

11 May 2015

To : Members of the PBC – Burundi Configuration

**Informal meeting of the Burundi Specific Configuration of the
PBC, New York, 11 May 2015**

Chair's Summary

On Monday, 11 May 2015, from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm, an informal meeting of the Country - Specific Configuration on Burundi of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC Burundi Configuration) took place at UN Headquarters under the chairmanship of H.E. Ambassador Paul Seger, Chair of the Burundi Configuration. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the most appropriate means to prevent further escalation of the violence that had erupted since 26 April, and to support a peaceful and credible electoral process in Burundi. Mr. Saïd Djinnit, Special Envoy of the Secretary General to the Great Lakes Region (SESG), briefed the Configuration on the situation on the ground and on his efforts to mediate a dialogue and to help de-escalate the violence. Burundi's Minister of Interior, Mr. Edouard Nduwimana, also addressed the Configuration. Mr. Agostinho Zacarias, UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator, briefed the Configuration on the scope of the humanitarian challenges as well as on the UN's response. Ambassador Albert Shingiro, Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations, addressed the Configuration as well, followed by a statement by the ASG for Peacebuilding Support. The meeting was interactive, and the delegates of Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Chile, France, Kenya, Tanzania, the UK, and the EU asked questions and/or made statements.

SESG Djinnit provided an overview over developments that had taken place since the announcement of President Nkurunziza on 25 April 2015 to run for a third presidential term. He mentioned that about 700 people had been arrested as a result of the demonstrations and that more than 50,000 had left the country to neighbouring States. He also indicated that there were allegations against elements of the CNDD-FDD's youth wing operating within the Police. He further indicated that some private radio stations had been prevented from broadcasting. The SESG underlined that the situation remained tense, with daily demonstrations and violence resulting in loss of lives, injuries and restrictions of movement. He also mentioned that the Government had issued arrest warrants against leaders of the "anti-third term" movement. The SESG warned that, despite the start of the official electoral campaign period for the legislative and communal elections and the announcement of eight candidates for the presidency, violence could undermine the electoral process.

The SESG also briefed on his mediation efforts. He said that over the last weeks he had been engaging with all major national stakeholders, encouraging them to address their differences through dialogue. He also noted that he had met with regional delegations, most notably the EAC's Foreign Ministers. He said that he participated in the dialogue session convened by the Minister of Interior on 5 and 6 May 2015, during which he was asked to facilitate closed consultations between the Minister of Interior, the ruling party, opposition parties, civil society leaders, religious figures and former Presidents. Mr. Djinnit said that he identified five agenda items for the dialogue: i) appeasement and mutual commitment; ii) management of the electoral process; iii) guarantees for peaceful, transparent and inclusive elections; iv) respect of Arusha Accord and of the Constitution [reference to the issue of the "third term"]; v) constitutional rights and freedoms. He noted that while participants had lengthy discussions on measures to reduce tensions and violence, discussions had stalled on the issue of the "third term" with the ruling party, the opposition and civil society not giving in on their position. The SESG explained that civil society representatives did not attend the discussions on 6 May in the afternoon. The SESG also referred to the statement he had issued on 7 May condemning the escalation of the violence. He concluded by indicating that he would be attending the EAC Summit on 13 May, and most likely the ICGLR meeting of 18 May.

Following SESG Djinnit, Mr. Agostinho Zacarias, UN Resident Coordinator, briefed on the humanitarian situation. He indicated that the UN estimated that about 50'000 people had taken refuge in neighbouring countries (26'000 in Rwanda; 17'000 in Tanzania; 7'000 in the DRC). He noted that many unknowns remained, mainly with regard to a recent upsurge in the flow of refugees into Tanzania and that the UN was expecting a further worsening of the situation. He stated that the UN had come up with a humanitarian contingency plan and had requested 11.6 million USD for its emergency response. He also highlighted that because of the unrests, only around 50% of UN staff showed up at work, putting a further strain on its response capacity.

