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Excellency,

In my capacity as Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, I have the honor to share with you the main outcomes of a mission that I recently undertook to Burundi from 18 to 25 April 2012.

My visit was part of the PBC's regular engagement with Burundi and was aimed as a follow up on the meeting the PBC had with the Second Vice President of Burundi on 12 April 2012 in New York focused on the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper II (PRSP II) and the related resource mobilisation efforts. On my way to Bujumbura I paid a brief visit to EU headquarters in Brussels to meet with Ambassador Koen Vervaeke, Director and Principal Coordinator of the EU for the Great Lakes Region.

The visit was also partly in response to the Security Council Resolution 2027 (2011) of 20 December 2011 which encouraged the Government of Burundi, the Peacebuilding Commission and its national and international partners to honour their commitments made under the Outcome Document of the Fifth Review of the Implementation of the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding and to review these commitments once the PRSP II is finalized to determine how the Peacebuilding Commission can best contribute to Burundi's peacebuilding priorities.

In the course of my stay in Burundi, I met with several interlocutors, including at the highest levels of government as well as other key stakeholders in the country

My overall impression is that the situation of the country has further stabilized and progressed since my last visit in Fall of 2011. This is reflected in an improvement in the relationship between the ruling political party and the opposition not represented in parliament. The harsh and sometimes provocative language which I heard from both sides in the past has disappeared or at least considerably subsided. It seems that the government and the CNDD-FDD as the majority party have come to the conclusion that it would be better to give political space to the opposition in the lead to the next elections in 2015.

The recent change in the leadership of the CNDD-FDD (party leaders, women's and youth wings of CNDD-FDD) further highlights a positive evolution in the political situation. At the same time, the opposition, while still occasionally very critical of the government, has moderated its behavior and participated, for instance, in a recent seminar on the Law on Opposition. One major indicative trend of the prevailing "détente" is that the President of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights (CNIDH) noted a decrease in human rights violations and assassinations with a likely political background over the last months, though such violent deaths still take place.

His Excellency
Mr. Agshin Mehdiyev
President of the Security Council
New York

The modest progress in the political situation could, however, be jeopardized by the economic conditions. With the considerable price increases in gasoline and basic food commodities such as rice and beans, the focus of public agitation has shifted to the socio-economic situation. Everybody in Bujumbura mentioned to me "la vie chère" (the expensive life) which has become the common slogan for the problems caused by the rise of food and commodity prices. Civil society reacted with protests and a "stay-at-home" rally in March. In turn, the government accused civil society organizations of abusing their respective roles and acting as a political opposition. So far, the controversy has been limited to mutual recriminations which are at times acrimonious, but not violent. But several interlocutors told me that the worsening socio-economic situation has a clear potential for unrest and is seen as potentially dangerous.

There is also some concern that the "Commission nationale des terres et autres biens"(CNTB, National Land Commission) whose policy some commentators perceive as one-sided since its decisions to attribute land seem to favor the rights of returnees over existing landholders. Since the land issue is one of the most delicate in a densely populated Burundi heavily dependent on agriculture a fair and equitable distribution of land is important also from a peace-building perspective.

On a more positive note, the fiscal situation has improved quite substantially due to the increased efficiency of the "Office Burundais des Recettes", OBR (the revenue office). With the assistance mainly from the UK, the OBR has been reformed into an independent, more effective and efficient institution. Fiscal loopholes have been mended and corruption was reduced. The energetic behavior of the OBR has provoked counter-reactions from across the political spectrum and parts of civil society, who feel that the agency is acting too aggressively. Still, the reformed OBR is a positive development in the institutional architecture of Burundi and its independence and effectiveness should be preserved.

Despite an increasingly difficult socio-economic situation which is likely to worsen, I encouraged the government to sustain the progress in the areas of political openness, good governance and human rights and the rule of law. In that context, I mentioned among other matters the trial of the murder of Ernest Manirumva whose apparent lack of progress had the potential to hurt the image of Burundi. I underlined that the PBC and its Chair remain committed to assist and support Burundi. Advancements in the political and institutional fields would help me a lot to generate the goodwill on the international level which is beneficial in the running-up to the meeting for the PRSP II which Burundi wants to convene in fall.

As regards the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper II the Government of Burundi plans to hold an international partner's meeting to generate support for it. For the government, the conference would serve as a means to generate financial resources for the implementation of its PRSP II whose overall cost Burundi estimates at USD 2.5 billion. As a possible date, October 2012 has been mentioned. The Government of Burundi has asked Switzerland to host the meeting. My Government is reviewing the request and we will be able to provide an answer in due time.

Overall, the reaction of the international community in Bujumbura to the planned event is positive, but guarded concerning its financial impact. The echoes I have received indicate that it seems unrealistic to generate resources in the amount Burundi seeks. Most traditional donors assured me

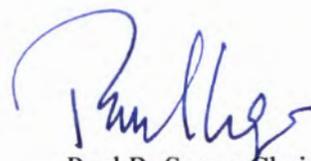
that they would continue to support Burundi within existing financial commitments. Some non-traditional donors signaled interest in participating at the meeting and openness to consider financing based on a project basis. But there still seems to exist a gap between the expectations of the government of Burundi and its international partners. I have informed the 2nd Vice-President and the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance of the budgetary difficulties major donors are currently facing and warned Burundian interlocutors that it may be hard to generate additional funding. I also urged them to define priorities, both in substance and in time. It would be important to identify the most pressing and important needs which have to be addressed first. Besides, Burundi has to step up the pace of both the conceptual and organizational preparations of the meeting.

A number of things need to be done within the next weeks: a) Burundi and the international community should agree on the objectives, the setting and the format of the meeting. It may be helpful to establish scenarios on possible outcomes of the meeting and ensuing follow-up; b) an operational "task force" in Bujumbura should be set up comprising the major national and international actors: A time-line with a to-do list needs to be established and a division of labor defined. Burundi has the leading role in this exercise, but the international community, especially the UN system, should closely assist; c) Burundi, with the help of UNDP and the World Bank should define its most important priorities bearing in mind that the international donor environment is tight; d) the PBC, through its Chair, but also through all its members, should intensify the advocacy for Burundi, particularly among non-traditional donors.

The PBC will continue to work with the Government of Burundi on the partners' conference as well as other relevant peacebuilding issues.

I remain at your disposal to provide further information and clarifications as may be required by the members of the Security Council. The PBC will continue to monitor the situation and keep the Council informed on developments relating to the peacebuilding priorities agreed between the Government of Burundi and PBC.

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



Paul R. Seger, Chair
Peacebuilding Commission – Burundi
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