

The President of the Security Council presents his compliments to the members of the Council and has the honour to transmit herewith, for their information, a copy of a **letter dated 24 March 2020 from the Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission** addressed to the President of the Security Council, and its enclosure.

The letter and its enclosure will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/2020/232.

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New York, 24 March 2020

Excellency,

It is my pleasure to share with you, in my capacity as Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), the report of my visit to Burundi from 2 to 6 February 2020.

I remain at the disposal of the Security Council to provide further information and clarifications as may be required. The PBC remains ready to accompany Burundi and to inform the Council on peacebuilding-related developments, as appropriate.

I kindly request that this letter be circulated to the Members of the Security Council and issued as an official document of the Council.

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



H.E. Mr. Jürg Lauber  
Chair  
Burundi Configuration of the  
Peacebuilding Commission

His Excellency  
Mr. Zhang Jun  
President of the Security Council  
New York

To: Members of the Security Council

Subject: **Chair's visit to Burundi, 2-6 February 2020**

1. In my capacity as Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), I visited Burundi from 2 to 6 February 2020. On my way to Burundi, I travelled through Addis Ababa, where I met with senior officials of the African Union. In Burundi, the Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, Ms. Bintou Keita, joined my delegation. The Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) accompanied the visit. I thank the Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations, Ambassador Albert Shingiro, and UN Resident Coordinator Garry Conille and his team for their efforts to organize my program.

2. In line with the conclusions of the meeting of the Burundi Configuration on 27 January 2020, the priorities of my visit were (i) the political situation and possibilities for supporting Burundi in creating the conditions for peaceful, inclusive and transparent elections; (ii) the socio-economic dimension and engagement between Burundi and international partners around the National Development Plan; (iii) national reconciliation, initiatives to prevent and resolve conflict at the community-level, and capacities to ensure the full realization of all human rights; and (iv) the immediate and longer-term needs of the Burundian people, including with regard to the voluntary return and sustainable reintegration of refugees.

3. In Addis Ababa, I met with the Commissioner for Political Affairs, H.E. Minata Samate Cessouma and the Commissioner for Peace and Security, H.E. Smaïl Chergui, of the African Union, as well as with the Permanent Representative of Burundi to the African Union and the Economic Commission for Africa, Ambassador Joël Nkurabagaya. My exchanges in Addis Ababa confirmed the readiness of the African Union (AU) to support Burundi in its peacebuilding priorities before, during and after elections, including through the deployment of AU Human Rights observers and election observation, in consultation with the government of Burundi.

4. In Burundi, I met with H.E. Mr. Ezéchiel Nibigira, Minister of Foreign Affairs; H.E. Domitien Ndiwokubwayo, Minister of Finance; H.E. Martin Nivyabandi, Minister of Human Rights, Social Affairs and Gender; H.E. Aimé Laurentine Kanyana, Minister of Justice; and H.E. Evelyne Butoyi, Minister of Youth; the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) led by its President, Dr.



Pierre Claver Kazihise; the Secretary-General of the ruling party CNDD-FDD, Evariste Ndayishimiye; the First Vice-President of the Republic, Gaston Sindimwo; the President of the *Conseil National pour la Liberté* (CNL), Agathon Rwasa; the designated candidate for the presidential elections of FRODEBU, Léonce Ngendakumana; the World Bank and the African Development Bank; bilateral donors; the UN Country Team, representatives of the private sector, civil society and members of the diplomatic community.

5. The visit also provided the opportunity to meet with the Secretary-General of the East African Community (EAC), Ambassador Libérat Mfumukeko, who led a delegation of the EAC-Secretariat for consultative meetings with key stakeholders in Bujumbura ahead of the announcement by the EAC to observe the May 2020 elections in Burundi.

6. My meetings in Burundi provided important insights into political developments and preparations for the general elections in May 2020, as well as the security, socio-economic and humanitarian situation. The elections are an important milestone for Burundi. High levels of participation, zero tolerance for violence and an outcome that is perceived as legitimate by the Burundian people, and accepted by all participants in the election – winners and losers – are crucial for the consolidation of peace in Burundi, as well as for continued partnership and cooperation around Burundi's peacebuilding and development priorities.

