

29 December 2014

To: Members of the Peacebuilding Commission, Burundi Configuration

Subject: **Chair's visit to Burundi and to other stakeholders, 8 – 12 December 2014**

Dear colleagues,

In my capacity as Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, I visited Burundi from 8-12 December 2014 to continue my regular exchanges with the Government and other national and international stakeholders, to participate in the roundtable meeting of 11-12 December between the Government and its international partners, and to assist at the closing ceremony of the UN Mission in Burundi (BNUB). The ASG for Peacebuilding Support, Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, as well as my designated successor as Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations, Ambassador Jürg Lauber, joined me for this trip.

Prior to the two-day roundtable, I met with the President of the Republic, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the President of the Independent National Human Rights Commission (CNIDH), the President of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), the Director of the National Committee for the Coordination of Aid, representatives of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the African Development Bank, representatives of the international community, including the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, Mr. Pablo de Greiff, as well as with USG Jeffrey Feltman and SRSG Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, together with his senior staff and the UNCT as well as with various political leaders, representatives of civil society organizations, [see detailed program in the annex].

#### *Political situation*

My visit to Burundi took place against the background of an early key moment of the electoral process that will lead to general elections between May and August next year. The political situation in the country was dominated by two processes that ran parallel to each other and that are of central importance since they will determine who is eligible to vote in next year's elections: the distribution of national identity cards and the registration of voters. The controversial appreciation of this process by While Government representatives, notably the Minister of the Interior, and the CENI admitted some problems and irregularities in the two processes and consequently extended the duration of the two-week enrolment phase by an additional week (until 12 December 2014), some

of the opposition parties and civil society organizations openly called for their suspension in order to look into the allegations of what they deem to be serious frauds. Dismissing the need for a comprehensive audit requested by a group of opposition parties, the President of the CENI referred to the publication of all provisional lists of voters at the level of the “collines” [the lowest level of administration in Burundi] that would allow everyone to identify eventual irregularities. The tensions created at this early and crucial stage of the electoral process are emblematic of the ongoing and persisting climate of mistrust between Government representatives and opposition parties which is further exacerbated by the continued absence of a genuine political dialogue between all political stakeholders.

Tensions between the Government and opposition parties continue to mainly revolve around different interpretations of the meaning of the roadmap towards elections [“feuille de route”] adopted by all political stakeholders, including those leaders that are not recognized by the authorities, in March 2013 – to a great extent thanks to the facilitation role of the BNUB. Promoting an inclusive, credible, fair and peaceful electoral process, the spirit of the roadmap is seen by the opposition as the guiding principle for the preparation of next year’s elections. The CENI however has so far interpreted its role in a formalistic manner, thereby excluding so-called “political actors” [a Burundian term for those former political leaders who were removed from the head of their political parties, i.e. mainly Agathon Rwasa (FNL) and Charles Nditije (Uprona)] that are not officially recognized within the electoral code from its consultations. In my meeting with the President of the CENI, I therefore argued in favor of creating the necessary space for a meaningful dialogue with all stakeholders. All Burundians, independently from their political or ethnic affiliation, must have a fair shot at actively participating in the electoral process. If this credo is not respected, the risk of further alienating opposition representatives grows and could in turn jeopardize the credibility of the elections. In this sense, the inclusive nature of a CENI meeting on 5 December 2014 was reassuring.

Another contentious issue that has gained in prominence since my last trip to Burundi is the question whether the President will run for a third term or not. While the Arusha accords clearly stipulate that the President of the Republic must not exceed ten years in power, the ruling party, CNDD-FDD, continues to keep everyone in the dark [the date for the party congress has not been set yet]. A recent reshuffle of influential figures in his inner circle by the President has further nurtured speculations. In the meantime, the positions of various opposition parties have radicalized on this issue. I was told by some of them that they would interpret the eventual announcement of a third term as a coup d’état further raising the stakes the question already engenders.

