

Security Council – Open debate on the situation in Burundi
*Statement by Ambassador Paul Seger, Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the
Peacebuilding Commission.*

New York, 08 December 2010

Mr. President,

On behalf of the Burundi Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, I thank you for the invitation to address the Security Council in today's debate. I speak in my capacity as chair of the Burundi Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission.

I also thank the Secretary-General for his report. It addresses all pertinent aspects of peacebuilding in Burundi in a comprehensive and balanced way.

In its Resolution 1902 (2009), adopted by the Security Council at its 6245th meeting, on 17 December 2009, the Security Council welcomed the continued engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission in Burundi and encouraged the Government of Burundi, the Peacebuilding Commission, and its national and international partners to honour the commitments they have made under the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding. The Council also requested the Peacebuilding Commission, with support from BINUB, to continue to assist the Government of Burundi in laying the foundations for sustainable peace and security, reintegration and long-term development in Burundi and in mobilizing the resources needed to achieve these goals, including for the 2010 elections.

Mr President, I am delighted to report briefly on the work the Burundi Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission has accomplished following the request by the Security Council.

In its fourth year of engagement with Burundi, the Commission continued to focus its work on supporting the country's efforts on a range of peacebuilding activities. The engagement was marked by visits to Burundi by my predecessor Peter Maurer, a PBC delegation and later by myself; meetings of the country configuration; my recent visit to the World Bank as well as the lunch event I co-hosted with my colleague Ambassador Gahutu Zacharie on 24 September 2010.

Taken together, these activities provide important illustrations of the Commission's efforts in fulfilling its core functions of political accompaniment to countries on its agenda; resource mobilisation and advocacy and bringing partners together to support post conflict peacebuilding efforts.

Political accompaniment

The most important issue during this period was the preparations for and holding of the elections in 2010. Much of the work of this configuration focused on supporting the country's efforts to conduct free and fair elections and in mobilising international support for that effort.

On 25 January and 05 February 2010, the Configuration met under the leadership of my predecessor Ambassador Peter Maurer, to provide an update on progress achieved in the preparation of 2010 elections. Following the presentation of the electoral calendar, discussions at the meeting focused on important challenges, including a gap of USD 13 Million in the electoral budget, security of elections and the need to keep a focus on economic recovery in parallel to support for the elections.

From 24 to 28 February 2010, Ambassador Peter Maurer led a PBC delegation on a visit to Burundi to follow up on the preparation of elections and pursue engagement with key stakeholders and explore opportunities for long term engagement of the PBC with Burundi. The PBC Delegation had very fruitful discussions with the President and other national authorities, the National Independent Electoral Commission, the Political Parties represented in the Parliament, the FNL Leadership, representatives of the Civil Society Organisations, regional stakeholders as well representatives of the International Community. The delegation also visited Bubanza province where it interacted with the Communal Independent Electoral Commissions and the Communal Committee for Community Development in Bubanza.

Following the visit, my predecessor convened a formal meeting of the Configuration on 24 March 2010 to report on the PBC visit to Burundi and to conclude the fourth biannual review of the implementation of the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in Burundi. This review provided the opportunity to update and further refine the role of the PBC in support of elections, to focus on the following key remaining areas of support, i.e: (a) Increase efforts to mobilize remaining technical and financial resources needed for the 2010 elections and ensure that resources are made available as soon as possible and in the agreed terms; (b) Ensure communication between and, where possible, coordination of national and international electoral observers.

On 09 June 2010, I introduced myself to members of the Configuration in my capacity as the new Chair of the Burundi Configuration. I then convened a meeting of the Configuration on 21 June 2010 for members to be updated on the electoral process and to discuss opportunities to further support the democratic process and encourage an inclusive approach with the view of the upcoming legislative elections [and in light of the withdrawal of the main opposition parties, alleging irregularities in the communal elections of May].

Mid-way during the elections, in my capacity as new Chair of the Burundi Configuration, I undertook a visit to Bujumbura from 30 June to 3 July 2010 with the following objectives of better understanding progress made in the on-going electoral process; to pursue the PBC's engagement with the Government, the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI), political actors, national and international stakeholders in support to efforts aimed at ensuring the electoral process is democratic, safe and inclusive and to discuss with national authorities and BINUB the next steps after the elections and the opportunities for PBC support to long-term development efforts.

