

The situation in Burundi
Statement by Ambassador Jürg Lauber,
Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission

UN Security Council, 26 February 2018

Mr. President

Distinguished Members of the Council

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

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

Since my last briefing to the Council, the PBC Burundi Configuration convened on two occasions, on 8 November 2017 and 29 January 2018, with a focus on humanitarian, socioeconomic and political questions. The Configuration heard briefings from Garry Conille, the UN Resident Coordinator in Burundi, from OCHA, UNHCR and PBSO.

At her briefing on 29 January, Ms. Ursula Müller, Assistant Secretary-General of OCHA, reported that in the last three years the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Burundi had tripled, rising from 1 to 3.6 million people. She noted that 25 percent of the population are estimated to be food insecure (a 7 % increase compared to 2016). 500'000 people received food and nutrition assistance in 2017. At least 60'000 children are currently suffering from severe acute malnutrition. On a more positive note, a malaria epidemic which resulted in some 9400 deaths between 2015 to 2017 has successfully been contained.

On 19 February, OCHA presented its report for the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2018 in Bujumbura. On 21 February, the Government informed in a press communiqué that it rejects the content of this report “en bloc” for lack of cooperation, calling OCHA’s numbers exaggerated and referring to positive developments regarding food security. The Government invited OCHA to discuss cooperation on humanitarian responses with the responsible Ministries in order to produce a consensual plan for both parties.

At the Configuration meeting of 29 January, Ms. Ninette Kelley, Director of the New York Office of UNHCR, informed the Configuration on the challenges related to the return of refugees from Tanzania to Burundi. Based on an agreement reached between Burundi, Tanzania and UNHCR within their Tripartite Commission last August, 13’000 refugees returned in 2017, while the repatriation of another 60’000 persons is planned for 2018. The return of refugees will increase pressure on receiving communities, requiring additional reintegration support to those who return, but also to those who did not leave the area. UNHCR also reports on an influx of over 8000 refugees from the DRC into Burundi since the beginning of 2018.

The displaced persons inside Burundi are being supported under the humanitarian response plan. Besides that, a Regional Refugee Response Plan (3RP) is in place to support the 434’000 Burundian refugees living in Tanzania, Rwanda, DRC and Uganda. On 29 January, the Permanent Representative of Tanzania informed the Configuration that Tanzania has decided to withdraw from the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF).

In various interactions with the Configuration, UN Resident Coordinator Garry Conille pointed to the challenging socioeconomic situation. A negative trade balance, inflation (rising from 5.6 per cent in December 2016 to 18 per cent in December 2017), unemployment and a shortage of foreign currency reserves are among the most concerning economic trends. The Resident Coordinator outlined multidimensional challenges for the UN: The UNCT is trying to address chronic vulnerability and a series of shocks simultaneously. At the moment, strengthening the resilience of the population is a priority of the UNCT engagement in Burundi.

According to OHCHR, the negotiations on a revised Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between OHCHR and the Government of Burundi have yet to be finalized and the cooperation which was suspended on 11 October 2016 has not yet resumed. I encourage both parties to move forward and finalize the MoU. Meanwhile the deployment of three human rights experts to Bujumbura, in line with Human Rights Council resolution 36/2 of 28 September 2017, is being finalized.

As mentioned in earlier briefings to this Council, it is obvious that the activities of the Configuration must be complementary to the efforts undertaken on sub-regional, regional, and international level to advance the political reconciliation in Burundi. To this end, I have been maintaining regular contacts to H.E. Mr. Benjamin Mkapa, the former President of the United Republic of Tanzania and EAC Facilitator for Burundi, H.E. Mr. Smaïl Chergui, the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, H.E. Mr. Basile Ikouebe, the AU Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region, as well as H.E. Michel Kafando, UN Special Envoy, all of whom I had the opportunity to meet recently in Addis Ababa or Geneva.

In both recent meetings of the PBC Burundi Configuration, Member States expressed overwhelming support to the EAC-led dialogue process and gratitude to President Mkapa for his personal engagement. While the government recognizes that progress has been made during the 4th session of the dialogue, some delegations regretted the lack of progress in the process. Some delegations expressed concerns that the upcoming referendum on a revised constitution could reverse some of the gains achieved through the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement. Other delegations expressed their view that constitutional amendment falls under the sovereignty of the country and the situation is generally improving.

In the field of security, since my last visit to Burundi and the region, I received reports that the security situation has been generally calm in the country. I encourage all national stakeholders to contribute to peace and stability in Burundi.

I am currently preparing my next trip to Burundi which is supposed to take place within the next few weeks. In view of recent developments and after consultations with the Configuration, I intend to focus on the following five topics during my visit:

1. The mediation efforts of the EAC: In my contacts in Burundi, I will insist that the remaining political divergences should be addressed in the framework of the EAC dialogue in an inclusive manner.
2. Related to that, I am planning to discuss the path leading towards the 2020 elections. I will encourage my interlocutors to reflect on how free, fair and democratic elections in a pluralistic and peaceful environment can be ensured in Burundi and how the international community could support Burundi on this path.
3. I am also planning to continue the socioeconomic dialogue with the Government and its international partners. This dialogue should aim at both addressing the needs of the population and at overcoming existing obstacles for cooperation. I am planning to involve additional partners such as regional actors, the private sector, civil society and academia in this conversation.
4. I will continue to focus on the humanitarian situation and engage with humanitarian actors on the ground in cooperation with the government.
5. National reconciliation and dealing with the past will be high on my agenda – a subject to which the President of the Republic attaches great importance.

These priorities are very similar to those defined by the Peacebuilding Fund for its current engagement: Since my last briefing in November, the Peacebuilding Fund has approved three new projects with a total volume of 6.5 million in Burundi. 3 million USD were approved for a project involving those four communities in Burundi with the highest number of expected returnees. It aims at increasing protection of displaced people in border areas, specifically with regard to social and economic rights, including ensuring access to basic services and livelihoods for returnees and members of host communities, as well as with regard to gender-based violence. The second new PBF initiative with a volume of 1.75 million USD supports capacity building among the youth members of political parties. The third project of the same volume supports cross-generational networks of women leaders in their ability to launch local peacebuilding initiatives.

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Based on my recent contacts with Burundian stakeholders, regional and international actors, I wish to draw the following conclusions:

- (1) The **EAC-led dialogue process** remains an indispensable instrument to address the current situation in Burundi. National, regional and international interlocutors should continue to lend their support to the efforts undertaken by H.E. President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and H.E. President Benjamin Mkapa.
- (2) The upcoming elections of 2020 require increased international attention. It would be a great achievement if national, regional and international actors could agree on some kind of **roadmap** in order to create the necessary preconditions for democratic, peaceful and inclusive elections in 2020.
- (3) **Humanitarian needs** must be addressed: I call upon Burundi's international partners to strengthen the resilience of the population by addressing the current humanitarian challenges on the ground in cooperation with the government. At the same time, I call upon the Government of Burundi to continue to cooperate closely and constructively with its international humanitarian partners to address the most urgent needs of Burundi's population.
- (4) Mid- and long-term **socioeconomic development** must not be ignored. I invite the Government of Burundi and its partners to engage in a dialogue on mutually beneficial, people-centred and innovative forms of engagement.
- (5) I remain convinced that a swift signing of the **MoUs** between the Government and OHCHR and as well as between the Government and the African Union, and the deployment of the respective observers will allow to provide a more comprehensive and accurate picture of the human rights situation and help to safeguard the space for civil society in Burundi.

Many thanks for your attention.