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HEADQUARTERS • SIEGENEW YORK, NY 10017
TEL.: 1 (212) 963.1234 • FAX: 1 (212) 963.4879

26 April 2017

To: Members of the Peacebuilding Commission, Burundi Configuration

Subject: **Chair's visit to Burundi and Tanzania, 27 – 31 March 2017**

Excellencies,

Dear colleagues,

From 27 to 31 March 2017, I undertook my fourth visit to Burundi and to the region as Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). I held consultations in Dar es Salaam on 27-28 March and in Bujumbura from 28 to 31 March. The main objectives of my visit were, in line with the Terms of Reference discussed in our a last meeting on 13 March, (a) to pursue the engagement with the Government and key stakeholders, with a particular focus on socio-economic issues and on the macro-economic situation as a follow-up to the socioeconomic consultations which we had in November 2016 in Geneva; (b) to support the dialogue process facilitated by President Mkapa and encourage the Burundian stakeholders to fully engage; (c) to get a first-hand impression on the situation in Burundi and (d) to receive an update of the on-going peacebuilding initiatives, including projects supported by the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).

I am grateful for the warm welcome which I received in Burundi and Tanzania. I like to thank the Government of Burundi for its hospitality and confidence and, in particular, Ambassador Albert Shingiro, Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations, who traveled with me to Burundi, for his excellent cooperation and support. I also thank Resident Coordinator a.i., Bo Viktor Nylund, the UN Country Team in Bujumbura and the UN Peacebuilding Support Office in New York for preparing a very rich and insightful program and for their ongoing support.

Last but not least, I wish to express my sincere thanks to President Mkapa for receiving me and for his continued engagement with the PBC.



I. Program of the visit

In Bujumbura I met H.E. Pierre Nkurunziza, President of the Republic of Burundi; Hon. Pascal Nyabenda, President of the National Assembly and the Bureau; H.E. Mr. Alain Aimé Nyamitwe, Minister of External Relations; H.E. Domitien Ndiwokubwayo, Minister of Finance; and Hon. Edouard Nduwimana, the Ombudsman. I also had meetings with the Archbishop of the Catholic Church, the President of the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation (CVR), the Special Envoy of the African Union; the Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR); representatives of political parties; representatives of the local business community; the Director of Kahawatu, a Foundation which engages in the coffee sector; representatives of civil society organizations; the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and representatives of the diplomatic community.

Furthermore, I had the opportunity to meet young people who engage in different areas of peacebuilding with funding by the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).

Before travelling to Burundi, I stopped in Dar es Salaam on 27-28 March, where I met the former President of Tanzania, H.E. Benjamin Mkapa, the EAC Facilitator of the Burundi dialogue, senior officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Country Director of the World Bank, Ms. Bella Bird, as well as representatives of the UN and of the diplomatic community in Dar es Salaam.

II. Main points of my discussions

(a) The socio-economic challenges and macro-economic situation

I briefed President Nkurunziza, several members of the Government, and other key partners on the socioeconomic consultations which we had held in Geneva in November 2016.

After the Geneva meeting and in preparation of my visit, I had continued my conversations with Burundi's main partners, namely the World Bank, the IMF, the European Union, the African Development Bank, UN Agencies and bilateral donors. The President and representatives of his Government welcomed this initiative and the opportunity to pursue the policy discussions.



In this regards, on 30 March I co-hosted a **working lunch** together with the Government and the UN Resident Coordinator a.i. on the macro-economic situation, the socio-economic challenges, and on-going responses. The meeting was co-chaired by the Minister of External Relations & International Cooperation personally. Participation from the Government included the Minister of Public Health and the fight against AIDS, Ms. Josiane Nijimbere; the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance; Representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of External Relations. UNCT agencies leading the relevant socio-economic sectors attended as well.

I informed the Government that in my contacts Burundi's international partners had expressed overwhelming readiness to remain engaged for the benefit of the population, but also pointed to certain technical and political obstacles which they encounter in their engagement. Among the problems which the partners had outlined were the new law on NGOs, the authorization of visas for internationals, the shortage of foreign currency and the lack of data.

Both the Government and UN agencies reported developments in the health sector since November, particularly the incidence of malaria which the Government had declared as an epidemic on 13 March, and the deterioration of the food security situation. Reports indicate that in 2016, there have been 8.2 million of cases of malaria, with more than 3,800 deaths. Since the beginning of 2017, 1.8 million cases of malaria have been recorded, and 700 people have died of malaria. The declaration of the malaria epidemic has made it easier for partners to coordinate with the Government and mobilise resources. A multi-sector response plan with a budget of US\$ 42 million was finalized; about 30 million US\$ have already been mobilized.

