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To: Members of the Peacebuilding Commission, Burundi Configuration

Subject: **Chair's visit to Burundi, Rwanda and Ethiopia, 15 - 20 February 2016**

Excellencies,  
Dear colleagues,

From 15-20 February 2016, I undertook my second regional visit as Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). I held consultations in Bujumbura (15-17 February), Kigali (18 February) and Addis Ababa (19-20 February). The main objective of my visit was to pursue the policy dialogue with the Government of Burundi and other national and international stakeholders with a view to complement ongoing efforts by the UN and the regional organizations AU and EAC. My consultations focused on the following main issues: (a) security, violence and human rights; (b) political dialogue and mediation; (c) the socio-economic impact of the current crisis and (d) its humanitarian dimension.

I also used my visit to Bujumbura to discuss priorities and opportunities for the PBC engagement with Burundi in 2016.

I am very grateful for the warm welcome which I received in Burundi, Rwanda and Ethiopia. The support of Ambassador Albert Shingiro, Burundi's Permanent Representative to the UN, the UN Peacebuilding Support Office, and the UN Country Team in Bujumbura ensured a very rich and insightful program.

In Bujumbura I met the President of the Republic, H.E. Mr Pierre Nkurunziza; H.E. Mr Alain Nyamitwe, Minister of External Relations and International Cooperation; H.E. Mr Pascal Barandagiye, Minister of the Interior; H.E. Mr Tabu Abdallah Manirakiza, Minister of Finances; H.E. Ms Aimée Laurentine Kanyana, Minister of Justice; the 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President of the Parliament; representatives of the opposition, religious leaders, political parties; the president of the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation (CVR), the president and two members of the National Commission for the Inter-Burundian Dialogue (CNDD); civil society organizations; the Resident Representative of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Resident Representative a.i. of the African Development Bank (AfDB), human rights and military observers of the African Union, the UN Resident Coordinator a.i. together with members of the UN Country Team, senior



members of the Support Team of the Special Advisor on Conflict Prevention, as well as representatives of the international community. Furthermore, I participated in an informal meeting of the Joint Steering Committee of the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).

From Bujumbura I travelled to Kigali where I met H.E. Ms Serafine Mukantabana, Minister for Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs, and the Country Representative of UNHCR. In my discussions in Kigali, I focused on the humanitarian and regional dimension of the Burundian crisis.

In Addis Ababa I held consultations with H.E. Mr Smaïl Chergui, the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, with the Acting Head of the AU Peace and Security Department, the Acting Head of the Peace Support Operations Division (PSOD), the Head of the AU Prevention and Early Warning Division, the Officer in Charge of the Political Affairs Department, the UN Special Representative to the African Union, the Chargé d'affaires of the Burundian Mission and with representatives of various Member States and Partners of the African Union. At the AU Partner's Group Non-Operational Meeting of 19 February, I briefed participants on my visit. The special focus of my discussions in Addis Ababa was the AU engagement in Burundi and UN-AU cooperation.

## ***1. Main subjects of discussion***

### ***(a) Security situation, violence and human rights***

The general impression of an on-going political crisis and insecurity in Burundi persists. The assault on military camps in Burundi on 11 December 2015 and the subsequent violent incidents raised grave concern about a possible escalation of violence. Between December 2015 and February 2016, four rebel armed movements have identified themselves; some have claimed attacks against military objectives and police stations.

Trends in January 2016 suggested a calmer security situation; unfortunately February started with more security incidences, including 14 grenade attacks reported by UN Security Services the second week of February. A new trend observed was that these grenades are thrown randomly in public places, and target civilians. A grenade attack took place the first morning of my visit, and I was told that a child was among the victims.

Officials of the Government of Burundi and other interlocutors condemn these violent acts as terrorism. Some interlocutors accused the Government of Rwanda for contributing to insecurity in Burundi; they called for a rapid restoration of trust between both Governments, and warned against the risk of a regionalisation of the current crisis in Burundi.



