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HEADQUARTERS • SIEGENEW YORK, NY 10017
TEL.: 1 (212) 963.1234 • FAX: 1 (212) 963.4879

16 April 2018

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen

My sixth visit to Burundi in my capacity as Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission took place from 27 to 30 March. In my meetings, I focused on the subjects that I had presented to the Configuration on 29 January, i.e.: the EAC-led dialogue process, the path towards the elections in 2020, the socioeconomic situation, the humanitarian challenges as well as reconciliation.

The main objectives of my visit were to get a first-hand impression of the situation on the ground, to maintain the contact with the Government and other national stakeholders, to advocate for renewed dialogue and cooperation between the Government and its international partners and to identify further avenues for PBC engagement with Burundi.

I would like to start by thanking the Government of Burundi, UN Resident Coordinator Garry Conille and the UN Country Team, the Swiss Cooperation Office in Bujumbura and the UN Peacebuilding Support Office in New York for preparing a very rich and insightful program.

Ms. Barrie Freeman, Deputy and Political Director of the UN Peacebuilding Support Office, travelled with me.

Particular thanks go to Ambassador Albert Shingiro, the Permanent Representative of Burundi, who accompanied me, as on previous missions.

1. Program of the visit

In Burundi, I was received by H.E. Pierre Nkurunziza, President of the Republic of Burundi; H.E. Mr. Alain Aimé Nyamitwe, Minister of External Relations and International Cooperation; H.E. Mr. Domitien Ndiwokubwayo, Minister of Finance, Budget and Privatization; H.E. Mr. Pierre Claver Ndayicariye, President of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI); H.E. Mgr. Jean



Louis Nahimana, President of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC); leaders of three political parties (CNDD-FDD, Amizero y'Abarundi and UPRONA); H.E. Mr. Basile Ikouebe, Special Envoy of the African Union; representatives of the private sector; the UNCT; Members of the Team of UN Special Envoy Michel Kafando; ICRC; Representatives of Member States of the Configuration (Belgium, China, the European Union, France, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, Switzerland and the United States) as well as a group of economists and historians.

Two initially planned meetings with political parties and with civil society organizations did not take place, but I am planning to meet these interlocutors during my next visit to Burundi.

2. Political situation

After three days in Bujumbura I spent one day in the city of Ngozi where I was received by the President of the Republic. The two cities which I visited during my mission to Burundi made a lively impression and the general security situation seemed calm.

On 28 March, I met the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI), which is in charge of preparing the upcoming referendum and the elections of 2020. The President of the CENI explained how the Commission is finalizing registration of voters for the referendum scheduled for 17 May and the elections of 2020. On 12 December 2017, the Government had launched an “explanation campaign” (“campagne d’explication”) regarding the referendum, whereas the political campaign itself will last from 1st to 14th of May. Governmental officials stressed that the proposed constitutional amendments are fully compatible with the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement. In my contacts with the Government, I underlined that the referendum must take place in a democratic and open environment, and without any incidents.

I also invited the Government to reflect about whether Burundi may require international electoral assistance for the elections of 2020.

The leaders of three political parties whom I met on 29 March suggested that Burundi’s political actors should agree on a roadmap (“feuille de route”) which would define the path towards the elections in 2020.



Such a roadmap could contain a number of benchmarks aimed at ensuring that the elections will be free, fair, transparent, peaceful, fully inclusive, with the participation of all political parties. The party leaders also reiterated their continued commitment to participate in the EAC-led dialogue process.

Many interlocutors expressed similar support to the EAC mediation and the hope that the next round of the Arusha dialogue will take place in Uganda in late April, as planned. The AU Special Representative and the team of the UN Special Envoy underlined their readiness to continue to support the efforts of the EAC.

Various interlocutors emphasized that the Government should swiftly reach an agreement with the AU on the deployment of the agreed number of human rights and military observers and with OHCHR on the full resumption of its activities.

3. Socioeconomic situation and humanitarian challenges

The serious socioeconomic challenges which Burundi is currently facing were a key subject of my conversations. According to the Minister of Finance, Burundi's GDP grew by 2.8% in 2017, while the inflation rate was 16 %. For 2018, the government forecasts a GDP growth of 4% and a budget deficit of 3%.

Government officials called upon Burundi's partners to focus more on mid- and long-term socioeconomic development than on humanitarian assistance.

They reiterated their regret about the suspension of direct budgetary assistance by the European Union in 2016, but, at the same time, expressed their appreciation for the continued engagement by the European Union and its Member States in specific areas.

The Government also informed me that it is currently elaborating a new National Development Plan which will soon be published.