#### *Political developments and preparations for the upcoming elections*

7. The authorities underlined that the security situation was calm and that Burundi was preparing for peaceful and democratic elections. In this context, they highlighted the steady return of refugees from neighboring countries. The Foreign Minister reiterated the government's decision to finance the elections with internal resources and indicated that the necessary infrastructure was in place. He pointed out that the number of candidates for the presidential elections had reached an unprecedented level. Many interlocutors welcomed the nomination of the candidate for the presidential elections by the ruling party CNDD-FDD, which they saw as confirmation of the decision by H.E. President Pierre Nkurunziza not to stand for re-election. In my interactions with representatives of different political parties, they reaffirmed without exception their intent to participate in the upcoming elections and expressed their hope for a peaceful, fair and transparent process. Several interlocutors stressed the importance for all political stakeholders to be able to gather freely with their constituencies in order to guarantee an inclusive electoral process.



8. The National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) informed about the publication on 3 February 2020 of the definitive list of registered voters, with a total of 5'126'351, including 12'933 from the diaspora. On the list of registered voters, the women outnumber the men. According to the CENI, around 117'000 returned refugees were registered before the deadline. With regard to election observation, the CENI indicated their readiness to receive the consultative mission led by the Secretary-General of the EAC. In addition, they highlighted the accreditation of around forty civil society organizations and the invitation to personnel accredited with diplomatic missions in Burundi to observe the elections. Several interlocutors pointed out the role of *mandataires*, which are nominated by their parties to be deployed as poll-watchers on Election Day. In accordance with the Electoral Code, political parties may deploy a maximum of two *mandataires* per polling station to observe election proceedings. I learned that there are approximately 18'000 polling stations countrywide. Representatives of several political parties highlighted the need for support for the preparation, training and deployment of their poll-watchers. The authorities pointed out that support by the government depended on the availability of resources, as stated in the Electoral Code. Any additional support would have to be disbursed equally to all political parties without discrimination.

9. In my meetings with the authorities, I reiterated the readiness of the PBC to support Burundi in its efforts to ensure peaceful, inclusive and transparent elections. I welcomed activities initiated by the government and the CENI to this effect, which include engagement with youth. I was encouraged to hear the Minister of Justice speak of plans to extend the work of women mediators beyond the seven provinces in which they are currently active. I underlined the importance for all initiatives to be inclusive and open to all stakeholders, regardless of political affiliation. I also commended public declarations by the authorities condemning violent incidents, and insisted on the need for all stakeholders to be able to engage in the upcoming electoral campaign freely and without fear for their security.

#### *Cooperation in the area of socio-economic development*

10. While election preparations were at the center of most discussions, my visit also highlighted the need for continued attention to Burundi's socio-economic development. The authorities stressed the centrality of the National Development Plan and invited the United Nations, through the PBC and the UN Country Team, to serve as a bridge between Burundi and its partners in mobilizing the necessary resources for its implementation. The Minister of Finance insisted that cooperation must not come to a halt during the electoral process. He highlighted the importance



of socio-economic development to create a conducive environment for peaceful elections. Several interlocutors mentioned poverty reduction, education and initiatives to reduce unemployment, in particular among youth, as imperatives for the country in the months and years ahead. Some partners highlighted the exceptional resilience observed in the context of Burundi, while also sharing their concerns about the consequences if this resilience reaches its limits.

11. I reassured the authorities that I would convey the call to avoid any slowdown in cooperation with the same urgency upon my return to New York. At the same time, I stressed how important it was for the authorities at all levels to facilitate cooperation programs and projects, and to ensure access of the relevant goods and services to the population in need anywhere in the country. In this regard, I reiterated the availability of the PBC to serve as a platform for cooperation on socio-economic issues during and after the electoral cycle.