Shortly before my arrival in Bujumbura, the Burundian parliament also nominated the 11 commissioners [six with a religious background and four women] that will form the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. While in principle progress on this central issue propagated by the Arusha Accords is to be welcomed, I heard a lot of criticism regarding the nomination process that once more was motivated by a perceived lack of inclusive dialogue and consultations. This led, for

example, parliamentarians of Uprona to walk out of the National Assembly prior to the vote. Going forward, it will be critical to ensure that the Truth and Reconciliation adopts a transparent and inclusive approach engaging with all different parts of Burundian society. Furthermore, beyond the importance of truth-seeking and reconciliation, the justice dimension, i.e. the promotion of accountability for past crimes, must not be forgotten.

The absence of a genuine political dialogue that includes all relevant political actors and the ensuing continued lack of a truly open political space that creates a level playing field for all do not represent new challenges but have become the recurrent theme of Burundian politics that casts a, at times admittedly disproportionate, cloud over the undeniable and impressive progress the country has gone through since the end of the civil war. An encouraging sign that is worth mentioning for example is the recent reduction in cases of political violence involving youth affiliated with political parties. On several occasions I heard people say that it would take only little for Burundi to make that last effort towards irreversible peace consolidation and grow into a model case for a successful post-conflict transition. I believe so too. A decisive step in that direction would be to commit to a truly inclusive political dialogue and open up political space by ensuring the protection of all public liberties, including the right to free assembly and association, the right to freedom of opinion and speech as well as the protection of human rights defenders. It goes without saying that the responsibility first and foremost falls to the Government. It has to back up its promises with real deeds. But the opposition must equally play a constructive part in this endeavor, particularly by avoiding recommitting the mistakes of 2010. In this regard, the impact of the recently proclaimed coalition regrouping Agathon Rwasa, Charles Nditije and six other political parties on the coherence of the opposition will be interesting to follow.

### *Socio-economic situation*

As per usual practice, I also met with representatives of the international financial institutions, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the African Development Bank. All three lauded Burundi's remarkable progress in improving economic stability over the last decade. Inflation has been reduced considerably and the management of public finances has seen improvements. Economic growth however (momentarily over 4%) is still not enough to reduce high poverty levels given the parallel demographic growth and continues to be dependent on international development assistance [e.g. 50% of the budget are provided for by partners]. Going forward, Burundi should improve its capacity to mobilize internal resources, continue to implement structural reforms such as improving debt management, pursue efforts to consolidate peace and push regional integration. The upcoming elections also pose a financial challenge since they can create incentives to spend more. All financial institutions underscored that the holding of good elections would allow Burundi to focus on key sectors with a view of strengthening economic growth. In a country where only 2% of the population has permanent access to electricity, increasing the energy capacity is fundamental. Transport links need to be improved as well. Another challenge is the increase of agricultural

productivity that is strongly linked to the issue of urbanization since 9 out of 10 Burundians still live in rural areas, which leads to a fragmentation of arable land. Such economic programs will have to be accompanied by the strengthening of resilience of the most vulnerable through the expansion of the delivery of basic services to the whole population. All of this can only happen with the simultaneous improvement of the economic governance, notably through public financial management, including for the exploitation of natural resources. Last but not least, regional integration, specifically within the EAC, also holds an important key to unlock Burundi's potential.

These economic reforms are also necessary to develop a viable and solid private sector in Burundi. Its population, particularly the young generation, needs to benefit from the peace dividends through increased employment opportunities. In the end, a solid and democratic society also depends on a strong private sector. Today in the absence of a valid alternative in the private sector, political power all too often amounts to economic power. Consequently, electoral stakes are extremely high.

