

The situation in Burundi
Statement by Ambassador Jürg Lauber,
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Mr. President,
Distinguished Members of the Council

I'm grateful to have the opportunity to brief the Council today on my recent visit to Burundi, Rwanda and Ethiopia and on the latest discussions within the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC).

I'm pleased that H.E. Mr Alain Nyamitwe, Burundi's Minister for Foreign Relations and International Cooperation, participates in today's debate and I would like to use this opportunity to express my gratitude to him for the cooperation which the PBC enjoys with the Government of Burundi in its peacebuilding engagement.

From 15-20 February 2016, I undertook my second regional visit as Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). I held consultations in Bujumbura, Kigali and Addis Ababa. The main objective of my visit was to pursue the policy dialogue with the Government of Burundi and other national and international stakeholders in order to complement ongoing peacebuilding efforts by the UN, the African Union and the East African Community.

In Bujumbura I met the President of the Republic, H.E. Mr Pierre Nkurunziza and members of his Government; representatives of political parties, religious leaders; representatives of the opposition; the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, the National Commission for the Inter-Burundian Dialogue; civil society organizations; international and regional financial institutions; human rights and military observers of the African Union, as well as representatives of the international community and the UN family. From Bujumbura I travelled to Kigali where I focused on the

humanitarian and regional dimension of the crisis in my discussions with the Minister for Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs of Rwanda, and with the Country Representative of the UNHCR. In Addis Ababa I held consultations with high-ranking officials of the African Union, including H.E. Mr Smaïl Chergui, the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, representatives of AU Member States and Partners as well as with the UN Special Representative to the African Union. The special focus of my discussions in Addis Ababa was the AU engagement in Burundi and UN-AU cooperation.

Mr. President,

I shared the detailed written report of my visit with members of the Security Council through the established channel. Today, I would like to share with you the main takeaways of my visit, and reflect on the PBC's continued engagement with Burundi, including recent contacts with the IMF and the World Bank.

After my departure and prior to the visit of the Secretary General of the United Nations and the high-level AU visit of five African Heads of States and Governments, the Government of Burundi announced a series of decisions which included the release of prisoners, the reopening of two radio stations and the revocation of the arrest warrants against some 15 members of the opposition. The Members of the PBC Burundi Configuration welcomed these steps; they encouraged their rapid implementation and additional steps to reinforce the momentum created by these measures and recent high-level diplomatic engagement.

Mr President,

The urgent need for a viable, inclusive and intensified dialogue process was underlined by most interlocutors in Bujumbura, Kigali and Addis Ababa. Diverging views on the specifics of an inclusive dialogue do, however, persist.

In Bujumbura I had the opportunity to meet with the National Commission for the Inter-Burundian Dialogue. The Commission depicted the dialogue as a series of big

gatherings in which participants elaborate their views on how to create democratic conditions for the Burundian elections in 2020. Preliminary findings by the National Commission seem to indicate that a key request of the population is to amend the Constitution and to revise the Arusha Agreement – including with regard to ethnic quotas, term limits for the President, and double citizenship. Some national and many international observers I met expressed concerns that tensions in Burundi could rise if the current process evolves into a campaign to revise the Arusha Agreement.

Mr. President,

My discussions in Bujumbura also showed that there is a considerable risk that the economic downturn becomes an additional driver of the crisis. After 10 years of steady economic growth, the country has experienced a negative growth of 4 percent in 2015. The Government expressed its regret with the fact that some partners have reduced cooperation with Burundi. The suspension of direct budget support has an immediate impact on public expenditures, which will decrease by 22% in 2016. I was told by development partners that the political crisis had slowed down the implementation of strategic programs, such as infrastructures/roads and electricity. Furthermore, I was informed that the cycle of cooperation strategies and key assistance mechanisms used by the main financial and development partners of Burundi (such as the African Development Fund, AfDB and the IMF) would end in 2016. Negotiations on a new cycle might take place against a context of uncertainty if the current political crisis continues. Consequently, envelopes allocated to Burundi might be affected or disbursement of funds further delayed. .

On the other hand, international donors appeared to be ready to re-engage if they see clear signals towards the resolution of the current crisis and a more conducive environment being established. In parallel to a political dialogue process, the Government of Burundi and international donors may therefore want to intensify their conversation on the socioeconomic impact of the crisis.

Mr President,

I share the assessment of previous briefers that the on-going political crisis and insecurity persist, although the patterns of violent acts committed by elements of the security forces and armed opposition seem to change. Grenades thrown randomly in public places appear to be a new trend. OHCHR and the Human Rights observers of the AU whom I met in Bujumbura confirmed that current incidents might be less visible than after the events of 11 December, but reported on allegations of forced disappearances, killings, torture, ill-treatment, hate speech and sexual violence.

Mr President

On 9 March, I briefed the members of the PBC Configuration on my mission. In the subsequent discussion, PBC members reiterated their rejection of violence from either side. Many members expressed grave concerns about the continuing violence and human rights violations.

Members welcomed the work being done by Special Advisor Benomar and the deployment of his team in Burundi. They also expressed support to the Special Advisor, particularly his efforts aimed at ensuring coherence between the different actors. The Members of the Configuration further welcomed the recent appointment of former President of Tanzania, Mr. Benjamin Mkapa, to facilitate the dialogue process under the EAC mediator President Museveni.

PBC members considered the AU decision to deploy an additional 100 human rights monitors and 100 military experts a positive step towards general stabilization and an improvement of the human rights situation. The Peacebuilding Fund is planning to support the 32 AU human rights observers who are already in the country and who closely cooperate with OHCHR. Other partners are encouraged to consider contributions to the deployment of the additional observers. 23 additional Human Rights observers of the African Union arrived in Burundi at the time of my mission.

Mr. President, with regards to the Peacebuilding Fund, the Joint Steering Committee that oversees PBF activities in Burundi decided on 9 March to launch new initiatives in the areas of Dialogue (support to the Special Advisor's team; support to women's role in the dialogue process); Promotion and protection of human rights and support to victims and Youth engagement, community security and social cohesion.

Mr President, I draw the following conclusions from my discussions in the region and within the PBC Burundi Configuration:

1. First, the resolution of the current crisis in Burundi will require maximum coherence between international and regional organizations, in particular between the UN, AU and EAC. Coordinated efforts will be crucial to establish a viable, inclusive and intensified political dialogue. Such a process can only benefit from the cumulated experience of these three organizations if the three join their efforts. In this regard, the Security Council's overall guidance and support will be critical.
2. Second, increased international presence in Burundi can considerably help to improve the security and human rights situation and to reduce violence. It therefore remains crucial that the Security Council continues its discussion in consultation with the Government of Burundi on options of UN engagement. I am glad that the AU and the Government of Burundi have agreed to increase the number of human rights and military observers. I also welcome the recent visit to Burundi by three independent experts mandated by the Human Rights Council, which will be followed by additional visits between now and July. This sort of impartial monitoring and engagement can also help to clarify allegations and ease tensions within the Burundian society.
3. Third, there is a need to draw attention to possible regional implications of the crisis.

4. Fourth, the socio-economic dimension of the current crisis must not be overlooked. In line with the holistic approach of peacebuilding, the Configuration can continue to serve as a platform to include the socioeconomic dimension into the international debate on Burundi. I will, on my part, continue the Configuration's engagement with the main development partners of Burundi. A systematic dialogue between the Government of Burundi and international donors could help to clarify mutual expectations. In this regard, the next cycle of the Burundi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, is a crucial opportunity to redefine the Government's vision and reset cooperation with international partners.

I thank you, Mr. President.