

Informal Meeting of the PBC Burundi Configuration: Chair's Summary

6 June 2013

Introduction

On Thursday, 6 June 2013, from 11:30 am to 01:25 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 government of Burundi was represented by H.E. Dr. Gervais Rufyikiri, Second Vice-President, accompanied by a delegation of Ministers and high officials from Bujumbura, and H.E. Ambassador Herménégilde Niyonzima, Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations in New York. The United Nations were represented by Assistant Secretary-General Judy Cheng-Hopkins, Head of the Peacebuilding Support Office. Philippe Dongier, Country Director of the World Bank, attended via VTC from Dar-es-Salaam. Mr. Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Burundi, and representatives of the International Community in Bujumbura attended via VTC from Bujumbura.

The purpose of the meeting was to update the Configuration on the follow up to the Geneva Conference and on the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP-II) and to exchange on the latest developments in Burundi. Due to a delayed flight the Burundian delegation arrived late. The order of speakers was adapted accordingly and is reflected in this summary.

Presentations

Assistant Secretary-General Cheng-Hopkins thanked the Chair of the PBC Burundi Configuration for the important role he played for the success of the Partners' Conference in Geneva. She reiterated PBSO's commitment to provide a last PBF contribution to Burundi, which will be programmed under the Pillar I of the PRSP-II, in

coordination with the main donors who made pledges in these areas, with the PBF playing a catalytic role, including kick starting activities critical to peacebuilding, paving the way for other donors to come in later. She asked if the current land issue could be one of the areas where the PBF could provide support, given the potential for the land issue to trigger conflicts. She announced that PBSO will send a mission to Burundi in June to initiate the planning of this third PBF phase in close coordination with the Chair.

The World Bank Country Director Philippe Dongier recalled the important reforms and progress achieved by Burundi, including in the business environment, programs in health that have contributed to reducing child and maternal mortality, as well as ongoing efforts in the energy sector and service delivery. He assessed that Burundi is on the right trajectory, and yet it remains one of the most fragile countries in the world, mainly due to its vulnerability to external shocks, such as energy crises, price rises of key commodities and fluctuations of external aid. The economic growth perspective for Burundi remains very timid. He warned that the country's fragility can have severe consequences. Difficult policies of lower tax rates and fewer tax exemptions are necessary in order to stabilize Burundi's fragile fiscal balance. He urged donors to work together urgently to improve predictability of aid flows to allow for better fiscal management and concluded by calling for increased budgetary support as a response to the fiscal fragility of the country. Budgetary support, he concluded, constitutes a lifeline for Burundi.

In his introductory remarks *H.E. Ambassador Paul Seger* commended the government of Burundi for its efforts in following up on the results of the Geneva Conference by focusing on the implementation of the PRSP-II and working on reforms in both the socio-economic and the politico-institutional fields. He encouraged the Burundian government to identify key priorities and specific actions within the general framework of the PRSP-II in view of the upcoming sectoral conferences. On the politico-institutional side he positively mentioned the two recent workshops held in Bujumbura and Kayanza respectively aimed at laying the ground for the 2015 elections. Regarding the newly adopted law on the press the Chair expressed his strong concerns about

certain dispositions within the law that could seriously hamper the freedoms of press and opinion in Burundi. The Chair underscored his hope that the government would interpret the new law in a liberal and equitable fashion upholding the fundamental freedoms of press and opinion at all times. The Chair also mentioned he would like to explore the possibility of a growing engagement of the PBC Burundi Configuration in the current land issue.

In his statement, *Second Vice-President Rufyikiri* thanked the Chair and the PBC Burundi Configuration for delivering on one of the main objectives of the PBC, resource mobilization, through the Geneva Conference. He welcomed progress in the realization of pledges made in Geneva, with 43% of overall pledges already translated into funding agreements. He indicated that the Government had been following through with commitments it made in Geneva. He mentioned the most recent meetings organized in preparation of the 2015 elections and expressed satisfaction that these meetings have reassured Burundians and the international community. On the newly promulgated media law, he reiterated his Government's commitment to the respect of freedom of press; he reassured members that the law had taken into account comments received in the process of its elaboration and had drawn from other countries' experiences. He announced that a draft law on transitional justice and reconciliation had been sent to parliament for deliberation. He mentioned that the Government has embarked on new reforms, including the privatization of the Government cars used by dignitaries [charroie de l'Etat]. He recalled the socio-economic challenges that Burundi continues to face, including the effects of the global economic crisis, the destruction of the main market of Bujumbura in January 2013, the rise of prices of important commodities such as oil and food, and the fact that some donors have stopped budget support. He mentioned that the Government/Minister of Finance is looking into components of the fiscal policy that would increase fiscal revenues. He announced the calendar of the sector specific conferences, the first scheduled on 15-16 July and the second one planned in October, in Bujumbura. The first conference in July will focus on infrastructure, private sector development, employment, trade, tourism and gender, education and water and sanitation [see the attached draft program]. He recalled the

objective of these sector specific conferences, which is the presentation of programs and projects and the response by partners in terms of alignment behind priorities and coordination of their interventions. He reiterated the Government's invitation to partners to participate in the sector specific conferences and mentioned that invitations would be sent out soon and a website containing the necessary documentation was being established. He concluded by recommitting his Government to pursue engagements made in Geneva, and by expressing his expectation towards the PBC to continue its advocacy work.

Discussion

The following members made statements: the Netherlands, Belgium, Japan, the European Union, South Africa, France, the United Kingdom and Germany.

They welcomed reforms and progress achieved by the Government of Burundi, with a particular appreciation of the work done to prepare the elections of 2015, including the lessons learned workshop and the subsequent meeting that discussed the revision of the electoral code. They encouraged the Government of Burundi to keep and build on this momentum and aim at improving the inclusivity and the atmosphere for the preparation of the 2015 elections. Some welcomed progress in human rights which constitutes a good narrative for Burundi.

Most of them expressed strong concerns about the newly adopted law on the media and its potential impact on the freedoms of media and speech. They called for restraint in the application of the law maintaining a liberal approach to freedom of expression. Some also called for a particular attention to some pieces of legislation in the pipeline that are relevant to peacebuilding – including the draft law on reconciliation and transitional justice, the upcoming law on non-profit organizations and the law on association – and they urged the government to ensure that they don't jeopardize the progress achieved. Another member recalled that Burundi is still a model for successful transition, where the accompaniment of the international community has worked well, and he recommended pursuing efforts to sustain the gains achieved.

Responding to members' concerns about the new media law the Second Vice-President reassured them that Burundi is proud of its active and dynamic media and has every intention to maintain it by continuing to defend the freedoms of press and opinion in the future.

The Chair wrapped-up the discussion by thanking the Second Vice-President and members of the PBC for a frank and open exchange of opinions on current developments in Burundi. He stressed the importance of such a constructive partnership and noted the great but at the same time also critical support and encouragement coming from all partners for Burundi. As a case in point he mentioned the discussion on the new press law. He concluded by reminding that the freedom of press is a "natural resource" for Burundi, which it should cherish and nurture at all times.

Next Steps

The Chair informed the Burundi Configuration of his upcoming visit to Bujumbura on 24-28 June 2013 to pursue the PBC engagement with Burundi, building on the key messages of this meeting.

AOB

Regarding the working methods of the PBC Burundi Configuration one delegation reminded that all public statements and letters coming from the Configuration must be consulted with and cleared by the whole membership.