12. I was encouraged to hear about ongoing cooperation with the World Bank and the African Development Bank as well as with bilateral partners. The government is also working closely with the UN Country Team and has made notable progress in the rollout of a multi-sectoral strategy to tackle chronic malnutrition. With a current portfolio upwards of 10 million USD, the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) supports peacebuilding initiatives in the areas of localized conflict resolution and prevention, empowerment of youth and women, as well as displacement and returns. The authorities expressed their appreciation for the multidimensional support provided through the PBF and welcomed the particular attention paid to women, youth, social cohesion and the voluntary return of refugees. Revised terms of reference for a Sectoral Sub-Group on Peacebuilding, which brings together the government, national and international partners to ensure coherence between peacebuilding initiatives and the National Development Plan, were signed recently.

13. At the same time, the immediate and longer-term needs of the population require sustained attention. Climate change adversely affects the population, as torrential rainfalls and floods have led to the displacement of over 12'000 people in December 2019. Natural disasters have led to high numbers of internally displaced persons at the start of 2020 compared to the previous year. The UN Country Team commended the close cooperation with the government in finalizing the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2020, which is expected to require financing at a level of around 114 million USD. It estimates the number of people in need at 1.7 million.



### *Final observations and recommendations*

14. My interlocutors in Burundi were unanimous in their appreciation of the importance of the upcoming elections for the future of their country, and united in their wish for a credible, inclusive, transparent and peaceful electoral process. This is a crucial moment for the international community to remain engaged in support of these aspirations, while respecting the sovereign decision of Burundi to finance the elections by its own means. The region and the subregion in particular should be encouraged to assist where called for, and supported in their endeavors.

15. In this context, I see a continued role for the PBC to support, where possible, the government of Burundi, political parties and other stakeholders in creating a conducive environment for peaceful, inclusive and transparent elections. As Burundi is preparing for a political transition, the PBC can serve as a platform to mobilize support and build partnerships in line with the country's priorities, in particular opportunities for youth. Any transition, everywhere, holds the promise of new beginnings, but also raises expectations on all sides. I believe the PBC provides a space for Burundi and its international partners to respond to these expectations in a constructive dialogue.

16. Based on my recent visit, my recommendations are as follows:

(1) Transparency and credibility are of key importance to all stakeholders taking part in the upcoming elections. While the primary responsibility lies with the authorities and the CENI, I encourage them to engage with relevant regional bodies for electoral observation to bolster transparency and enhance trust in the process. I also see an opportunity for partners to engage with the government of Burundi on the question of support to poll-watchers ("*mandataires*") in terms of training, preparation and the logistics for them to deploy throughout the country.

(2) Leaders at national and community level play an important role in ensuring a conducive environment for a peaceful political transition. I call on the government of Burundi, the CENI and all political stakeholders to take a strong stance against any form of hate speech and intimidation, and to insist on zero tolerance for violence. Violent incidents and human rights violations must be properly investigated and those responsible prosecuted.

(3) Initiatives to promote social cohesion and dialogue among all stakeholders at the community, provincial and national levels should be supported and where possible expanded. These include the work of women mediators, as well as efforts by civil society and faith-based groups to engage with youth across political affiliations.



(4) The UN system and the PBC should continue supporting Burundi in protecting and promoting the full realization of all human rights, including through the work carried out by national institutions and the implementation of the recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review.

(5) I encourage bilateral and multilateral partners and the Government of Burundi to continue their dialogue on the implementation of Burundi's National Development Plan 2018-2027, as well as with a view to create conducive conditions for the resumption of suspended assistance.

(6) The electoral period must not deflect attention from acute and chronic needs of the population. I encourage authorities at all levels to facilitate cooperation to meet those needs and to ensure access of providers of relevant goods and services throughout the country. I also urge donors to respond rapidly to the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2020.

(7) The orderly and voluntary return of Burundian refugees remains a key issue, which requires additional funding in order to enable the voluntary and dignified return of refugees and to support their sustainable reintegration.

I have informed the Member States of the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission about the outcomes of my visit on 25 February 2020.

At the time of this letter (19 March), the Burundi authorities have not reported any cases of COVID-19.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Members of the Security Council for their continuous support to the Configuration and their interest.