I was also informed about an increased level of crime, some incidents involving racketing of passenger cars. To a certain extent, this development might be linked to the degradation of the economic situation as well as to the circulation of weapons among civilians.

Reports on the human rights situation indicate that human rights violations remain frequent. OHCHR and the Human Rights observers of the AU confirmed that current incidents might be less visible than after the events of 11 December, but include killings, forced disappearances, torture, ill-treatment and sexual violence. The AU Human Rights Observers and Military experts presented their work, with details on cases and figures. Both groups work in tandem, they report to the AU Peace & Security Council and closely cooperate with OHCHR. With limited resources, they are doing a very important work of monitoring the security situation and cases of human rights violation. The number of HR observers deployed at the time of my visit was 9, deployed across the country; 23 additional HR observers arrived in Burundi during my mission. The number of AU military experts is 15. The PBF funds that are being programmed to support the HR observers are very critical. I was also reassured by the Government of Burundi that it will do all it can to facilitate the work of these HR Observers. Furthermore, the government authorized the mission of three independent experts who visited Burundi on behalf of the Human Rights Council from 1 to 8 March 2016.

I encouraged the Government to intensify its cooperation with international observers and appealed to all sides to refrain from violence.

In the days following my visit, I noticed with appreciation that the Government of Burundi had undertaken *a series of steps* which could contribute to a de-escalation of the situation: The government revoked the arrest warrants against some 15 members of the opposition, the civil society and media, including the president of the CNARED movement; two of four private radio stations (Radio Isanganiro and Rema FM) which had been closed following the events of 13 May 2015 were authorized to reopen; a certain number of prisoners have been released; and President Nkurunziza appealed to the population to stop hate speech against Rwanda in the context of various demonstrations against Rwanda which took place in mid-February. On 23 February, during the visit of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, President Nkurunziza announced a general amnesty for prisoners with physical and mental illnesses, minors, persons over 60 years, pregnant women and young mothers with the exception of persons who were sentenced for grave crimes.

The security situation in Burundi was also a key aspect of my conversations with representatives of the African Union, AU Member States and Partners in *Addis Ababa*. My interlocutors in Addis underlined the need for close cooperation between UN, AU and EAC and called for an inclusive political dialogue among Burundians. Member States expressed support for the high-level Mission of five African Heads of States (i.e. the Presidents of South Africa, Senegal, Gabon and Mauritania as well as the Prime Minister of Ethiopia) which took place on 25-26 February.



My interlocutors in Addis Ababa welcomed the deployment of 23 additional AU human rights observers to Burundi on 20 February, and I was reassured that the MoU between the AU and the Burundian Government was being finalised. The PBF support to this deployment still being programmed during my visit was welcomed by the AU and other partners. On 27 February, when the five African Heads of State and Government had completed their high-level mission to Burundi, the African Union announced the plan to deploy one hundred human rights observers and one hundred military experts to Burundi.

***(b) Political dialogue and mediation***

The urgent need for a viable and inclusive dialogue was underlined by most interlocutors in all three capitals. My interlocutors in Bujumbura welcomed the meeting in Kampala of 28 December 2015 under the auspices of the Ugandan mediation and insistently called for an intensification of the mediation process. Diverging views persist on the specifics of an inclusive dialogue. International partners, in particular the European Union, expressed readiness to support the mediation process if such help were to contribute to the intensification of the mediation.

In Bujumbura I had the opportunity to discuss the Inter-Burundian dialogue with the president and two members of the National Commission for the Inter-Burundian Dialogue (CNDI) and with various stakeholders. The National Commission indicated that the first phase of the dialogue was almost concluded with dialogue sessions held in 14 of 18 provinces; a second phase with consultations at the communal level and a third phase involving the Burundian diaspora are planned. The Commission described the dialogue sessions as big gatherings with 500 - 5000 participants; they are asked to reply in writing to the questions “*how can a sustainable democracy be ensured in Burundi and how can electoral violence be prevented in 2020*”. In the second part of the sessions, a certain number of participants are given the floor to share their views. Following the sessions, the Commission will go through all the answers provided and consolidate the recommendations. The Commission shared some preliminary trends and recurrent recommendations from the participants: The key request by the population appears to be to amend the Constitution and to revise the Arusha Agreement (with regard to items such as ethnic quotas, term limits, and double citizenship), to strengthen the fight against impunity regarding crimes committed in the past, as well as some kind of civic education in order to strengthen Burundian patriotism. National and international observers of the inter-Burundian dialogue expressed serious concern that the call for revising the Arusha Agreement could enhance tensions and contribute to destabilization. Some interlocutors characterized the current dialogue process as not sufficiently inclusive; they raised doubts about the methodology and expressed concern that the dialogue might evolve into a movement which requests a referendum on the revision of the Arusha Agreement.



