

14 September 2015

To : Members of the PBC – Burundi  
Configuration

**Informal meeting of the Burundi Specific Configuration of the PBC,  
New York, 09 September 2015**

**Chair's Summary**

On 09 September 2015 an informal meeting of the PBC Burundi Configuration took place at UN headquarters under the chairmanship of H.E. Ambassador Jürg Lauber. Mr. Taye Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary General in the Department for Political Affairs (DPA), briefed the Configuration on the current political situation. Mr. Ivan Simonovic, Assistant Secretary General in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), gave a briefing on the situation of human rights in Burundi, especially in regard to the current crisis. Mr. Fabien Nsengimana, Director of the Burundi Leadership Training Program (BLTP), and Mr. Egbert Pos, Programme Manager of the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD), both implementing partners of the PBF project on political dialogue, informed the Configuration on their work in the country. The Permanent Representative of Burundi, Ambassador Albert Shingiro, briefed the Configuration on the situation in the country and his Government's efforts to address current challenges.

In his introductory remarks, the Chair expressed his concerns about the recent developments. He noted the gap between the atmosphere of the partners' conference in December 2014 and the violence that had marred the elections of 2015. He suggested that rebuilding trust was a priority, an effort which concerned all partners but in which the Government of Burundi should lead the way. The Chair noted that the recommendations of the recent review of the Peacebuilding Architecture were important in regard to defining parameters for future engagement, particularly those related to national ownership, inclusion and regional engagement.

In his briefing, Mr. Taye Zerihoun, ASG DPA, noted with concern, that politically motivated violence and assassinations of high profile members of the opposition and of the ruling party had increased. He stated that more than 100 people had been killed, hundreds put in detention, and that cases of torture, large scale cordon and search operations and arbitrary arrests had caused widespread fear among the population leading to serious disruptions of the population's daily life. He stated that the Ugandan facilitation of the political dialogue through President Museveni had not yet resumed, and that DPA was in discussion with the facilitation team on possible DPA technical support. He listed some of the underlying causes of the crisis, such as the use of violence for political aims, the lack of freedom of expression and the stalled reconciliation process. In order to proceed with a meaningful dialogue, the ASG DPA stated that tensions needed to be reduced and assassinations to be ended. He concluded his briefing by noting the severe political and humanitarian consequences of the crisis for the region, specifically for the relations between Burundi and Rwanda, and the need for the rebuilding of confidence through open and active channels of communication.

Mr. Ivan Simonovic, ASG OHCHR, briefed the Configuration on the human rights situation. He stated with concern the number of casualties, 121 persons, who had been killed due to political violence excluding additional victims of the failed coup in May. He noted that during the period of 27 August to 8 September, 14 people had been killed, an average of more than one person a day. He noted that in the first months of the crisis, the victims belonged mostly to the opposition and human rights defenders groups, and that this trend was slowly shifting, with members of the ruling party increasingly being targeted. He further gave an overview of recent actions taken. He stated that the African Union had sent 9 human rights observers and 8 military experts who jointly monitor the situation with OHCHR in a productive working relationship. The AU intended to increase this number but faces financial constraints. He reiterated the need for an inclusive national dialogue, aimed at building trust among Burundians, the reinforcement of credible national institutions, further efforts in the field of SSR and disarmament, the facilitation of safe return of the refugees, the return of exiled private media groups and the effective functioning of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He noted the important contribution the PBF was making to Human Rights activities in Burundi, including strengthening of the Human Rights Commission, building capacities of Human Rights defenders. He made a plea for more stable funding for OHCHR activities, and encouraged member States to make multi-year

pledges. To conclude his briefing, he stressed the need for a law of protection of human right defenders, a law for the protection of victims and witnesses, the guarantee for a free and safe return of refugees and the reestablishment of a free civil society and media, to guarantee freedom of the press and the right to information. Mr. Egbert Pos gave a short briefing on the work of the NIMD. He stated that the organization had been cooperating with BLTP since 2008, and had been working across the political spectrum with party leaders and senior party officials based on the principles of impartiality and inclusiveness.

Mr. Fabien Nsengimana gave an overview of the work of BLTP focusing in particular also on the work implemented with PBF funding. Founded in 2003, the NGO works with political parties, high officers and representatives of civil society and provides training in communication, negotiation and conflict resolution skills. Most recently, BLTP has endeavored to build trust between the ruling party and the opposition on the basis of the mutually agreed principles contained in the roadmap of 2013 for the preparation of the 2015 elections. He stated that the deteriorating circumstances since April 2015 and the boycott of the elections by several opposition parties, made it difficult to reach the initially envisaged goals. Since then, the aim has shifted to keep a minimum of communication between the parties going and to foster relationships between the different opposing parties.