With regards to food security, reports indicate that an estimated 3 million people are food insecure, of whom 806,000 are severely food insecure and require urgent food assistance.

The Representative of the Ministry of Finance recalled that the macro-economic situation in Burundi was under 3 main types of pressure:

- 1) political considerations that led some donors to suspend direct budget support,



2) the fall in the prices of agricultural commodities, especially coffee and tea that are the main sources of foreign reserves after development assistance, and

3) the impact of climate change. The Representative of the Ministry of Finance noted that the country has 1-2 months of foreign reserves, and that the budget of 2017 was quite restrictive and difficult to implement with the limited foreign reserves available.

Participants in this meeting noted that the Government had not been able to access resources made available by donors through different basket funds to support education, health and access to fertilizers. Participants also discussed the multiple causes of the deepening humanitarian and socioeconomic crisis, gaps and flexibility on modalities of coordination and cooperation, including the option of sectoral instead of direct budget support. The Minister of External Relations indicated that he would convene urgent meetings with the Sectoral Ministries and relevant partners to explore solutions to the issues related to fund availability and implementation.

A number of interlocutors mentioned corruption and economic governance as recurrent challenges that need a particular attention in the current crisis (for instance to enable a rapid and efficient response to the malaria epidemic and to the situation of food insecurity).

At the same time, the Government and the UNCT mentioned encouraging examples of cooperation in various areas such as the recently launched \$40 million-World Bank social safety net program with a focus on family support and the multi-sectoral response plan on malaria. At several points during the meeting, the Government representatives underlined their gratitude for the continuous support by bilateral and multilateral donors.

Minister Nyamitwe emphasized the need to address both humanitarian and development needs as well as macroeconomic stability because of the severe impact that the balance of payments deficit is having on all sectors, deepening the humanitarian and socioeconomic crisis.

This is in line with the conclusions of the preparatory consultations in Geneva of November 2016, which proposed addressing humanitarian and socioeconomic needs in the priority sectors health, food security and education within a broader socioeconomic development framework, including macroeconomic stability, involving the Government and key development partners.



This is an opportune moment given that the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper II (PRSP / CSLP II) expired in December 2016.

I agreed with the Foreign Minister and the UN Resident Coordinator a.i. to continue these conversations in the format of a joint socioeconomic discussion with the Government and its main international partners to be held in Bujumbura, possibly in July.

This meeting shall focus, on the one hand, on the overall macroeconomic situation and the socioeconomic challenges and, on the other hand, on ways to make cooperation between the Government and its international partners more efficient and to overcome existing obstacles.

On 21 April, I went to **Washington DC** in order to pursue my conversation with H.E. Domitien Ndiokubwayo, Burundi's Minister of Finance, Budget and Privatization, who had travelled to DC in order to participate in the Spring Meetings of the International Financial Institutions. I also met Representatives of the World Bank and the IMF in DC and was updated about their latest responses to the socioeconomic situation in Burundi. My interlocutors stated a certain intensification of the contacts between the Government of Burundi and international donors in recent times, but also pointed to the continuing challenges and the need for strengthening the confidence between Burundi and its partners. They welcomed the idea to organize a meeting between the Government and key multilateral partners, possibly this summer in Bujumbura.

(b) Political process and facilitation of inter-Burundian dialogue

On 28 March, before travelling to Burundi, I met H.E. Benjamin Mkapa, former President of Tanzania and Facilitator of the EAC-led Burundi dialogue, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

President Mkapa updated me on the February round of the Arusha talks and the developments since then. While reaffirming that he will continue his efforts, he underscored two important challenges or conditions for his mission to succeed: 1) strong regional and international political support, in particular by the EAC Heads of State; 2) engagement without pre-conditions by the Government and by the political parties of the opposition.



Some of my interlocutors in Bujumbura, including from the opposition, told me that they had appreciated the last round of talks in Arusha, the way it was conducted, the content and the participation. Some interlocutors perceived the presence of the ruling party as an indication of the commitment to the dialogue.

In my meetings with the various political actors I stressed the need to keep the two processes synchronized and in particular to avoid that recommendations and developments arising from the national dialogue inside Burundi outpace the EAC-facilitated dialogue.

From my meeting with the Ombudsman, who is mandated to reach out to the various political Burundian stakeholders, I noted that it is also important to support internal efforts aimed at restoring trust between political actors/forces, with a view to preparing conditions for inclusive, free and fair elections in 2020.

(c) National reconciliation

Like in previous meetings, President Nkurunziza insisted on national reconciliation and on the work of the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR) as a top priority and as the last big chapter of the Arusha Agreements waiting for implementation.