#### *UN transition*

On Friday, 12 December 2014, the last day of my visit, I assisted at the official closing ceremony of the UN's political mission in Burundi, BNUB. Its departure that intervenes only months prior to the elections is seen by many as premature, no need to hide it. BNUB was the main facilitator of political dialogue and high-level advocacy and will undoubtedly leave a serious gap in this regard – as put forward by the joint transition plan. Given this critical challenge, I argued with Government, UN and other international representatives to ensure that the incoming electoral observation mission in Burundi (MENUB) will not only provide electoral observation but also continue BNUB's efforts of facilitating inclusive political dialogue all along the electoral process. In my meeting with the President of the CENI, I suggested that MENUB could facilitate a dialogue on the electoral process that would regroup all relevant political stakeholders, including so-called political actors, as well as the CENI. The President welcomed this proposal since his Commission would not be able to organize such a dialogue on its own given the legal constraints contained in the electoral code. In order to do this, MENUB should be provided with the necessary resources. In addition to MENUB's role in facilitating political dialogue and in view of increasing the country's self-reliance, Burundi should also develop its own mediation capacities, for example through its various former presidents. Several civil society organizations already play an outstanding role in promoting political dialogue and should be encouraged and supported to continue their important work.

Beyond MENUB, the UN Country Team should be strengthened as well. I was glad to hear that the Government and the UN reached an agreement on the next Resident Coordinator and I urge UNDP to speed up his deployment to ensure a as smooth as possible transition. I am confident that the future RC and his entire UNCT team will also take into consideration the political realities in Burundi and act accordingly.

During my visit, the Government also reiterated its wish to continue its cooperation with the Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Human rights promotion and monitoring remains an ever important task in Burundi, particularly in view of next year's election. The funding of the OHCHR office however remains a difficult challenge. I am heartened by Germany's commitment to contribute a substantial amount of financial resources and by the Peacebuilding Fund's (PBF) intention to follow suit. More resources are needed as soon as possible though. Budgetary predictability is fundamental to ensure that experienced OHCHR staff can remain in the country, both in the capital and in the field offices – unfortunately though, many have already left. I therefore once again urge all partners to contribute as soon as possible to the OHCHR presence in Burundi [annual budgetary needs amount to USD 2.2 million].

Finally, coordination and coherence among all remaining (UNCT and OHCHR) and new elements (MENUM) of the UN presence on the ground will be an important factor to maximize its effect. The Peacebuilding Fund already plays a critical contribution in this regard. Its third peacebuilding priority plan (PPP-III) amounting to USD 11.65 million will support key projects in human rights, political dialogue and social cohesion, youth participation and land disputes. AF Fernandez-Taranco's participation in the trip allow him to engage with key partners and push forward project plans in the four priority areas.

Beyond the UN's engagement, the politico-institutional and socio-economic progress of Burundi hinges on its cooperation with bi- and multilateral partners. This dimension was the subject of a two-day roundtable meeting between the Government of Burundi and its main partners on 11-12 December 2014, and the main reason behind my visit.

### *Roundtable meeting*

The roundtable meeting, which was to a large degree facilitated by the PBC Burundi Configuration, was part of the wider Geneva process dating back to the donors' conference in October 2012. Its main objective was threefold: to take stock of the mutual engagements taken at the Geneva Conference two years ago, to assess the implications of BNUB's drawdown on the cooperation between Burundi and its partners and to discuss the future of the partnership assuming that elections will be free, transparent, credible, inclusive and peaceful.

The President of the Republic himself opened the roundtable reiterating the important progress Burundi has already achieved, but also acknowledging considerable outstanding challenges, particularly in the fight against poverty. He underlined once more that the ambition of his Government was to make the 2015 elections the most successful the country has ever seen and called upon all partners to remain engaged in Burundi. The following one and a half days saw frank and open discussions on critical issues like the evaluation of the implementation of mutual commitments taken in Geneva, the preparations for the 2015 elections and the future cooperation beyond the current developmental framework, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper II (PRSP-II),

which expires at the end of 2015. While the Government did not miss to acknowledge the overall satisfying disbursement of pledges taken in Geneva and at subsequent sectoral conferences, it called upon all partners to make an effort to translate the entirety of their financial promises into development agreements and to increase predictability. Partners on the other side urged the Government to improve its absorption and implementation capacity to allow them to effectively disburse their developmental frameworks.

