

24 May 2018

Madam President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for inviting me to brief the Security Council on behalf of the PBC Burundi Configuration and for the excellent cooperation between the Council and the Configuration.

As per established practice, this statement has been approved by the Members of the PBC Configuration, including the country concerned, Burundi.

Today's briefing gives me the opportunity to inform you about my latest visit to Burundi which took place in late March, and on developments which occurred after my visit. At the end, I will formulate some recommendations regarding international engagement with Burundi. I briefed the PBC Burundi Configuration about the outcome of my visit on 16 April.

1. Visit to Burundi, 27 – 30 March

From 27 to 30 March, I visited Burundi for the sixth time in my capacity as Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission. The visit allowed me to get a first-hand impression of the situation on the ground, to maintain contact with the Government and other national stakeholders, to advocate for renewed dialogue and cooperation between the Government and its international partners and to identify further avenues for PBC engagement with Burundi. At the time of my visit, the security situation in the country was generally calm.

I was received by H.E. Pierre Nkurunziza, President of the Republic of Burundi; the Minister of External Relations and International Cooperation; the Minister of Finance, Budget and Privatization; the National Independent Electoral Commission; the President of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; leaders of three political parties; the African Union Special



Representative for the Great Lakes region; representatives of the private sector; the UN Country Team; the ICRC; the diplomatic community and a group of economists and historians.

My visit was an opportunity to learn more about the preparation of the **constitutional referendum** which took place on 17 May. [*A reference to the official results of the referendum will be added here once they are available*]. The National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) explained how they are registering voters both for the referendum and the elections of 2020 and how the referendum will be conducted. I underlined in these contacts that the referendum should take place in a democratic and open environment, and without any incidents. I also invited the Government to reflect about whether Burundi may require international electoral assistance for the elections of 2020.

On 29 March, I met leaders of three political parties: The ruling party CNDD-FDD, UPRONA and Agathon Rwasa (Amizero y' Abarundi). They all agreed that Burundi's political actors should define the path towards the elections of 2020 in a **joint roadmap** ("feuille de route"). Such a roadmap would contain some benchmarks aimed at ensuring that the elections will be free, fair, transparent, peaceful, fully inclusive, with the participation of all political parties.

Madam President,

The serious **socioeconomic challenges** which Burundi is facing were another key subject of my conversations.

Government officials called upon Burundi's partners to focus more on mid- and long-term socioeconomic development than on humanitarian assistance.

The Government informed me that it is currently elaborating a new National Development Plan, which might be published before the summer break.

Burundi's international partners reiterated their readiness to support Burundi both with regard to socioeconomic and to humanitarian challenges. They expressed their wish to be informed about the National Development Plan as early as possible in order to adapt their development strategies to national priorities.



Burundi's international partners and representatives of the private sector referred to certain challenges for economic engagement, including the lack of foreign currency and difficulties to obtain bank loans.

In my conversation with the President of the Republic, I emphasized that the PBC remains committed to facilitate dialogue between the Government and its international partners. In that regard, I suggested to organize another round of socioeconomic consultations in Bujumbura, which could involve additional partners such as the IMF, the EU and bilateral donors. Burundi's National Development Plan might serve as a basis for this conversation. The President expressed his interest in the initiative including the participation of additional partners.

During my stay, high-ranking officials from Burundi, Tanzania and UNHCR signed a tripartite agreement on the **return of Burundian refugees** from Tanzania. Priority for repatriation will be given to those 19'148 refugees whose registered intention to return has already been verified by UNHCR.

With regard to the **Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP)** for 2018, the Government repeated its view that the plan contained exaggerated numbers and had not been sufficiently consulted with national authorities. OCHA had launched this plan in February 2018. Its total volume of USD 141.8 million is currently only covered by 2.9%. I told the Government and its humanitarian partners that a swift agreement on the Humanitarian Response Plan will allow to mobilize additional resources. I also offered the PBC Burundi Configuration as a platform to generate broad support for the plan.

