

18 November 2015

To: Members of the Peacebuilding Commission, Burundi Configuration

Subject: **Chair's visit to Burundi, 9 – 14 November 2015**

Dear colleagues,

From 9 to 14 November, I undertook my first visit to Burundi, Uganda and Tanzania in my capacity as Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). The objective of my visit was to establish contacts with the Government of Burundi, other national stakeholders, regional and international partners, to gain a better understanding of the current political crisis, and to learn about the Government's plans to address the crisis and other related initiatives. I further explored opportunities for the PBC's engagement, both in response to immediate conflict prevention needs and in support to medium and long-term peacebuilding priorities.

During my visit in Bujumbura, I met the President of the Republic, H.E Pierre Nkurunziza; the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-Presidents of the Republic; the Minister of External Relations and International Cooperation; the President of the ruling party CNDD-FDD (who is also the President of the National Assembly); the First Vice-President of the National Assembly; members of the National Commission for Inter-Burundian Dialogue; the National Independent Human Rights Commission; leaders of opposition parties; the Special Envoy of the African Union for the Great Lakes Region; representatives of civil society organizations and women's associations; members of the diplomatic community; the Country Manager of the World Bank; the Country Representative of ICRC, and representatives of the UN family, both MENUB and the UN Country Team.

On the evening of the first day of my visit, I participated via VTC in a meeting of the UN Security Council on Burundi and briefed the Members of the Council on my visit.

From Bujumbura, I continued my trip to Kampala, Uganda, where I met the Minister of Defense, H.E. Crispus Kiyonga, who is leading the EAC-mediation process on behalf of President Museveni on 12 November. I also met members of the diplomatic community. On 13-14 November, I traveled to Dar es Salaam, where I discussed the situation in Burundi with



representatives of the Government of Tanzania in their capacity as Chair of the East African Community (EAC) in 2015, with a member of the EAC Legislative Assembly, with the World Bank Country Director (who covers Tanzania, Burundi, Malawi and Somalia from Dar-es-Salaam), UN agencies and members of the diplomatic community.

My discussions were organized around four main issues: (a) the security situation, ongoing violence and violations of human rights; (b) dialogue initiatives; (c) the socio-economic impact of the current crisis and (d) partnership with regional and international actors.

### *Security situation and ongoing violence*

While there is overall recognition of a situation of insecurity and violence, there are significant gaps in the assessment of its magnitude and associated risks, as well as divergent views on the responsibilities. I was provided with statistics, indicating about 250 deaths directly related to the escalation of violence since the end of April 2015. Governmental officials acknowledged the existence of security problems in some areas of Bujumbura; they indicated that the Government is addressing these problems.<sup>1</sup> They expressed regrets that the international community is not paying sufficient attention to violence caused by anti-governmental actors and to the victims among the ranks of the Burundian security forces. A senior Government official noted that a significant number of police officers had been killed.

Beyond the numbers and the divergent views on responsibilities, I noted the risk for violence to spiral out of control and to take root (especially in some neighborhoods of Bujumbura, but also outside of the capital) if it was not urgently addressed. I also noted with much regret that political manipulation of youth by all sides is a key feature of the situation of violence in Burundi. Most of the perpetrators and the victims are young people.

Civil society organizations described the political climate as increasingly repressive; they reported on threats against civil society actors, on numerous human rights violations including extrajudicial executions and detentions. UN representatives in Bujumbura stated that the current insecurity had compelled them to limit their activities; they had to reduce office hours in order to ensure that employees can be at home before nightfall and they restricted travelling to the provinces. Since April two staff members of International Organizations operating in Burundi lost their lives in violent incidents due to the current crisis.

I appealed to all stakeholders to refrain from violence. I reiterated that the Government is responsible of the security and safety of all its citizens. In this regard, I encouraged international

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<sup>1</sup> During the time of my mission, the Government was conducting a disarmament operation in the neighborhoods of Bujumbura where violence had been most acute.



and regional assistance for de-escalation measures such as the disarmament of armed groups according to international best practices. I also cautioned against inflammatory rhetoric, perceived or real, from any side, which could incite hatred among different groups of Burundian society and reverse the gains in social cohesion achieved over the last ten years.

At its meeting of 9 November and in the subsequent Resolution 2248 adopted on 12 November, the UN Security Council reiterated deep concern about the ongoing escalation of insecurity and violence in Burundi; it strongly condemned increasing killings, increased cases of human rights violations and abuses committed both by security forces and by militias and other illegal armed groups. It called on the Government and all parties to reject violence, and demanded that all sides refrain from any action that could threaten peace and stability.

