

Peacebuilding Commission
Ambassadorial-Level Meeting on Burundi
25 February 2020
Chair's Summary

1. On 25 February, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) held an ambassadorial-level meeting on Burundi under the chairmanship of H.E. Mr. Jürg Lauber, Chair of the PBC Burundi Configuration. The purpose of the meeting was for the Chair to debrief on his trip to Burundi from 2 to 6 February 2020 and for the PBC to receive an update from the Secretary-General of the East African Community (EAC), H.E. Mr. Libérat Mfumukeko, on the EAC mission to Burundi from 4 to 8 February 2020.
2. The Chair informed about his recent visit to Burundi and expressed his appreciation for Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, Ms. Bintou Keita, who had joined the delegation for the meetings in Burundi. He noted that, on his way to Burundi, he had meetings in Addis Ababa where he met with the African Union (AU) Commissioner for Peace and Security as well as the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs. The exchanges confirmed the readiness of the AU to support Burundi in its peacebuilding priorities before, during and after elections. In Burundi, the Chair and his delegation were well-received by the Minister of Foreign Affairs who facilitated joint working sessions with the President of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) and with the Ministers of Finance; Human Rights, Social Affairs and Gender; Justice; and Youth. The Chair's delegation also met with political parties and their presidential candidates including, among others, the CNDD-FDD Secretary-General and presidential candidate Evariste Ndayishimiye, and the President of the *Conseil National pour la Liberté (CNL)*, Agathon Rwasa who in the meantime was nominated as the party's candidate for the presidential election. The Chair further informed of meetings with the Secretary-General of the East African Community (EAC), the UN Country Team, and bilateral donors as well as representatives of the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the private sector, civil society and the diplomatic community.
3. The Chair recalled that in his meetings in Burundi, authorities highlighted the calm security situation, the steady return of refugees, and the country's preparedness to organize peaceful and democratic elections. He noted that many interlocutors welcomed the nomination of the CNDD-FDD presidential candidate, Evariste Ndayishimiye, which they saw as a confirmation of H.E. President Nkurunziza's announcement not to stand for the elections. Different political party representatives reaffirmed to the Chair their intention to participate in the upcoming elections and highlighted the need for support – disbursed equally to all parties without discrimination – for the preparation, training and deployment of party poll-watchers (“mandataires”). He recalled that the CENI indicated their readiness to receive the EAC consultative mission and highlighted that around 40 civil society organizations had been accredited to observe the elections. The Chair stressed the need for continued

attention to Burundi's socio-economic development, noting that Burundian authorities stressed the centrality of the National Development Plan (NDP) and invited the UN, through the PBC and UNCT, to serve as a bridge between Burundi and its partners to mobilize resources for its implementation. He informed that interlocutors emphasized addressing the imperatives of poverty reduction, education, and employment initiatives, particularly for youth. The Chair noted the government's encouraging cooperation with bilateral donors, the World Bank, and the African Development Bank as well as with the UNCT in finalizing the 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan.

4. The Chair recommended that the PBC remain committed to supporting Burundi in creating a conducive environment for peaceful, inclusive, and transparent elections, noting the possibility for further engagement with the government regarding support for party poll-watchers. He recommended that the PBC continue to serve as a platform to mobilize resources and build partnerships around key priorities, and invited donors to rapidly respond to the 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan. Additionally, the Chair advocated that initiatives to promote social cohesion and dialogue at all levels be supported and expanded where possible, and further advocated that the PBC continue to support Burundi in promoting the full realization of human rights. The Chair also highlighted the additional funding required to assist the voluntary and sustainable return of Burundian refugees.
5. H.E. Mr. Albert Shingiro, Permanent Representative of Burundi to the UN, informed that the political situation in Burundi is dominated by the electoral process. He provided updates related to the country's electoral preparedness, including a 20 February decree encouraging voter participation as well as the publication of the official voters list on 3 February. He highlighted that the majority of registered voters on the list are women. He informed of a broadened political space in Burundi as evidenced by, among others, the welcomed integration of returnees in the electoral process, the commitment of religious leaders and political parties to work closely together for fair and peaceful elections, the return of opposition party leaders in 2019 and increased messaging on social cohesion and tolerance. Ambassador Shingiro highlighted the signing of a political party code of conduct as a significant advance and noted that having 11 presidential candidates – the highest number since independence – was evidence of an inclusive process. He informed that 80,366 refugees had voluntarily repatriated since August, clearly demonstrating Burundi's return to peace and tranquility, and underlined that their socio-economic reintegration, as well as assistance to host communities, required support from technical and financial partners. He acknowledged the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR), which required further support. Regarding socio-economic development, the Ambassador highlighted that the country's National Development Plan (NDP) provides a guideline for attaining sustainable development by 2030 and called upon partners for support in implementing the NDP, noting the crucial role of the PBC and UNCT in resource mobilization. He thanked the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) for its many projects in Burundi. He concluded by recalling the longstanding cooperation with the PBC, the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and the UN Country Team, and informed that Burundi would reach

out to the Commission at the year's end t for a joint discussion on the future of the collaboration.