In my discussions, I underlined the need for an inclusive and genuine political dialogue with a link between the regional mediation and the dialogue within Burundi. I emphasized the necessity to respect the letter and spirit of the Arusha Agreement. I also assured my interlocutors in Bujumbura that numerous members of the international community had expressed their readiness to support an inclusive dialogue process.

*(c) Socioeconomic situation*

Following the briefings which the PBC had received from the IMF and the World Bank on 10 February, I went to Bujumbura with the concern that a further deterioration of the economy could itself become an aggravating factor of the political crisis.

After 10 years of steady economic growth, the country has experienced a negative growth of 4 percent in 2015. The Government expressed its regret with this trend, which it partly attributes to the fact that some partners have reduced cooperation with Burundi. The suspension of budget aid has a direct impact on public expenditures, which will decrease by 22% in 2016. Furthermore, the foreign currency reserves of the Central Bank have considerably decreased. The Government outlined a series of measures which it had undertaken to mitigate the risks of speculative transactions that could destabilise the Burundi Franc.

According to the Government, the crisis erupted at a time when the country was about to exit the vicious circle of poverty and violence. It appears that if nothing is done at this stage, the competition for control over limited resources might sharpen and the country might return into the vicious circle.

My main message to the Government was that partners were still committed to assist Burundi, and that it was up to the Government to provide an environment conducive for the continuation of development programs. I suggested that donors were looking for positive signals from the Government of Burundi to fully re-engage. Such signals include a viable and inclusive political process and reduction of violence and human rights violations. I noted an urgent need to re-establish trust and confidence of donors and investors.

My discussions with the Government and the main development partners of Burundi reinforced this message.

I was told by development partners that the political crisis had slowed down the implementation of strategic projects/programs, such as infrastructures/roads and electricity. Furthermore, I was informed that the cycle of cooperation strategies and key assistance mechanisms used by the main financial and development partners of Burundi (such as the African Development Fund, AfDB and the IMF) would end in 2016. Negotiations for the new cycle in 2016 might take place against a context of uncertainty if the current political crisis continues. Consequently, envelopes allocated to Burundi might be affected or disbursement of funds further delayed. On the other hand, and in



line with discussions held during the PBC meeting on 10 February, international partners indicated their readiness to provide financial support should there be significant signals towards the resolution of the current crisis. For instance, the IMF Representative indicated that mechanisms such as the IMF Rapid Credit Facility could be set up quickly, once the conditions are conducive to their approval by the IMF Executive Board.

The Government reassured me that it had well received the main messages given by partners, and that they were working on adequate responses.

*(d) Humanitarian dimension*

According to UNHCR, approximately 240'000 people have fled Burundi since the beginning of the crisis; more than 72'000 of them are in Rwanda. Many interlocutors characterized this exodus as a regrettable "loss of talents". In continuation of the discussions on the humanitarian dimension of the crisis which I had held in Dar es Salaam in November, I decided to discuss the same question with the Rwandan Government and UNHCR in Kigali. On 12 February, H.E. Ms. Louise Mushikiwabo, Rwanda's Foreign Minister had announced that Rwanda is ready to work with international partners in order to plan the relocation of Burundian refugees to third countries. When I met H.E. Ms. Serafine Mukantabana, Rwanda's Minister for Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs on 18 February, she stressed that the Government of Rwanda fully respects its obligations vis-à-vis the Burundian refugees according to international law, and that the shelters for the Burundian refugees are being maintained according to international standards; she extended an invitation to members of the international community who wish to visit the camps. The UNHCR Representative in Rwanda informed me that the Refugee Agency was enjoying an excellent working relationship with the Government. He was hopeful that they would work with the Government of Rwanda on a strategy that would ensure the civilian and humanitarian character of the refugee camps. My Rwandan interlocutors further expressed considerable disappointment about what they called an insufficient and incoherent response by international organizations to the crisis in Burundi.

