

Peacebuilding Commission – Burundi Configuration
Chair's visit to Burundi, 28 – 30 October 2013

1. From 28 to 30 October 2013 I undertook a trip to Bujumbura, upon the invitation by the Government of Burundi to attend the second follow up meeting to the Geneva Partners Conference that took place in October 2012. I used the opportunity to meet the authorities of Burundi and interact with the key partners in the margin of the meeting. I had separate meetings with President Nkurunziza, with Minister Kavakure. And I had a working dinner with the Ambassadors from the EU group, the US and the SRSG Parfait Onanga-Anyanga.
2. The main outcome of the Conference (and of my visit) is the final communiqué issued at the end of the meeting. In addition to this communiqué that I am sharing, I would like to share a few impressions I yielded from my meetings and interaction with stakeholders.
3. Overall, the Government expressed satisfaction with the delivery of the Geneva pledges, estimated at 52 %, and it committed to pursue the reforms recommended by Geneva and the two follow up Conferences. President Nkurunziza opened the Partners' Conference, and his presence most of the morning was much appreciated by international partners and Burundians. The main donors reiterated their financial commitments. The messages reflected in the partners' interventions at the Conference included 1) an acknowledgment of progress, 2) a reiteration and further concretisation of financial commitments, and 3) a reference to outstanding political challenges.
4. The sector of energy seemed to be well supported and coordinated, giving hope that one of the main obstacles to the development of Burundi might be removed in a couple of years. There were also good policy discussions on key governance/political issues. Election-related matters received a particular attention, including the political environment and the operational preparation for the elections of 2015. Donors have already started pledging financial resources in support of these elections.
5. The Burundians representing non state constituencies at the Conference made contributions referring to the overall direction of the country and to specific issues/cases. They challenged the Government and the donor community to have a more systematic and frank policy discussion on important issues/reforms, identifying areas in which progress is stuck or going backward, as well as related roadblocks. They suggested that such an approach is much in line with the principle of mutual accountability and requires more trust. Some challenged donors who are hesitating to either honor their commitments to indicate to the Government areas where it has failed to make progress.

6. In my meeting with President Nkurunziza, we discussed mainly the partners' conference, the analysis on the youth wings of political parties in connection to the peacebuilding priority plan and to the 2015 elections, the amendment of the constitution and the revision of the electoral code.
7. The President seemed to appreciate positively the Partners' Conference and his own involvement. He was also very appreciative of the role played by the Chair in this engagement with partners.
8. With regards to the violence related to youth wings affiliated to political parties, I received two divergent views from my interlocutors. On one hand, the UN, international partners and members of non state institutions in Burundi expressed concerns on the risks of violence escalation due to activities of certain youth wings. Most pointed to Imbonerakure, the youth organisation of the ruling party, CNDD-FDD, with a number of incidents documented by the UN and others. They advise to engage with the Government and political parties in order to prevent further escalation and to avoid risks of confrontation between the different youth organisations in run up of the 2015 elections. On the other hand, the ruling party downplays the threat that Imbonerakure might represent. President Nkurunziza described this group as an organisation that included members of CNDD-FDD between 18-49 years. He indicated that some of his own advisors in the President Office were members of this group. He also noted that members of this group were working with him in building community based infrastructures, including schools.
9. For the President, the youth organisation affiliated to the CNDD-FDD doesn't represent a threat; rather he sees it as a useful organisation, playing an important role in community development projects, social infrastructures, including schools. He challenged those who are reporting that his youth organisation is responsible of violence, arguing that the youth organisation affiliated to the CNDD-FDD was not like one of those youth wings that committed violence in the past. The President is of the view that members of Imbonerakure who had been involved with acts of violence are very few and the justice has been dealing with them as individuals. Justice should equally apply to individuals from other parties who commit acts of violence. The few incidents are amplified and exaggerated by private media, and the international community listens to these media, falling in the trap of overplaying.
10. On the Constitution, I received again two different perspectives. President Nkurunziza indicated to me that this was a normal exercise and that the amendment of the Constitution aimed at reflecting the developments in the country's political and institutional landscape since 2005 when the current Constitution was adopted and since the Arusha Accords of 2000. The President reiterated his right to propose amendments to the Constitution when required. Since the Parliament represents political parties and the population, there is no need to consult separately the political parties or the population, or any other constituencies.

