freedoms especially of opinion and expression, association and assembly; abuses committed by the *Imbonerakure* that have instilled fear in the civilian population and led to the flight of more than one hundred thousand Burundians to neighbouring countries.

Mr. President,

While in Burundi, I met with President Pierre Nkurunziza, the Second Vice-President, the Minister of External Relations and the President of the ruling CNDD-FDD political party. I

also met with the Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region civil society representatives, senior officials of the United Nations Electoral Observation Mission in Burundi, members of the United Nations Country Team and representatives of the international community.

Mr. President,

While the crisis in Burundi has been primarily of a political nature, in my meetings with President Nkurunziza and key political leaders close to him, I was concerned by constant references to and manipulation of ethnicity in the context of the crisis – which I believe to be a very slippery slope, given the recent history of Burundi. The President and those close to him accused Tutsi elites of being behind the protests against his bid for a third term, suggesting that the ultimate goal was to gain political power. Also of concern, it is clear that President Nkurunziza is determined to go forward with the elections, whether or not the environment is conducive to the holding of credible elections, and that he will run for a third term. This is an issue that he was not keen to discuss. In my meeting with President Nkurunziza, I reminded him that at our last meeting in April 2014, he had committed to conduct an independent investigation into the activities of the *Imbonerakure*, possibly with the assistance of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to ensure impartiality and credibility in the investigation. This time, I raised concerns at reports that the *Imbonerakure* continued to be associated with the security forces, especially the police, and that their actions, including human rights abuses reportedly committed against demonstrators and individuals suspected of supporting the opposition, had instilled fear in the civilian population, leading to the displacement of people to neighbouring countries.

Political space in Burundi remains restricted; opposition party leaders and their supporters are being intimidated and some have been arrested; the independent media has been silenced, and the lack of independent voices has facilitated the spread of rumours, which can fan the flames of discontent and contribute to escalating tensions as well as the fear of further violence. Civil society is divided, with some parts supporting the opposition and others supporting the government and is thus a reflection of the divisions in the country.

Mr. President,

Whereas, as I said earlier, I am cognizant of the fact that the current crisis in Burundi is caused predominantly by political factors, it is important to take note of a number of factors that could, cumulatively, increase the risk of atrocity crimes being committed in Burundi. These factors include the arming of youth groups associated with political parties, particularly the ruling CNDD-FDD; allegations of serious human rights violations; weaknesses of in state structures; existing inter-group tensions and a number of triggering factors, especially the forthcoming elections. In my assessment, if action is not taken to address current tensions and violence and prevent an escalation, the trajectory of the crisis could

change into one that escalates along ethnic lines, with ethnically motivated attacks, as has happened in the past.

The initiative to facilitate a dialogue among Burundians, led by Said Djinnit, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and supported by the envoys of the East African Community, the Eminent Persons of the African Union and the Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the ICGLR, is one of the key ways to de-escalate tensions and create an environment conducive to inclusive, free and fair elections. It is clear that the current environment is not conducive. It is important that the Special Envoy's work is fully supported, and his capacity strengthened through deployment of experts to work with Burundians and in the region, especially with the representatives of the East African Community and the ICGLR.

The international community should also support on-going regional initiatives and take steps to rebuild confidence between Burundi and the region. Any deterioration in relations between countries in the region could complicate the crisis in Burundi.

I encourage the international community to speak with one voice to Burundian actors. I believe that differences in approach to the crisis risk having a negative impact on efforts to resolve the crisis as they may serve to entrench the positions of government and opposition and undermine the dialogue. If the two sides continue to pursue their separate positions, there is a risk that the dialogue will fail and the violence increase, potentially on the basis of ethnic affiliation.

I also encourage the Security Council to visit Burundi in the next forty-five days, as recommended at the Summit of East African Community leaders last weekend.

Mr. President,

The Burundian people and the international community have invested heavily in building peace in Burundi after the Arusha Peace Agreement that ended decades of conflict. We cannot afford to let Burundi throw away this hard earned achievement and return to the deadly cycles of violence the country suffered through in the past. I strongly believe that we can prevent the situation from escalating and uphold our collective responsibility to protect populations from atrocity crimes.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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