

The situation in Burundi

Statement by Ambassador Jürg Lauber,

Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission

UN Security Council, 19 February 2019

Mr. President

Members of the Council

On behalf of the PBC Burundi Configuration, I thank you for inviting me to brief the Security Council and for the excellent cooperation between the Council and the Configuration.

As per established practice, this statement has been approved by the Members of the PBC Configuration, including the country concerned, Burundi.

I Last meeting of the Configuration

I last had the opportunity to brief the Council on 21 November 2018, following my visit to Burundi earlier that month.

The Burundi Configuration convened shortly thereafter on 26 November 2018. In addition to receiving a comprehensive report of my visit, the Configuration heard briefings on the UN peacebuilding engagement and on refugee returns to Burundi.

PBSO informed the Configuration about its support to the socioeconomic dimension and about PBF funding for projects supporting the role of women and youth in peacebuilding efforts.

The UNHCR Regional Refugee Coordinator in Nairobi, Ms. Catherine Wiesner, indicated in her briefing to the Configuration that refugee returns to Burundi will possibly peak in 2019 at more than 100,000 returnees. She noted that an innovative cross-border project supported by the Peacebuilding Fund and implemented by IOM, UNDP and UNHCR, in

coordination with the Governments of Tanzania and Burundi, had improved co-existence among returnees, refugees and host communities in targeted areas, including through livelihood activities to reduce socio-economic pressures. However, she drew attention to the fact that the *Burundi Regional Refugee Response Plan*, designed to assist refugees in the neighboring countries, is among the least funded appeals in the world. Unfortunately three months later this observation is still correct, the challenge of severe underfunding remains acute. Funding is also required to support the *Joint Refugee Return and Integration Plan*, an integrated response designed to assist refugee returnees in Burundi by addressing their immediate and longer-term reintegration needs.

Members of the Configuration commended the critical assistance provided by UNHCR for the voluntary return of refugees and underlined the need to respect the international standards in order to facilitate conditions for the sustainable reintegration of returnees.

Furthermore, the Members of the Configuration remain committed to drawing the attention of the bilateral, regional and international partners to the persistent need for support in reducing vulnerabilities, strengthening resilience and improving disaster preparedness and response in Burundi.

They also agree on the need to continue supporting the ongoing efforts of national reconciliation and helping to preserve the gains achieved through the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation agreement.

Finally, Members of the Configuration underlined the important supporting role of the East African Community in the run-up to the 2020 elections in Burundi. Free, inclusive and democratic elections are most likely to prevent violence and unrest, and to produce an outcome which will be perceived as legitimate inside and outside of Burundi.

II Developments since the last briefing (with relevance for peacebuilding)

Since I last had the opportunity to brief the Council in November, a number of significant developments have occurred:

According to the information from the ground, the security situation has remained generally calm since the last briefing of the Security Council on 21 November 2018.

At the recent EAC Summit in Arusha, former President Mkapa submitted his report on the EAC-led Inter-Burundi Dialogue Process. The Configuration has always considered its role as complementary and supportive to the ongoing political processes at different levels. I want to take this opportunity to thank former President Mkapa for his tremendous efforts.

On 25 January, the Minister of Finance, Budget and Economic Development of Burundi and the UN Resident Coordinator jointly signed the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2019-2023 for Burundi. On 1 February, the President of Burundi, H.E. Pierre Nkurunziza, officially launched the localization strategy for the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 in the presence of Ministers, state authorities, local leaders and international partners. I encourage bilateral and multilateral partners and the Government of Burundi to continue their dialogue on the implementation of these objectives, as well as for the resumption of assistance.

In December 2018, the Government requested the OHCHR to terminate their activities in the country and withdraw their staff. Human rights are an important element of peacebuilding; peaceful and resilient societies are an essential part of sustainable development. Stakeholders need to continue supporting the authorities in Burundi on their path towards building capacity for the protection and promotion of the full range of human rights, i.e. civil and political, as well as social, economic and cultural rights.

III Outlook to 2019 activities of the Configuration

The preparations for the 2020 elections already seem to absorb much of the energy and attention of the authorities as well as many other stakeholders in Burundi. As we move closer to the 2020 elections, I invite the Government of Burundi and the political parties to work together to create the conditions for the next elections to be inclusive, free, democratic and peaceful. In this regard, I welcome the news from Bujumbura of the approval by the

Minister of Interior of Burundi of the new political party “*Congrès National pour la Liberté, CNL*” of Agathon Rwasa and current deputy Speaker of the National Assembly.

Meanwhile, the persistent challenges in the socioeconomic area shall remain at the core of the Configuration’s attention for the current year. The National Development Plan issued by the Government of Burundi provides an opportunity for Burundi and its bilateral and multilateral partners to engage on a strategic and substantive exchange on the plan’s implementation, as does the recently approved UNDAF. The alignment between the NDP, the national priorities of the UNDAF and the SDGs provides the basis for a strategic and coherent engagement among all stakeholders towards the common objective of building resilience, eliminating poverty and reducing inequality and vulnerabilities. I encourage the Government of Burundi and their partners to engage in an open and substantive strategic dialogue on the implementation of the plan, followed by sector-specific discussions on concrete projects.

Mr. President

Distinguished Members of the Council

The Burundi Configuration will pursue its discussions and activities in the coming months on the priorities that I have outlined. Allow me to conclude with the following recommendations:

- (1) For the government of Burundi, political parties and other stakeholders to work closely together, with the support of the Member States of the sub-region and building on previous efforts, in order to **create an enabling environment for free, inclusive, democratic and peaceful elections** in 2020. The Configuration stands ready to support Burundi and its neighbours in all possible ways in this effort.
- (2) For Burundi and its international partners to keep a focus on **mid- and long-term socioeconomic development**, even as the preparations for the elections of 2020 increasingly move to the centre of attention. I reiterate my invitation to the Government of Burundi and their partners to enter into a strategic conversation on

how the implementation of the NDP can foster mutually beneficial, people-centred and innovative forms of engagement.

- (3) For the international community to remain responsive to the importance of providing adequate assistance to help **addressing the urgent needs** of the people of Burundi and **reducing vulnerability**, which remains high in spite of improvements compared to the previous year. With their support, bilateral and multilateral partners can contribute to a conducive environment for peaceful and inclusive elections.
- (4) For the PBC Burundi Configuration to continue supporting the on-going process of **national reconciliation**; working, among others, with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The PBC Burundi Configuration remains committed to supporting the Government of Burundi and its partners in these areas, with a continued focus on the socioeconomic dimension, particularly on the implementation of the national development plan.

I thank you for your interest and for the continuous support of the Members of the Security Council to the Configuration.