Burundi's international partners reiterated their readiness to support Burundi both with regard to socioeconomic and to humanitarian challenges. They expressed their wish to be informed about the National Development Plan as early as possible in order to adapt their development strategies to



national priorities. The UNCT pointed to the great relevance of the National Development Plan for the elaboration of the next Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

Burundi's international partners as well as representatives of the private sector referred to certain challenges for economic engagement, including the lack of foreign currency and difficulties to obtain bank loans.

In my conversation with the President of the Republic, I emphasized that the PBC Burundi Configuration remains committed to facilitate dialogue and cooperation between the Government and its international partners. In that regard, I suggested to organize another round of socioeconomic consultations in Bujumbura in 2018 which could involve additional partners such as the IMF, the EU and bilateral donors. Burundi's National Development Plan might serve as a basis for this conversation between the Government and its partners.

The President thanked the Configuration for its continued cooperation with Burundi and expressed his interest in another round of the socioeconomic dialogue, including with additional partners. He also indicated that the National Development Plan will be "realistic and pragmatic".

During my stay, high-ranking officials from Burundi, Tanzania and UNHCR signed a tripartite agreement on the return of additional Burundian refugees from Tanzania. According to UNHCR, a total of 274'455 Burundian refugees are currently living in Tanzania. Priority for repatriation will be given to 19'148 refugees whose registered intention to return has already been verified by UNHCR. The total number of returnees might reach 72'000 persons in 2018. I encouraged the Government to continue its cooperation with UNHCR on repatriation in full respect of the principles of international refugee law and in the interest of enabling the conflict-sensitive reintegration of returnees.

With regard to the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for 2018, the Government repeated its view that the plan contained exaggerated numbers and had not been sufficiently consulted with national authorities. OCHA had launched this plan in February 2018. Its total volume of USD 141.8 million is currently covered by only 2%. I told the Government and its humanitarian partners that a swift agreement on the Humanitarian Response Plan will allow them to mobilize additional resources, and I offered the PBC Burundi Configuration as a platform to generate broad support for the plan.



I was also pleased to hear that the Peacebuilding Fund has pledged up to 8 million USD for peacebuilding programming in Burundi this year.

4. Reconciliation

Since in previous meetings the President of the Republic had always underlined the importance of national reconciliation, I raised this question again when he received me on 30 March. Two days before I had met the President of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and a group of local historians and reconciliation experts. I was impressed to hear about the work the commission had undertaken in recent months; so far it had collected over 45'000 testimonies and engaged in 16 of the 18 provinces of Burundi. Among the challenges, which the commission is facing, are time pressure, the security of data and the question of accountability.

In my meeting with the President, I welcomed the progress made by the TRC. I recommended extending the mandate of the commission by one year, until the end of 2019, in accordance with the provisions of the Arusha Accord. I also indicated that the PBC Burundi Configuration could help mobilize international technical and financial assistance for the commission as well as for other reconciliation efforts in Burundi. The President reacted positively to the suggestion of an extension of the mandate and said he would welcome increased international assistance for the commission whose work he called “a key for the future of Burundi”.

5. Conclusions

Based on my conversations in Burundi, my recommendations to the PBC Burundi Configuration are the following:

- 1) The international community should continue to follow developments in Burundi attentively and take all aspects of the current situation into account. In doing so, there is a need for coherence among UN actors and the international community, and for finding common ground with the government in order to build trust and a better sense of partnership.
- 2) The mediation efforts by the EAC continue to deserve our full support.



3) The next National Development Plan may offer a basis for a renewed conversation between the Government and its international partners. I am therefore planning to organize another round of the socioeconomic dialogue between Burundi and its partners in 2018 in cooperation with the Government of Burundi and the UN Resident Coordinator. The involvement of partners such as the IMF, the EU and bilateral donors who had not participated in the Bujumbura roundtables in 2017 seems crucial to me. In my view, such a dialogue session has a considerable potential to foster confidence between Burundi and its partners.

4) Besides mid- and long-term socioeconomic cooperation, the international community should not neglect the immediate humanitarian needs in Burundi. The Configuration should continue to encourage cooperation between the Government and its humanitarian partners with a view to address the most urgent needs of the population.

5) The significant gains achieved through the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement must not be undermined.

One of the advantages of a roadmap to 2020 (“feuille de route”) among political actors is that it could potentially yield a broadly shared understanding on how the gains of Arusha can be preserved – namely in the view of the elections of 2020.

6) The international community should continue to support efforts of national reconciliation and follow the ongoing reconciliation process in Burundi attentively.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Members of Configuration for their continuous support.