

10 July, 2014

To : Members of the PBC – Burundi Configuration

**Informal meeting of the Burundi Specific Configuration of the
PBC, New York, 09 July 2014**

Chair's Summary

On Wednesday, 09 July March 2014, from 11:30 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 hear a briefing by Ivan Šimonović, ASG for Human Rights, on his visit to Burundi from 24-27 June. Mr. Sam Ibok, Director, Africa I Division in the Department of Political Affairs, also provided an update on the BNUB transition process. The government of Burundi was represented by H.E. Ambassador Herménégilde Niyonzima, Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations in New York.

The objectives of ASG Šimonović visit were to assess the country's human rights situation and discuss the human rights presence after the end of BNUB's mandate in December 2014. He met with Burundian officials, with representatives of the international community, civil society groups, and visited Bujumbura's Mpimba prison.

ASG Šimonović indicated that the security situation in the country had significantly improved over the recent years and that the number of politically-motivated killings had reduced. He also noted encouraging steps regarding the electoral process, such as the adoption of the electoral code, as well as the signing of a code of conduct, by the Government, the Independent National Electoral Commission, political parties and the United Nations. The code of conduct consists of a set of principles, which will govern the conduct of the stakeholders during the electoral process.

He shared his deep concerns regarding the growing restrictions on the rights of freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. He also noted an increase in political violence and intimidation often involving the Imbonerakure. A further cause for concern he underscored was the division of political parties and civil society organizations. He particularly highlighted the law on the establishment of the TRC (emphasizing the importance of a consensual appointment of the Commissioners), the new law on the CNTB and the challenges to the heritage of Arusha as potential triggers for social divisions in the Burundian Society. Lastly, he mentioned that given the dire socio-economic situation most

Burundians are still faced with, and he advocated that economic and social rights should remain a priority.

With regards to OHCHR's future presence in Burundi, he mentioned the Office intention to establish a stand-alone presence with monitoring and capacity-building functions, following BNUB departure and in response to concerns about the further deterioration of the situation of human rights ahead of the 2015 elections. The High Commissioner is in the process of sending a letter to the Government informing them officially of OHCHR's intentions, referring to the open-ended agreement signed with the Government in 1995.

The Director of Africa I in DPA, Sam Ibok, focused on the ongoing BNUB transition process, which is well reflected in the transition plan. He highlighted the key areas of the BNUB's responsibilities being transferred, as well as some of the gaps that would need to be filled once BNUB departs. He mentioned the facilitation of political dialogue and high-level advocacy as the biggest gap resulting from BNUB's departure, and highlighted the critical role of the region and other partners in this regard. Regarding human rights, he welcomed OHCHR's intention to establish a stand-alone presence and urged Member States to provide the necessary voluntary contributions. Rule of law was mentioned as an area that would leave significant gaps. He informed that UNDP intended to recruit a Rule of Law Adviser as well as three UNVs to mitigate this challenge. He mentioned that transition periods often coincided with a drop of international attention to remaining peacebuilding challenges. He therefore called upon Configuration members to actively remain engaged with Burundi.

In his response, Ambassador Herménégilde Niyonzima of Burundi thanked ASG Šimonović for highlighting the progress Burundi had achieved and he indicated that overall the country was on the right track. He acknowledged that challenges remained, especially in the political area, but also with regards to the TRC process and land issues. He reassured members of the Configuration that his government would handle these processes with utmost care to avoid any frictions. Lastly, he underlined his country's continued commitment to the heritage of Arusha.

Belgium, Tanzania, the Netherlands, South Africa, the Organization of the Francophonie and PBSO took the floor. Overall they shared ASG Simonovic's analysis of the situation; they encouraged the Burundi Configuration of the PBC to think about ways to help fill the gaps left by the departure of BNUB. Encouraging regional engagement in the facilitation of political dialogue was mentioned as one aspect where the Configuration through its Chair could make a difference. There was also a strong call for more African political engagement in Burundi, and a suggestion to continue addressing poverty that remains one of the main destabilizing factors for Burundi. It was suggested that Burundi could further benefit from the EAC for its economic development, especially regional infrastructure projects and the development of the banking sector. The OIF informed the Configuration about the

appointment of Mohamed El Hacem Ould Lebatt as Special Envoy for the accompaniment of the electoral process in Burundi. OIF would stand ready to provide further technical assistance in view of the upcoming elections.

The Chair encouraged both DPA and OHCHR to continue to use the PBC as a platform for such briefings but also to use it as a tool for the mobilization of necessary political and financial support throughout and beyond the transition period. He supported the idea of a stand-alone OHCHR office in Burundi and offered the Configuration's readiness to further consider OHCHR's needs for the establishment of such a country office once specific figures are available. He reiterated the need to sustain the successful work of the National Independent Human Rights Commission, and to ensure the continuity of its leadership when the term of the current President ends.

In closing the meeting, the Chair introduced the concept paper on the roundtable and informed Configuration members that he was expecting a consolidated feedback from the government by the end of the month and that he intended to reach out to key partners in the coming weeks. He thanked and bid farewell to ASG Judy Cheng-Hopkins of PBSO and Ambassador Hermenegilde Niyonzima [who were to leave their positions in a few weeks] for an excellent collaboration and support to the work of the Burundi Configuration of the PBC.