In this context he noted that the coordination between the efforts of the UN and other international mediation efforts to address the crisis and ongoing domestic processes was difficult and that possibly chances have been missed to use the existing domestic expertise for engagement with the political parties to find solutions to resolve the crisis. Despite all difficulties, opportunities to contribute to peaceful resolution of conflicts could be found, including for mediation between different politicians running for president who represented essentially the same political grouping.

Among the important issues to be addressed going forward, he noted that trust building was often necessary not only between, but also within parties, to improve their internal cohesion. Also, capacity building on the development of party programs and other tools to improve the functioning of political parties is an important factor which should receive further attention. He concluded that to address governance and development issues, the development of a minimum consensus on a comprehensive agenda shared by political parties in Burundi was necessary

In his statement, Ambassador Shingiro welcomed the new Chair and assured him of the Government of Burundi's will to continue the excellent collaboration established with the previous Chair. He invited the Members of the Configuration not to dwell on the past, but to focus on the future of Burundi and sustainable economic development for its people. He stated that the victory of the President belonged to all Burundians, and he reassured members of the PBC that Burundi would elect a new President in 2020. He stated that dialogue efforts were under way, reflected by the fact that opposition leader Agathon Rwaso had joined the Government. Ambassador Shingiro informed members of the PBC that the new Government fully respected the Arusha Agreement and Constitution of Burundi, with 12 ministers from the ruling party, 5 ministers from the coalition Amizero of Agathon Rwaso, and 3 independents; he underscored that 60% Ministers were Hutu, 40% Tutsi, and that 30% of the Government were women. He noted that the refugees were being invited to return and to join the rebuilding efforts and that the government would fully cooperate in facilitating their return. He stated that people trying to overturn democratic institutions and sparking division and conflict should be condemned, acknowledging the law enforcement services who were working towards restoring peace and security. Ambassador Shingiro stated that suspending international aid would cause suffering among the people of Burundi, and expressed hope for a continued cooperation based on mutual respect and trust. He stated that the Government was planning to initiate the preparation of a new poverty reduction strategy and invited the international community to move forward together and to engage in dialogue with the Government in this process.

The delegates of Uganda, the EU, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Egypt, Tanzania, Chile, China, and PBSO, took the floor to ask questions and make comments. The delegations expressed their concern about the situation and stressed the importance of credible and inclusive dialogue, aiming at the reestablishment of trust and reconciliation. They underscored the need for the urgent resumption of facilitation by Uganda, as well as the involvement of the international community and regional actors. Some delegations highlighted the importance of nationally led and homegrown processes which should be supported by the international community. Delegations stressed the importance of coordination among international and regional efforts in supporting the dialogue. The Government of Burundi was encouraged to consider the UN offer to support the facilitation led by Uganda. Reacting to some comments, Ambassador Shingiro reaffirmed the President's commitment

to the Arusha Accords and to the Constitution; he stressed again that this would be President Nkurunziza's last term in office. He stated that the Government shared the concerns about the security situation and would take necessary steps. He reiterated the spirit of openness of the Government and the willingness for continued dialogue with all Burundian parties. PBSO representative Brian J. Williams highlighted some of the activities being supported by the Peacebuilding Fund, such as the work of the human rights defenders network and women mediators. He noted the PBF's flexibility to adjust to ongoing developments, in accordance with the guiding principle of national ownership. He suggested that collaboration with the World Bank was important in particular with regard to ensuring that peacebuilding challenges were reflected in the poverty reduction strategy.

In conclusion, the Chair encouraged the Government of Burundi to pursue efforts aimed at resuming the dialogue and addressing the security challenges. He mentioned two particularly pressing issues: the reopening of private radio stations to guarantee the freedom of expression and right to information, and the disarmament of all youth groups to put an end to the violence. He called all partners to reengage in an open and inclusive dialogue, and stressed the PBF's role in supporting local dialogue initiatives through its projects. He suggested that the Configuration would further engage with the World Bank in order to better understand the impact of the crisis on the economy and to coordinate support to the Poverty Reduction Strategy. Furthermore, the Chair underlined that the PBC Burundi configuration would continue to serve as a platform for dialogue and constructive engagement in favor of peace. He indicated that he was in discussion with the Government of Burundi to determine the dates and objectives of his visit to Burundi.

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