The President of the CVR confirmed that the process of national reconciliation should start soon as it would contribute to addressing some of the root causes of the current crisis. Issues he raised included the appointment of an International Advisory Council, a body provided for by the arrangement that created the CVR. The call for international support to the CVR work was reiterated. In this regards, the presence of OHCHR in Burundi is essential as it has been designated as the UN entity “focal point” for transitional justice; the CVR had worked together with OHCHR and UNDP on a project that would help mobilize UN support to the work of CVR.

I intend to pursue discussions with PBC members and PBSO to ensure that international expertise and financial support needed to fulfill the mandate of the CVR are timely mobilized.



(d) Security, Human Rights and Refugee Situation

Many interlocutors described the security situation in Burundi as much calmer than in 2015-2016. My own perception while moving around in Bujumbura is that security has improved.

However, I also heard about wide-spread fear and repression and received information about an increase in arbitrary arrests and detention. Forced disappearances are still reported; torture and ill-treatment cases continue to be documented. Several interlocutors stated a general atmosphere of impunity.

The MoU between the Government and OHCHR would allow the Office to report on improvements of the human rights situation as well as on allegations of human rights violation. I advocated for this issue to be addressed, and the Government assured me that it will continue negotiations on the MoU with OHCHR.

The AU Special Envoy thanked PBSO for the PBF support the AU received for the deployment of their Human Rights Observers.

In **Dar es Salaam** I was told that the Government of Tanzania had recently changed its policies vis-à-vis the refugees coming from Burundi. Since the beginning of the crisis of 2015, Tanzania has received over 200,000 refugees from Burundi.

Up to 20 January 2017 all Burundian asylum seekers were granted refugee status on prima facie basis. On 24 January 2017, the Government of Tanzania announced the lifting of the prima facie refugee status recognition for refugees and asylum seekers from Burundi.

According to UNHCR and IOM following the revocation of prima facie recognition, at some entry points, particularly in Kagera Region, Tanzanian Immigration authorities have initiated a screening process and have returned to Burundi a number of individuals whom they believe are not in need of international protection. Since then, an increasing number of border points, including those in Kigoma region, have begun initiating this screening of new arrivals, and subsequent return of large numbers of asylum-seekers. The number of border points at which Burundian refugees can cross has been reduced from twelve to three.



UNHCR pointed out that a sustainable return and reintegration of refugees will only occur when there is political and socioeconomic stability and requires regional coordination of policies that avoid forced return and promote peaceful return and reintegration in the communities.

(e) Some projects supported by the PBF

In Bujumbura, I met a group of young people who are supported by UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNV through PBF-funded projects, aimed at fostering social cohesion, violence reduction and community-based reconciliation.

Their stories are compelling and make a good case of prevention despite the limited scope of these interventions. The experiences of these young people reaffirmed my conviction that the work of the Peacebuilding Fund deserves our increased financial and political support. I hope these stories will be shared with a view to demonstrate the impact of such projects and that the PBC can offer a platform for experiences of young people involved in peacebuilding projects.

III. Conclusions

Since my last visit in July 2016, there have been signs of improvement that we all need to sustain. Security in the streets of Bujumbura seems to have improved, especially in terms of reduction of violent attacks. On the other hand reports about grave human rights violations continue, and the economic aspects linked to the crisis continued to worsen.

In general, both the international partners and the Government are still in an engagement mood, and are waiting for significant and sustained signals from each other to reassess positively their cooperation and engagement.

I am grateful for the gestures of openness which the Government recently showed and invite it to further intensify its engagement with international partners and to facilitate and ensure international presence, including by the OHCHR and the African Union. Significant international presence will be a highly credible way to witness further progress in Burundi.

In light of the current situation, the Configuration may support peacebuilding in Burundi in the following ways:



- (a) Encourage all stakeholders to engage fully and participate without pre-conditions in the EAC-led Burundi Dialogue facilitated by President Mkapa. Mobilise international and regional support for President Mkapa's efforts, including through the upcoming EAC Summit;
- (b) Invite the bilateral and multilateral partners of Burundi to carefully consider the economic and fiscal situation of Burundi and to discuss how the cooperation with the Government could become more fruitful and how existing political and technical obstacles could be overcome.

For that purpose, I am planning to organize a socioeconomic discussion with the Government, Burundi's international partners and the UN Country Team, possibly in July in Bujumbura.

- (c) Follow the security and human rights situation in Burundi carefully and encourage the Government and OHCHR to agree on the conditions for the continuation of their cooperation.
- (d) Consider political, financial and technical support for the reconciliation process led by the CVR.
- (e) Consider additional support to grass-roots efforts for peacebuilding through PBF with a view to strengthen resilience, in particular by engaging with youth and women.

Please accept, Excellencies, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Ambassador Jürg Lauber, Chair
UN Peacebuilding Commission
Burundi Configuration