When I met the President of the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)**, I learned about the impressive progress made in this area in recent months: The Commission already collected more than 45'000 testimonies and worked in 16 of the 18 provinces of Burundi. Among the challenges, which the commission is facing, are time pressure, the security of data and the question of accountability.

In my meeting with the President of the Republic, I recommended to extend the mandate of the commission by one year, until the end of 2019, in accordance with the Arusha Accord. I indicated that the PBC could help mobilize international technical and financial assistance for reconciliation efforts in Burundi. As in previous meetings, the President insisted on the importance of national



reconciliation. He responded positively to the suggestions to extend the mandate of the Commission and to mobilize international expertise.

2. Developments after my visit

Madam President,

In the last few days, Representatives of the UN Country Team and UN officials in New York informed me about the following recent developments: On 20 April, President Nkurunziza appointed five new Ministers, increasing the cabinet from 20 to 21. Four Ministers were replaced, including Foreign Minister Alain-Aime Nyamitwe who was succeeded by Ezéchiel Nibigira.

The campaign for the constitutional referendum started on May 1. According to various observers, the environment of the campaign and the referendum was relatively calm. At the same time, I received reports about allegations of intimidation and repression against opponents of the constitutional changes.

On 11 May, 26 people were killed in a violent attack in the village in Ruhagarika in northwest Burundi by unidentified perpetrators – an assault which was broadly condemned by national and international actors. The international community continued to follow developments in Burundi attentively and in constructive manner. In view of the constitutional referendum, the African Union and the European Union, in their capacity as guarantors of the Arusha Peace Agreement, encouraged Burundi's Government to respect the spirit and the letter of the Agreement.

I also received an update on the implementation of Human Rights Council resolution 36/2 which had been presented on 28 September 2017 by African countries, including Burundi. The three human rights experts, who had been mandated by this resolution to determine “facts and circumstances” entered Burundi in February. They were, however, not able to conduct their work and left the country after one month. In view of Burundi's support for the resolution and its commitment to cooperation with the three experts, the window of opportunity for this mission is still open. According to UN officials, it would be advisable to conduct the mission as early as possible to allow the three experts to present their report to the Human Rights Council at its next session in June.



3. Recommendations

Madam President

Based on my conversations in Burundi and New York, I am drawing the following conclusions regarding international engagement with Burundi:

- 1) The international community should continue to follow developments in Burundi attentively and take all aspects of the current situation into account. In doing so, there is a need for coherence among UN actors and the international community – including regional and sub-regional actors – and for finding common ground with the government in order to build trust and a better sense of partnership.
- 2) The mediation efforts of the EAC, led by President Museveni of Uganda and by former President Mkapa of Tanzania, continue to deserve our full support.
- 3) The next National Development Plan may offer a basis for a renewed conversation between the Government and its international partners. I am therefore planning to organize another round of the socioeconomic dialogue between Burundi and its partners in 2018, in cooperation with the Government of Burundi and the UN Resident Coordinator. The involvement of partners such as the IMF, the EU and bilateral donors who had not participated in the Bujumbura roundtables in 2017 seems crucial to me. In my view, such a dialogue session has the potential to foster confidence between Burundi and its partners.
- 4) Besides mid- and long-term socioeconomic cooperation, the international community should not neglect the immediate humanitarian needs in Burundi. The Configuration should continue to encourage cooperation between the Government and its humanitarian partners with a view to address the most urgent needs of the population, in particular in the areas of basic social and health services, food security and protection.



5) The significant gains achieved through the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement must not be undermined.

One of the advantages of a roadmap to 2020 among political actors would be that it could yield a broadly shared understanding of how the gains of Arusha can be preserved – namely in the view of the elections of 2020.

6) The international community should continue to support efforts of national reconciliation and follow the ongoing reconciliation process in Burundi attentively.

Many thanks for your attention.