## **2. Conclusions**

I would like to summarize the conclusions of my mission in the following 6 points:

(1) In the last few weeks, the Government of Burundi made a series of unilateral gestures which could contribute to a more conducive environment for an inclusive dialogue, to a reduction of violence and to an improvement of the human rights situation. It is important to follow the impact of these gestures closely.



(2) In view of the persisting tensions, violence and human rights violations, the rapid launch of an inclusive and credible dialogue process involving Burundians inside and outside the country with fundamentally diverging political views remains indispensable. The mediation process must be intensified. Many interlocutors fear that the current inter-Burundian dialogue might undermine the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement which has served as the basis for the most recent period of peace, stabilization and economic growth in Burundi's history and proved to be an efficient bulwark against the re-emergence of conflict.

(3) There is a considerable risk that the economic downturn becomes an additional driver of the crisis. National and international stakeholders appear to be aware of this risk. International donors seem to be ready to re-engage if they see a more conducive environment being established. A systematic dialogue between the Government of Burundi as well as bilateral and multilateral donors should help to clarify mutual expectations. I will, on my part, continue PBC engagement with the main development partners of Burundi, including the World Bank, the IMF, the EU and the AfDB.

(4) Increased international engagement and presence in Burundi can considerably help to deescalate the situation. I am therefore glad that the AU will increase the number of its human rights and military observers, while a group of independent experts has been able to travel to Burundi in early March on behalf of the Human Rights Council. Both the Government and the opposition welcomed the work of Special Advisor Jamal Benomar and expressed readiness to engage with the UN more intensively. Various interlocutors, in particular representatives of the opposition, called for a more robust international involvement and emphasized the need to protect the civilian population against violence. It therefore remains important that UN actors, including the Security Council, continue their discussions on options of UN engagement. I will pursue the cooperation between the PBC and the UN system, and will continue to encourage opportunities for the PBF to support programmatic interventions, with a special focus on the areas outlined in the letter from President Nkurunziza to the President of the UN Security Council dated 24 January, outlining the areas of cooperation with the UN (i.e. dialogue, disarmament, security, human rights and development). In my conversations, the Peacebuilding Fund was acknowledged as playing a positive role in supporting peacebuilding interventions, including the AU Human Rights Observers and the dialogue process; it is ready to intensify its engagement in Burundi.

(5) In Addis Ababa, representatives of the African Union underlined the necessity of a close cooperation between the UN and the AU on Burundi. In order to ensure the success of international efforts to overcome the current crisis in Burundi, close cooperation and coordination between the UN, AU and EAC remain crucial.



(6) On a regional level, there appears to be a high level of mutual distrust between Bujumbura and Kigali spurred by various allegations and public statements. There is an urgent need to end the rhetoric between Bujumbura and Kigali, address the different allegations and rebuild trust between both Governments.

I would like to conclude my report with a word of gratitude to the Government of Burundi for its hospitality and confidence and to all my interlocutors for having shared their views with me. My special thanks go to Ambassador Albert Shingiro, Burundi's Permanent Representative to the UN, for our excellent cooperation and to Assistant Secretary General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco of PBSO for having made this visit possible. I would also like to express my gratitude to Mr. Paolo Lembo, the UN Resident Coordinator a.i. in Bujumbura, the UN Country Teams in Bujumbura and Kigali, PBF and the UN Secretariat for their valuable assistance.

Ambassador Jürg Lauber, Chair  
UN Peacebuilding Commission  
Burundi Configuration