The Minister of Interior, Mr. Edouard Nduwimana, downplayed the extent of the crisis. He underlined that the security situation was only tense in a couple of the capital's neighbourhoods with the rest of the country remaining calm. In line with his Government's position, he labelled the demonstrators as "insurrectionists". He defended the temporary measure of shutting down certain private radio stations since they were being politically instrumentalized. On the humanitarian situation, he challenged the figures provided by the UN by saying that the Government's figures amounted to 36'000 refugees. He also noted that some were already returning to the country. On the political track, he underscored that the Government remained committed to dialogue and the electoral process. He said that the issue of the "third mandate" had been settled legally by the Constitutional Court and invited opposition parties to challenge it politically at the ballot boxes. In response to various questions from Configuration members, the Minister denied any involvement of the Imbonerakure in acts of violence, dismissed their categorization as militia and accused members of the opposition youth wings to foment violence.

The Chair and members of the PBC Burundi Configuration thanked the SESG, the Minister of Interior and the RC for their briefings. They deplored the consequences of the violence, including the loss of lives, the destruction of goods and properties. They condemned unequivocally the use of violence by any side and called upon the collective responsibility of all parties to restore calm and refrain from using inflammatory language or hate speech. They recalled that it is the ultimate responsibility of the Government and of its security forces to impartially protect all its citizens, and stressed that human rights and public freedoms, including the freedoms of expression, peaceful association and assembly must be respected.

Members further expressed deep concern about the involvement of youth wings affiliated to political parties in violent acts, and called for an immediate halt to their political instrumentalization. They also called for the disarmament of the civilian population in view of indications that lethal weapons had been used during the demonstrations. Members recalled the imperative to eradicate impunity, and recommended that the competent authorities have the responsibility to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of crimes and human rights violations in an impartial manner. While members expressed divergent views on the Constitutional Court's decision on 4 May 2015 regarding the candidacy of President Nkurunziza for the presidential elections, members agreed on encouraging Burundians to express their grievances through non-violent means, and on appealing the main stakeholders to re-establish dialogue and to work together in good faith to ensure a free, transparent, credible, inclusive and peaceful electoral process. In this context, participants welcomed and expressed full support to on-going high-level regional and international engagement in Burundi, particularly by the African Union, the East African Community and the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region, and by the UN, through the Special Envoy of the Secretary General to the Great Lakes Region, Mr. Saïd Djinnit, and MENU, aimed at stopping the violence and bring on track the electoral process. They welcomed the upcoming Extraordinary Summit of the East African Community's Heads of State in Dar-es-Salaam on 13 May 2015. Participants further encouraged SESG Djinnit and the UN to take advantage of the funding provided by the Peacebuilding Fund to support political dialogue among political parties, as well as women and youth engagement in political activities. They fully backed the SESG role in mediating the crisis.

Configuration members expressed serious concerns caused by the humanitarian challenges, particularly the high numbers of Burundian people seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. In this context, they commended the efforts of Burundi's neighbours and the UN agencies for their assistance provided to these refugees. They expressed hope that the Government will create a conducive environment for the safe return of those who fled.

Upon recommendation by the Chair, participants supported in principle the project of a statement by the Configuration, which, in essence, would support the work of SESG Djinnit, regional organisations efforts and initiatives, and that would encourage Burundians to stop violence from further escalating and to engage in a dialogue towards the holding of fair, peaceful and inclusive

elections. In view of the upcoming Extraordinary Summit of the East African Community's Heads of State in Dar-es-Salaam on 13 May 2015, participants agreed to work towards issuing the PBC statement after the Summit with the possibility to support its outcome. The Chair announced that he would circulate a draft statement, with the aim to issue the statement on Thursday, 14 May evening; the Chair also noted that he would convene another informal meeting of the Configuration on Friday, 15 May to get a briefing on the Summit of Dar-es-Salaam

[N.B. The proposed plan of action has in the meantime been overtaken by an attempted coup in Bujumbura on 13 May 2015.]
