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To: Members of the Security Council

Subject: **Chair's visit to Burundi, 5 – 10 May 2019**

Mr. President

Members of the Council,

I have the honor to inform the Council today about **my recent visit to Burundi**, in my capacity as Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission from 5 to 10 May 2019.

As per established practice, this statement has been approved by the 54 Members of the PBC Configuration, including the country concerned, Burundi.

In line with the priorities identified together with the Members of the Configuration, I focused on the following issues during my recent visit:

- The political situation and possibilities for supporting Burundi on the path towards free, fair, inclusive and peaceful elections in 2020;
- The socio-economic dimension and engagement between Burundi and international partners around the priorities identified in Burundi's National Development Plan 2018-2027;
- National reconciliation and local-level conflict-resolution initiatives;
- The immediate and longer-term needs of the Burundian people, including with regard to the voluntary return and sustainable reintegration of refugees.

In Bujumbura, I met with H.E. Mr. Ezéchiel Nibigira, Minister of Foreign Affairs; H.E. Mr. Martin Nivyabandi, Minister of Human Rights, Social Affairs and Gender; the Permanent Secretaries of the Ministries of Finance and Defense as well as the Assistant to the Minister for Public Security; Lieutenant-General Silas Ntigurirwa, Permanent Secretary of the National Security Council; H.E.



Mr. Pascal Nyabenda, President of the National Assembly, accompanied by the two Deputy Speakers, the Hon. Agathon Rwaswa and the Hon. Jocky-Chantal Nkurunziza; the Hon. Edouard Nduwimana, Ombudsman; representatives of the opposition parties; representatives of the Office of the Special Envoy of the United Nations H.E. Mr. Michel Kafando; H.E. Mr. Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region; H.E. Mr. Basile Ikouebe, Special Representative of the African Union for the Great Lakes Region; representatives of the private sector, civil society and the diplomatic community; bilateral and multilateral donors; and the UN Country Team.

I want to thank Ambassador Albert Shingiro, the Permanent Representative of Burundi and UN Resident Coordinator Garry Conille and his team for their efforts to organize my program.

My visit to Burundi confirmed the impression that the **upcoming elections in 2020** are already absorbing considerable attention. I considered it important to hear the views of a wide range of interlocutors on the electoral process, given its implications for peacebuilding.

The authorities informed me that all instruments and processes required for a successful conduct of the elections are in place and that Burundi will finance the elections with its own resources. The electoral code was adopted by the members of the national assembly, including the president of the new opposition party *Congrès National pour la Liberté (CNL)*, Agathon Rwaswa, by 105 votes out of 108. The authorities reiterated that H.E. President Pierre Nkurunziza would not stand as a candidate in the elections. With regard to preparations for the peaceful conduct of the elections, the need for technical support, for instance in the areas of police training and security sector reform, was mentioned. I was informed that the independent national election commission (CENI) would invite observers from international and regional organizations to the elections.

The interlocutors I met from some of the opposition parties reiterated their intent to participate in the 2020 elections. They highlighted the advanced state of preparations for the elections and underscored the need for an inclusive process. A number of interlocutors voiced concerns over difficulties encountered by members of the opposition parties to gather freely. Some interlocutors expressed concerns over recent measures against two foreign media that allegedly violated national regulations according to the national authority.

During my stay in Bujumbura, the authorities confirmed that the **security situation** in the country was calm and stable. They highlighted that the situation in the country did not pose a threat to



international peace and security. During my visit, no security incidents were reported and the streets of Bujumbura were busy with people and activity.

However, a number of interlocutors voiced concerns about alleged violent incidents and human rights violations that are not properly investigated and prosecuted.

The Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights in Bujumbura was closed at the end of February at the request of the authorities. The Minister for Human Rights, Social Affairs and Gender confirmed Burundi's readiness to engage in technical cooperation with international human rights bodies and highlighted the ongoing work on the implementation of the recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Burundi in the Human Rights Council. The National Independent Commission for Human Rights (CNIDH), under new leadership since April 2019, expressed its readiness to cooperate with relevant partners in order to promote and protect the full spectrum of human rights in Burundi.