In my report, I concluded that the PBC should continue to assist Burundi independently of the outcome of the parliamentary elections, suggesting that the focus of co-operation should be determined according to the political situation prevailing thereafter.

Resource Mobilisation and advocacy

On 11 May 2010, a meeting of the Configuration assessed progress in the preparation of the elections and further mobilised the assistance of the international community. Following this meeting, the funding gap for the election budget was closed. On a total budget of USD 46.5 million, the Government of Burundi contributed USD 7.9 millions from their own budget and the rest was mainly covered by members of the Burundi Configuration. The following countries and organizations provided resources: Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, Egypt, France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the USA, the African Union, the European Union, and UNDP. To fill critical gaps, the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) provided 3 millions to the electoral budget.

On 6 October, I visited the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in Washington. The purpose of the visit was to establish initial contacts with officials of the two institutions handling Burundi-related matters and to take advantage of the presence of field representatives in Washington, to discuss peacebuilding issues in the context of the process of preparing a new poverty-reduction strategy paper (PRSP). The conclusion of the visit suggested that while the World Bank focuses on socio-economic issues, there was expectation that [the PBC would take the lead on] in engaging in political issues such as SSR, dialogue with the opposition, Human Rights and others. The World Bank also suggested that on the basis of the new PRSP it could co-host with the PBC a donor conference in Bujumbura in September/October 2011.

Bring Partners together in support of peacebuilding

Throughout this period, my predecessor, myself and membership of the Burundi Configuration interacted with several institutions and other key stakeholders with the aim of developing or deepening relations with them to better support peacebuilding

efforts in Burundi. Some of these interactions led to financial contribution, others generated mutual appreciation of the need to work together and still others laid the foundation of enhanced cooperation in the future.

On 24 September 2010, in the margin of the high-level segment of the General Assembly, I co-hosted with my colleague Ambassador Gahutu Zacharie, the Permanent Representative of Burundi in New York a lunch as a way to pursue engagement with the Government of Burundi, with a particular focus on the post electoral opportunities and challenges and the long-term engagement of the PBC with Burundi. During that lunch, Burundi Minister of External Relations and International Cooperation, Augustin Nsanze provided an update on the key outcomes of the elections and acknowledged the role played by the international community and the region. I reiterated the importance of a sustained political dialogue between the government and the opposition which had been mentioned by several speakers during the lunch

Conclusion

Mr President, the 2010 elections in Burundi have shown that national actors, regional actors and the international community can work together and provide efficient support to a complex process such as elections.

The main lesson learned from this experience is that we need to further put elections in a wider context and long-term perspective. We have the responsibility to support the Government as it delivers key services to the population. Looking ahead, I see four entry points that should constitute the next rendez-vous between the Burundians and the International Community:

First, the PRSP provides a way to articulate a long-term development agenda and mobilise the investment required by the immediate priorities. I would like to commit the PBC in mobilizing traditional donors and helping the Government to attract new investments. Let's use the next donor conference to call attention to new business opportunities in the country. We believe that a strong and equitable economic development will absorb or reduce most of the current socio-political pressures and tensions.

Second, the Burundi presidency of the East African Regional Integration represents an opportunity to consolidate the role of Burundi in the region. The PBC stands ready to work with the UN leadership in mobilising international support for this regional role for Burundi.

Third, transitional justice and national reconciliation offers a way to put an end to the culture of impunity and to put behind the painful consequences of the tragic events most of which will be commemorated in the upcoming years.

Fourth, the culture of dialogue inherited from Arusha and embedded in the Burundian tradition and Constitution needs to be nurtured and sustained to lay the foundation to address any important socio-economic and political challenges. Like in any other country or society, challenges will always arise and Burundians have to be prepared to deal with them. Did the 2010 elections leave Burundians with residual challenges? This is one of the questions the PBC will look at in the context of the 5th biannual review of the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in Burundi. And if the answer is yes, the PBC will work with other actors in supporting solutions agreed among Burundians aimed at addressing those challenges.

Mr. President, I intend to lead a PBC delegation to Burundi in January 2011. The purpose will be to participate in the 5th review of the strategic framework and finalise discussions with the Government of Burundi on the role they would like the PBC to play in light of outstanding peacebuilding challenges and in support to the new UN Mission in Burundi. In this context, the PBC greatly appreciated the recommendations of the Security Council.

I highly appreciate the Council's invitation to speak today and suggest to establish a regular exchange of views between the Council and the PBC in the coming months.

I thank you Mr. President.