He further clarified that the amendment will not go through a referendum, because such a referendum is not in line with the provisions of the Constitution. I asked the President if this revision would only be a partial one and the Constitution of 2005 would remain intact and he replied affirmatively.

11. He informed me that the process of amending Constitution had been already initiated, that the new draft had been discussed by the Government. He indicated that the Constitution's amendment will be immediately followed by the finalisation of the revised electoral law, and that these two exercises would be achieved by December 2013. He also mentioned that the country is in the final phase of Arusha that will be completed once the TCR is in place.
12. From the side of the national and international partners of Burundi, the main message I received was they regretted the lack of transparency and broad popular consultation around this process. Without questioning the constitutional authority of the President to initiate constitution reviews and the legality of the process followed, they suggested, that given the significance of the Constitution and its link with the historical Peace Accord of Arusha, a form of dialogue around the review process would reinforce trust within the country and alleviate risks of suspicion and speculations around important issues such as the ethnic balance and power sharing arrangements in national institutions that are seen by many as a key feature of the Arusha Accord and a factor of stability.
13. With regards to the future of the UN presence in Burundi, an issue I discussed at length with Foreign Minister Kavakure, I started the conversation by inquiring about the government's view at this point of time. Minister Kavakure recalled that Burundi had repeated its position to transform BNUB into a Country Team already in the past. However, he indicated his readiness to look into the report of the UN Strategic Assessment Mission. Burundi preferred an agreed solution, but hoped that the UN would respect its wishes. In my reply, I recalled my preference for maintaining a political presence of the UN, at least until the elections of 2015, arguing that the relationship with the SRSG was extremely useful and important for my mandate to assist Burundi as the Configuration Chair. This is a view shared by members of the International Community. At the closing of the Partners' Conference, I therefore appealed to the Government to use the political asset they have in the current SRSG. The UN Strategic Assessment Mission that followed my visit to Burundi is expected to discuss this issue with much more depth and make recommendations for follow up consultations between the Government of Burundi, the Secretary General and the Security Council. I am confident that the best solution for Burundians will guide the final decision on the UN presence in Burundi.
14. I also brought up the "Plan Prioritaire de Consolidation de la Paix – Burundi (2014 – 2016)" (PPP-III) with the Foreign Minister. This plan could be supported by a financial assistance of approx. USD 14 million by the UN Peace-building Fund (PBF). In this regard, I

expressed my concern that the document had not yet been finalised because of ongoing divergences between the government of Burundi and partners on the conflict analysis which constitutes the underlying basis for the support by the PBF. In fact, the government seemed to withdraw from language previously agreed on the problem of the political youth organizations. I urged the Foreign Minister to find wording that reflects the situation realistically and in a way acceptable to all sides.

15. As I left Burundi after this visit, I was under a feeling of a country that is a crossroads in its peace-building, development and democratisation process. A country where there was still a basic consensus on the progress made since Arusha. A country that, despite continuing difficulties, is keen on embarking on its development path, with a strong support from donors and some visible signs of economic recovery, such as the rehabilitated roads, new hotels, etc. A country that is approaching another historical rendez-vous in the consolidation of its democracy with the elections of 2015. For this reason, I encouraged Burundi to stay on the reform track and rekindle the flame of Geneva Partner's Conference. But I also appealed to the international partners to honor their commitments and pledges of Geneva as well. The communiqué adopted at the conclusion of the Conference is a document all participants will be politically accountable for. It is also encouraging that the communiqué establishes a mechanism which monitors the implementation of its outcome. In sum, the Conference gave me hope that Burundian authorities and non-state institutions can rise up and do what is right for their people. The stability and the progress achieved so far are too good to squander; the country has challenges, but it has the potential to meet these challenges.
16. The Peacebuilding Commission and the entire international community will continue to accompany this country which, as I said in my speech, can be extraordinary and set a model for countries emerging from violent conflicts. The next few months are crucial and will require our sustained attention, with the Constitutional review, the discussion on the future of BNUB and the implementation of programs discussed during the Conference of 28-30 October.
17. I wish to thank again the Government of Burundi for trusting me and receiving me during this visit, the SRSG and his Office for facilitating so efficiently my visit, as well as PBSO for its continued support.

12 November 2013

Paul R. Seger, Chair

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