

Peacebuilding Commission, Burundi Configuration – Meeting of the Steering Group

New York, Swiss Mission to the United Nations, 20 September 2012

On Thursday, 20 September 2012, the Steering Group of the Burundi Configuration of the PBC held a breakfast meeting at the Swiss Mission. The main purpose of the meeting was to update the Steering Committee on the status of preparation of the upcoming Partners' Conference of 29/30 October in Geneva and on current political and socio-economic developments in Burundi.

Preparation Partners' Conference

Preparatory work on the ground is well under way; the invitations and the programme have been sent out. A web site has been set up for the conference (www.burundi.conference.org). The Chair thanked partners who have provided financial support to the organisation of the Conference, namely Belgium and Germany.

President Nkurunziza is going to attend the first day of the Conference, the Second Vice President will be present during the whole duration of the conference. A copy of the programme was distributed and the Chair drew members' attention to the session dedicated to peacebuilding issues. The Chair, Ambassador Seger, will lead on that session, and, in addition, he has a moderating role in other sessions.

The Chair will try to get hold of the list of the delegations invited to the Conference and will distribute it as soon possible. A large conference room at UN Headquarters in Geneva has been reserved for the Conference, together with two smaller rooms for the workshops on different sectoral issues.

The Chair is pursuing his outreach efforts, especially through a number of luncheons with new potential partners in order to generate support from non traditional donors as well. This week the Chair has also met with Ms. Helen Clark, UNDP Administrator, to discuss UNDP participation at the Conference. Mr. Ryan Jordan, Director of BCPR, will represent UNDP at the Conference. Last week the Chair also met with representatives of the Burundi country desk of the World Bank (WB) in the context of a PBC visit to Washington D.C., where he seized the opportunity to discuss the Conference with the WB. The WB is ready to support the Conference, and they see it as a starting point for a renewed and more institutionalized cooperation between bilateral and multilateral donors and Burundi. Specific commitment of the WB will be

based on their new Country Assistance Strategy, expected to be adopted on October 23rd.

Upon a comment of one delegation, the Chair mentioned the final communiqué foreseen at the conclusion of the Geneva Conference. He said that there are basically two options: Either a final communiqué established by Burundi as the host of the Conference or a joint final communiqué/declaration to conclude the Partners' Conference. While the first would only engage the host, the latter would have the advantage of sending out a clear message of common political support and mutual commitment. This could be a 1-2 pager stating mutual commitments of Burundi and its partners. On the one hand, the international community would reaffirm its sustained support over the next 4 years and on the other, Burundi would commit to implementing its poverty reduction strategy and effectively address outstanding peacebuilding issues. Such a joint message would of course have to be negotiated beforehand and agreed at the Conference. Members of the Steering Group supported the overall idea indicating, however, that the preparation for such a common declaration should mainly be done in Bujumbura in order to allow for an open and inclusive process for all stakeholders in the PRSP II. Ambassador Herménégilde Niyonzima agreed to consult his Government in Bujumbura in this regard. Once the idea is agreed upon, Bujumbura [Government and its local partners] is expected to prepare the draft of the communiqué, which will then be finalised during the Conference.

IPI event/round table

The International Peace Institute (IPI) is jointly organizing with the Permanent Missions of Burundi and Switzerland a high-level roundtable discussion on the upcoming Conference. The luncheon on October 2nd will, as the Chair reminded, constitute the last “rendez-vous” in New York before the Conference. The aim of the event is to have an open and candid discussion on the expectations, outcomes, and possible follow-up to the Conference, with a special focus on peacebuilding aspects, between the Government of Burundi and its traditional and potential new development partners. The Chair encouraged members to attend at the highest possible level, meaning PR or DPR, given the presence of Minister of Foreign Affairs Laurent Kavakure at the roundtable and to prepare to engage in a lively discussion. The Chair will send a reminder to members of the configuration in this regard.

Other matters, including recent developments

Ambassador Herménégilde Niyonzima reported that Transparency international has upgraded Burundi to the second best position in terms of the level of corruption within

the East African Community countries. Preparation for the 2015 elections have started and consultations for the new Independent Electoral Commission, CENI, are under way [the mandate of the current CENI members has been extended for 3 months to allow for further consultations on its future composition]. President Nkurunziza has appealed to extra parliamentary leaders to leave exile and come back home. Pancrace Cimpaye of FRODEBU is already back, and others have expressed their intention to follow him. The Government does not see the recent declaration by an FNL representative threatening to take up the arms again as a serious threat for the security of the country.

France announced a possible increase of its assistance to Burundi and the Netherlands informed Steering Group members that it is upgrading its presence in Bujumbura to a full-fledged Embassy. Both cautioned against the risk that the current revision of the law on the press might be more restrictive for the media. Nigeria expressed its worries on the sense of responsibility of the press in the absence of a strong rule of law. The Netherlands expressed its support for the BNUB communiqué on the recent report of the judiciary commission on extra-judiciary killings.

Ambassador Herménégilde Niyonzima reminded that freedom of press in Burundi is among the most liberal in Africa; he reiterated that the Government will continue to do its best to improve justice, which needs to be further strengthened. In closing this discussion, the Chair reminded participants that the bottom line was not how these killings are being called, but that such incidents should be prevented and if they occur nevertheless that the perpetrators should be brought to justice.

The Chair thanked the members of the Steering Group for their active participation and the useful exchange and adjourned the meeting.