Finally, from my conversations with Government's officials and with African Ambassadors, I sensed a deficit of trust among neighboring countries with regards to alleged support to armed groups. Such an atmosphere of suspicion could reverse the gains of stability and economic development the region had been achieving, and, while this is not an area in which the PBC is competent, I conclude that there is a need of high level engagement aimed at rebuilding confidence within the region.

### *Dialogue initiatives*

The crisis has deepened the mistrust among the political class in Burundi. Opposition leaders expressed deep concern about the shrinking political space and continued harassment. Civil society organisations expressed concern that the Arusha Agreement might be called into question by the Government, including through the national dialogue. The representatives of the Government and of the ruling party regretted the attempt by the opposition to challenge the results of the elections of 2015 and said it had destabilized the country.

There is overall agreement that dialogue is crucial to de-escalate the current situation; and yet there are opposing perspectives on the content, the scope, the approach and the structure of such a dialogue. The Government is of the view that the inter-Burundian dialogue will be led by the ad hoc Commission appointed by the President. In response to criticism about the insufficient inclusiveness of the dialogue and the credibility of the Commission, the highest authorities maintained that the newly appointed National Commission for inter-Burundian Dialogue (CNDI) shall consult with Burundians within and outside of the country. Furthermore President Nkurunziza, Government representatives, and the leadership of the CNDI welcomed support to the Commission by regional and international partners. It is my impression that there is indeed an opportunity to advise the CNDI and address the credibility challenge; the Commission is at a very early stage of design and planning, and the Chair and his team requested the PBC to help mobilize funding and appeared to be open to technical assistance that would ensure that the national dialogue is conducted in a credible and professional way.



I expressed my hope that the government will engage in an inclusive and genuine dialogue in order to restore trust among the Burundian people, and I confirmed our readiness to offer support to the inter-Burundian dialogue as requested. The exact content and modalities of such support will have to be further discussed between the Commission and relevant UN entities.

I further suggested that the inter-Burundian dialogue and Uganda's mediation efforts should complement each other. In my conversation with Minister Kiyonga, he underlined his readiness to fulfill the mediation mandate assigned to President Museveni by the East African Community (EAC). He reported on his recent contacts with Bujumbura. Minister Kiyonga expressed appreciation for the support he had been receiving from the UN for his mandate and said he would welcome further offers of UN support. On 13 November, the day after our meeting, Minister Kiyonga traveled to Bujumbura where he participated in the inaugural session of the CNDI.

In Dar es Salaam, Governmental officials, including Ambassador Liberata Mulamula, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation and former Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), underlined the relevance of regional initiatives, in particular the EAC-led mediation. My Tanzanian interlocutors also emphasized their readiness to cooperate with international actors in efforts to overcome the current crisis in Burundi.

In my meetings with local organisations in Bujumbura that have been supporting dialogue initiatives, including through a project funded by the Peacebuilding Fund, I was reminded that even in the middle of the crisis, community-based and local initiatives continue to maintain the communication among the political parties and to prevent violence in neighborhoods from further spiraling. Activities reported to me include a women mediators' initiative supported by UN Women, an exchange between Burundian youth groups and their counterparts in Kenya, supported by ACCORD. I wish to highlight these initiatives and suggest that the inter-Burundian dialogue builds on their experiences, results and expertise.

#### *Socio-economic impact of the current crisis*

The humanitarian impact of the crisis is mainly reflected by the statistics on the refugees. UNHCR reported that 207'000 people were currently displaced to neighboring countries (most of them to Tanzania and Rwanda). In addition, several hundred thousand people were reported to be affected by food insecurity. Governmental officials warned against the impact of sanctions and aid cuts on the most vulnerable populations.

The World Bank is following the impact of the crisis attentively. My visit coincided with a joint IMF/WB mission that was evaluating data in order to gain a better idea of the economic situation. The WB Country Manager indicated that existing reports on negative growth of 7% were not confirmed, and that the IMF/WB mission would provide more accurate figures. He noted that the



agricultural sector had performed well, while services such as hotel and airline transportation had underperformed since the beginning of the crisis. In response to a decrease in revenues, the Government had lowered expenses, which negatively impacted on social programs, in particular the health sector. Furthermore, there was a risk for continued increase in security expenses if the security situation was not addressed. He also indicated that the crisis had had exacerbated the situation of unemployment, and that farmers were facing difficulties to distribute their products. The World Bank was working with the Government to ensure that resources were secured for the health sector. The Country Director in Dar es Salaam welcomed further interaction with the Configuration in order to identify opportunities of cooperation.

