

**Peacebuilding Commission, Burundi Configuration**  
**Meeting of the Steering Group**

*New York, Swiss Mission to the United Nations, 22 December 2014*

On Monday, 22 December 2014, the Steering Group of the Burundi Configuration of the PBC held a luncheon meeting at the Swiss Mission in the presence of the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Electoral Observer Mission in Burundi (MENUM), Mr. Cassam Uteem. Since the mandate of MENUM was based on Security Council resolution 2137 of 14 February 2014 and Mr. Uteem visited New York to present himself in his new capacity, invitations to the meeting had been extended to present and incoming members of the Security Council.

The purpose of the meeting was twofold: To brief the Steering Group on the Chair's visit to Burundi from 8 to 12 December 2014, and on the outcome of the Roundtable of 11-12 December, and to have a first contact with the new Head of MENUM.

The meeting was attended by representatives from Belgium, Burundi, France, the European Union, Japan, Kenya, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Norway, the Russian Federation, Rwanda, Spain, Tanzania, the United Kingdom, the United States, UNDP, PBSO and DPA.

In his briefing, the Chair addressed the political environment in Burundi in view of the 2015 elections, the economic and social situation, the end of BNUB's mandate and its implications, and, finally, the Roundtable meeting. He distributed the draft report of his trip to Burundi along with the original French text of the Joint Communiqué adopted at the conclusion of the Roundtable of 11-12 December (with an unofficial English translation).

The Chair characterized the political atmosphere in Burundi as overall calm and peaceful although the thermometer among political parties and actors was rising due to the upcoming elections. Fortunately, the rising temperature did not result in increased violence. On the contrary, violent incidents with a political background had rather decreased over the recent months. To add to the positive elements, all parties reaffirmed to the Chair their adherence to the code of conduct and the roadmap for the 2015 elections which they had agreed to earlier this year. Also, all parties still seem to be committed to participating in the elections. Yet, the opposition parties voiced multiple complaints about the preparations for the elections which they consider as flawed and intransparent. They cite, as the main example, the distribution of national identity cards and the registration of voters where frequent manipulations appear to have happened. Opposition parties claim that ID cards have been distributed by the dozens to persons not entitled to them, such as minors or foreigners. While Government representatives admitted some irregularities and consequently extended the duration of the two-week enrollment

phase by an additional week, opposition parties and civil society organizations called for the suspension of the voters' registration in order to look into the allegations of what they deem to be serious frauds. Besides, tensions between the authorities and opposition parties continue to revolve around different interpretations of the code of conduct and roadmap towards elections, especially the participation of "political actors" in the preparatory process. The Chair explained that this term is used for those former political leaders who were removed from the leadership of their political parties, i.e. mainly Agathon Rwasa (FNL) and Charles Nditije (Uprona). Invoking formal and legal reasons, the President of the Independent National Electoral Commission CENI told the Chair that he was unable to invite "political actors" to meetings since they are not officially recognized by law. However, he agreed to participate in consultative meetings that may be convened by MENUB. The Chair also informed the Group that the question whether or not the President would run for another term had gained notable prominence and sensitivity in comparison to his last visit in May 2014. While the prevailing impression back then was that opposition parties may consider tolerating another mandate in the interest of peace, despite of the two-term limit of the Arusha accords, the flaws in the preparation process together with the lack of dialogue from the governmental institutions had increased the general feeling of mistrust and led to a hardening of positions. Still, the Chair expressed his hope that the elections would proceed in a free, open, transparent, inclusive and peaceful manner if the spirit of openness and dialogue among all stakeholders prevailed and all political parties had the confidence that they could freely and genuinely compete on a level-playing field.

The Chair then went on to summarize the economic and social situation where he had received relatively positive feedbacks from the IFIs. The current and projected growth of over 4% GDP represents a silver lining on the horizon for a still very poor population. Also, the macro-economic and financial performance had improved, according to analysts. Still, much more needs to be done. For further information on the economic situation, the Chair referred to his written report.

Addressing the implications of BNUB's end of mandate, the Chair highlighted the importance of a smooth transition towards the remaining UN institutions on the ground, namely UNDP, but also MENUB and OHCHR. In particular, he appealed to both the government of Burundi as well to UNDP to rapidly conclude the appointment procedure for the new Resident Coordinator (RC). In that respect, the Permanent Representative of Burundi informed the Group that his government had proposed to UNDP to maintain the mandate of the current acting RC until the conclusion of the election period. The Chair also thanked those delegations that have contributed financially to the continued field presence of OHCHR in Burundi, and invited those who have not yet done so to follow suit.

Besides, the Chair mentioned his conversations with the Foreign Minister on the continuation of the PBC's role. He informed the Group that he would be relinquishing his post by the end of July 2015, but that his successor would be ready to take over the Configuration Chairmanship if the Government of Burundi so desired. The Chair offered the view that, after the departure of BNUB, the PBC constituted a pillar of stability and continuity in an otherwise changing partnership environment. He informed the Group of his proposal to the Foreign Minister of Burundi to draw up a concept paper on the future of the Configuration, namely to make further use of its convening power as demonstrated by the Geneva's partner conference of 2012. This draft paper would of course be consulted with and discussed by the Configuration.

Finally, the Chair briefed the group of the two-day Roundtable of 11-12 December 2014 which he qualified as a very useful and constructive meeting. The gathering allowed for a frank, open and amicable exchange of views, and at the end a joint communiqué was adopted by consensus. The full and timely implementation of the communiqué would represent a major achievement towards Burundi's political and economic progress, the Chair noted.

Following the Chair's statement, the PR of Burundi reaffirmed that the situation in Burundi remained calm and that the preparations for the next elections went generally well. A number of logistical and administrative problems were being addressed. The PR of Burundi called upon the international community to support his country in these important elections by filling the remaining financial gaps, thanking namely the Netherlands for having already disbursed its contribution. He further asked for political and diplomatic support to convince all political parties to participate in the elections. With respect to the number of terms for the President, the PR of Burundi remarked that this was a matter of constitutional interpretation which would likely to be decided by the Constitutional Court of Burundi.

The Special Envoy and Head of MENEUB, Mr. Uteem, said that he preferred postponing his comments until having visited Burundi himself and get acquainted with his new mission. On a question from a representative, he described his mandate as being more than just technical, but also comprising the facilitation of an inclusive dialogue among all interested parties with a view to promoting free, transparent, credible, inclusive and peaceful elections. He further indicated that the mission will comprise 88 staff members. About half of them would be deployed in Bujumbura and to four other locations throughout the country to observe the electoral process. Mr. Uteem noted that he intends to visit Burundi on a regular basis and spend approximately 7-10 days per month in the country, or as need be, depending on the developments. His Deputy would however be permanently posted in Bujumbura.

During the meeting, representatives of the Russian Federation, Japan, France, the United States, UNDP, DPA and PBSO either made comments or asked questions.

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