My visit also offered the opportunity to follow up on the **socio-economic dialogue** with the Government and Burundi's international partners, which has been a priority for the Configuration over the past years. The authorities expressed their satisfaction with the successful outcome of the high-level side event on nutrition organized by the Ministry of Finance with bilateral and multilateral partners in the margins of the Spring Meetings of the World Bank and the IMF in Washington D.C. in April. Regarding the implementation of Burundi's National Development Plan 2018-2027 (NDP), the authorities expressed the intent to mobilize external resources to complement internal funds and indicated that preparations for a substantive dialogue on the NDP with bilateral and multilateral partners were underway.

A field trip to a project supported by the Peacebuilding Fund, which is jointly implemented by UNWOMEN, IOM and UNDP, highlighted the important work carried out by a group of **women mediators** to mitigate tensions and resolve conflicts at the community level. The powerful testimonies shared by these women showed the importance of accompanying mediation efforts with income-generating activities in order to strengthen resilience and empower women to take on their role in the consolidation of peace and to participate fully in the political sphere.

Some improvement compared to the previous year was noted with regard to meeting the **immediate and longer-term needs of the population**. Important funding requirements nevertheless persist, including for the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). A concern expressed by some interlocutors was the need to ensure that the implementation of programs and projects



would not suffer delays as the administration's focus increasingly turns to the elections. The important role of non-governmental organizations in the delivery of assistance was highlighted as well as the need to enable them to operate freely, in line with relevant national legislation and international standards.

I further had the opportunity to follow up on the **return of refugees** to Burundi from neighbouring countries with Government representatives and with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). UNHCR is assisting refugees in Burundi as well as people who voluntarily repatriate to Burundi, primarily from Tanzania. The protection and assistance to refugees, the sustainable reintegration of those who choose to return as well as of internally displaced people remains a core concern and funding requirements remain acute in this area.

Based on the experience of my recent visit, my **conclusions and recommendations** are the following:

- (1) Free, fair, inclusive and peaceful **elections in 2020**, the results of which enjoy high legitimacy both inside the country and internationally, are crucial to ensure favorable conditions for lasting peace and stability as well as for continued partnership and cooperation around Burundi's development priorities. I encourage the government of Burundi, political parties and other stakeholders, with the support of the Member States of the sub-region and building on previous efforts, to create the conditions that support this outcome. I further encourage the Government of Burundi and international partners to identify rapidly which **forms of assistance** are desirable and feasible with a view to supporting the preparation and conduct of the 2020 elections.
- (2) The electoral period should not lead to a slowdown in the **socioeconomic development** of the country. I encourage the Government and its international partners to pursue a substantive dialogue on the implementation of the National Development Plan and to build on the successful partnership that was formed around the event on nutrition in Washington D.C.. I also encourage bilateral and multilateral partners and the Government of Burundi to continue their dialogue with a view to create conducive conditions for the resumption of suspended assistance.



- (3) I encourage Member States, UN partners and Burundi to work together to create a conducive environment for the **full realization of all human rights**, including by exploring opportunities for further engagement and support at all levels.
- (4) Initiatives to promote **reconciliation and dialogue** among all stakeholders, including at the community level, play a crucial role in reducing tensions during the electoral period, in strengthening resilience beyond the elections and in helping to preserve the gains achieved through the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation agreement. Building on insights gained from programs such as the women mediators' network, support to local-level initiatives, in particular with regard to the empowerment of women and youth, should be continued and expanded.
- (5) 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. UNHCR and its partners engaged in this important effort should be given adequate resources, accompaniment and support by the international community.

A written report of my visit has been shared with the Member States of the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission and discussed at the last meeting of the Configuration on 12 June 2019.

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