#### *Partnership with regional and international actors*

While my interlocutors highlighted a deficit of trust between the Government of Burundi and many of its international partners that resulted from the current crisis, I sensed a will to restore this trust. Members of the Government shared their frustration about what they considered as unfair treatment by their partners. They regretted some aspects of the recent AU/PSC decisions, and of the EU sanctions. In October, the EU invited Burundi to consultations “in accordance with the procedure provided for under Article 96 of the EU-ACP Partnership Agreement” (“Cotonou-Agreement”). The Government of Burundi was examining this invitation during my visit to Burundi. I encouraged them to respond positively to the invitation as it provided an opportunity for a frank dialogue with one of their most important partners.

In its Resolution 2248 of 12 November, the UN Security Council calls for an inclusive dialogue to resolve the current crisis in Burundi. The Government of Burundi welcomed the resolution, saying that its content is in line with the government’s determination to resolve the crisis, including the promotion of dialogue.

Furthermore, and as mentioned previously, other partners of Burundi I talked to in Bujumbura, in Kampala and in Dar es Salaam reiterated their readiness to cooperate and assist Burundi to overcome the current crisis and to mitigate its impact. My sense is that countries and organizations are still committed to Burundi, and that there is an opportunity to restore trust and work together in resolving the current crisis and beyond.

#### *Concluding remarks and way forward*

A three-day stay in the capital does not allow a comprehensive assessment of the security situation. I perceived a high level of tension and distrust. After nightfall the streets are almost empty and after 10pm a curfew is in place. While the roadblocks and checkpoints erected are an indication of the security situation, I noticed that citizens keep going by their daily activities, displaying a sense of resilience despite the atmosphere of fear.



My overall impression is that Burundi and its partners still have a window of opportunity to address the current situation that requires a sense of urgency, coordinated approach and a spirit of compromise.

The decisions of the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC) of 17 October 2015, in combination with Security Council Resolution 2248 of 12 November 2015, provide an international and regional framework to addressing the current crisis in Burundi.

It is important to think about a combination of immediate response to the escalation of violence in some areas with a long-term strategy of disarmament and violence reduction. Such a strategy should specifically look at youth engagement.

The National Commission for inter-Burundian dialogue, together with the EAC mediation led by Uganda, provide the main tools to initiate and conduct an inclusive dialogue. It is important to alleviate the mutual mistrust around these two tools and to use them in complementarity as recommended by the Security Council and as reflected in the positive spirit my interlocutors in Bujumbura and in the region demonstrated.

UN Security Council resolution 2248 of 12 November welcomes the continued engagement of the Burundi Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, and encourages the continued cooperation between the Government of Burundi and the Peacebuilding Commission. I received a similar echo from the Government of Burundi. President Nkurunziza positively referred to the work done by my predecessor Ambassador Paul Seger and expressed his expectation that I would provide the same type of accompaniment to peacebuilding in Burundi.

As we work together with the Burundian Government and people, I will intensify my engagement with the members of the Configuration to address this crisis, and to help bring together those who have relevant contributions to offer. In this regard, I will continue my consultations with Permanent Representatives of EAC countries in New York, with the AU, with the EU and other partners. I will also work with the PBSO to mobilise the relevant expertise and capacity within the UN, in support to peacebuilding activities that are relevant to the current crisis, including disarmament and reduction of violence, human rights, dialogue, women and youth engagement. These elements will also be taken into consideration in the elaboration of a new work plan for the Configuration.

I will further continue my engagement with the WB and other IFIs with a view to better understanding the economic impact of the crisis and start planning our support to the elaboration of the next Burundi Poverty Reduction Strategy.

The Government asked me to help restore trust with international partners, to be a bridge. I will do my best to play this role, keeping in mind that progress in the two areas of security and dialogue will facilitate my role. I intend to travel back to Burundi and to the region in January-February 2016.



The people of Burundi deserve a peaceful, prosperous life in harmony and national unity, and I sincerely wish that the country overcomes its present crisis for a brighter future. I thank the government of Burundi for its hospitality and the confidence it put in my role. My gratitude also goes to the members of the Burundi Configuration for their strong support as well as to the UN Secretariat, PBSO and UN staff both in New York and in Burundi for their valuable assistance.

Ambassador Jürg Lauber, Chair  
UN Peacebuilding Commission  
Burundi Configuration