6. EAC Secretary General, Libérat Mfumukeko, provided a briefing on the EAC's mission to Burundi in preparation for the elections. He indicated that the EAC plans to play a significant role in support of the elections with a view to a peaceful democratic transfer of power. He informed that EAC Election Observation is guided by the Treaty for the Establishment of the EAC and the 2012 EAC Principles for Election Observation and Evaluation. The EAC's formal mission to Burundi engaged with electoral stakeholders such as the CENI, the Minister of Interior, and the Assistant Minister for Public Security as well as representatives of more than 20 political parties. The Secretary-General acknowledged efforts to level the playing field and provide space for all political parties and highlighted the establishment of consultative political party forums. He noted the presence of clear and well-structured security plans for the elections and informed of mixed security committees. The Secretary-General reported that the mission observed areas that needed improvement including, among others, the judiciary's limited timeframe to attend to electoral complaints and dissents after the CENI's release of provisional results as well as voter education and awareness-raising on legal frameworks for the elections. He also noted that support was required in terms of logistics for moving electoral equipment and materials. As a way forward, he noted the need for the continuous presence of the EAC during the elections, as well as EAC support to the CENI and regular consultations among key political actors. He informed that he was confident in EAC capacity to carry out an effective elections observation mission in Burundi and reviewed the EAC Framework for Election Observation, noting regulations and standards that ensured impartiality, independence and objectivity. The Secretary-General informed of the intention to have 75 long-term observers and 10-15 short-term observers that would deploy in early April and mid-May respectively. He highlighted plans to hold a Partner States Observation Mission Planning meeting in mid-March and stressed that the EAC needed financial resources to secure the necessary technical and logistical requirements for election observation.
7. Ms. Barrie Freeman, PBSO Director, reported that the PBF, with a current portfolio of \$16 million in Burundi, continues to support local-level dialogue and mediation activities in support of the government's efforts. She highlighted that PBF projects designed to help address displacement tension have contributed positively in restoring trust between returnees and host communities. She reiterated the PBSO's commitment to working with UN entities on the ground to help ensure that Burundi's socio-economic agenda continues to receive adequate attention and support during and after the elections.
8. Member States welcomed the briefings and made the following observations:
 - They welcomed the Chair's report and the contributions of the briefers and expressed their appreciation for the joint visit with Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, Ms. Bintou Keita.

- They stressed the importance of holding credible, transparent, inclusive and peaceful elections and appreciated Burundi's efforts to create an enabling environment.
 - They acknowledged the importance of the voluntary return of refugees and the need for continued support to returnees and host communities to strengthen resilience and social cohesion.
 - While emphasizing the importance of a nationally-owned election process, they acknowledged the importance of regional and sub-regional engagement, including that of the AU, the EAC and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR).
 - They highlighted the need for the international community to remain positively seized and underscored that a peaceful electoral process and transfer of power would be critical to increasing investor confidence and prospects for sustainable development.
 - They stressed the importance of the effective and meaningful participation of women and youth in peacebuilding and highlighted the work of the PBF-supported women mediators' network.
 - They expressed continued support for inclusive dialogue with political parties, civil society organizations and youth, and underlined the importance of funding for the PBF for its dialogue projects in Burundi.
 - They underscored that socio-economic development efforts should continue throughout the electoral process and beyond. They welcomed the call for the PBC and the UNCT to serve as a bridge between Burundi and its partners in resource mobilization.
 - Some expressed concern about the arbitrary arrests of journalists and opposition party members and noted the importance of freedoms of expression, press, and assembly. They called for prompt investigation of human rights violations and prosecution of those responsible.
9. In his concluding remarks, the Chair underlined that the PBC would remain engaged in Burundi in support of the country's peacebuilding priorities, during the elections and beyond, and would continue serving as a platform for dialogue between Burundi and its partners to strengthen the resilience of the population. He reiterated the importance of a transparent electoral process and urged zero tolerance for violence and hate speech. He also underscored the responsibility to support the sub-region to support Burundi, noting the EAC's need for support. He further highlighted that funding and additional efforts are needed in support of the Joint Refugee Return and Reintegration Plan, the 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan, for National Development Plan, and the Peacebuilding Fund.

Annex:

Statement of Ambassador Libérat Mfumukeko, Secretary-General of the East African Community to the PBC Burundi Configuration on 25 February 2020.