On the elections, the President of the CENI underscored that one of the main concerns remained the securing of their effective funding. Of the overall budget of a little over USD 60.5 million, only a little less than 50% have been secured so far. From the partners' side, the echo was unequivocal: the electoral process needs to be genuinely inclusive and credible and guarantee the necessary political space for the effective participation of all stakeholders. This is also why some bilateral partners have established a two-step approach for their contributions to the "basket fund for elections" managed by the UNPD, making the second financial tranche contingent upon the fulfilment of certain key conditions. With regard to the critical budgetary situation, many partners asked for a more detailed analysis of the CENI's real financial needs for the elections. Furthermore, the IMF representative noted that the fact that the Government has budgeted 18% of its fiscal revenues for the elections risked jeopardizing the implementation of important reform projects.

The last session of the roundtable focused on the post 2015 period and the end of the PRSP-II. The Government declared that it intended to work on a new development strategy that would mainly focus on economic growth and social development and be in line with its wider strategy, the Vision 2025. In this regard, it announced to convene a second roundtable in a year's time to present and promote the new strategy. Partners generally welcomed the Government's plans and underlined that they will remain at Burundi's sides. Concerns were expressed with regard to the ambition of developing a new substantive development framework during an electoral year.

At the end of the roundtable, a joint communiqué, mainly facilitated within the PBC Burundi Configuration, was adopted that welcomes progress achieved, identifies outstanding challenges and defines a new set of mutual engagements [see annex]. I very much welcome this encouraging step and hope that going forward the communiqué can serve as a guiding document both sides, Government and partners, can refer to. The adoption of the joint communiqué would not have been possible without the spirit of dialogue and compromise that has prevailed throughout the roundtable and I thank everyone for making an effort. Looking forward, it is my wish that both, Government and partners, can carry on with this approach in the spirit of a constructive partnership.

### *Future of the PBC*

Having focused on the post-2015 period, the roundtable also, at least implicitly, brought up the question of the future engagement of the PBC Burundi Configuration. Having had this issue already in mind for a while, I asked my designated successor as Permanent Representative of Switzerland to

the UN in New York, Ambassador Jürg Lauber, to accompany me on my trip to show our commitment in principle to carry on with the mandate. But also in order to allow him to get accustomed to Burundi and its various interlocutors. In my meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, I underscored the PBC's readiness to continue with the Configuration's engagement if the Government under the principle of national ownership wanted it. I reiterated that the PBC could help to foster continued engagement of the international community beyond 2015, mainly in view of the Government's new development strategy. Depending on a successful electoral process, the PBC could in future focus even more on socio-economic development and eventually try to facilitate a forum to attract private investment in Burundi, for example in collaboration with the Special Envoy on the Great Lakes Region, Mr. Said Djinnit,. The Minister told me that his Government had not yet taken a decision on the future cooperation with the PBC but would certainly appreciate the elaboration of a concept note that would present a series of options in this regard. I promised to the Minister to elaborate a proposal that could be discussed within the Configuration.

Going forward, the main imminent risk to the peacebuilding process, notably in view of the elections, remain exclusionary tendencies. It is imperative that the electoral process is perceived by all as inclusive and credible allowing for a genuinely open and free political space not only in theory, but also and foremost in practice. As Chair of the Burundi Configuration I am committed to remain closely engaged during this crucial period and have already communicated to the Government that I intend to travel to Burundi again around April 2015.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Government of Burundi for its warm hospitality and facilitation of high-level meetings with its exponents. My deep gratitude also goes to the SRSG Parfait Onanga-Anyanga and his entire BNUB staff. During my time as Chair of the Burundi Configuration the SRSG has been an outstanding partner and friend as well as an exemplary champion of the PBC at all times. It is to a great part also thanks to his personal engagement that our Configuration was able to play a role in Burundi's peacebuilding process. With his departure, Burundi loses one of its strongest advocates, future beneficiaries of his tremendous professionalism and commitment can look forward to him.

Paul R. Seger, Chair

Peacebuilding Commission – Burundi  
Configuration

Annex:

Joint Communiqué of the Burundi Roundtable of 11-12 December 2014 (French, with unofficial English translation)