

Peacebuilding Commission Burundi Configuration

Report of the Delegation's visit to Bujumbura, 24-28 February 2010

I. Objectives of the visit:

- i) to follow up on the preparation of elections and pursue engagement with key stakeholders;
- ii) to follow up on the implementation of the national socio-economic reintegration strategy;
- iii) to participate in the 4th review of the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in Burundi and attend the meeting of the Political Forum;
- iv) to explore opportunities for long term engagement of the PBC with Burundi.

II. Composition of the Delegation:

- 1) Amb. Peter Maurer, Chair PBC Burundi Configuration, Permanent Representative, Switzerland;
- 2) Amb. Zacharie Gahutu, Permanent Representative, Burundi;
- 3) Amb. Zachary D. Muburi Muita, Permanent Representative, Kenya;
- 4) Amb. Norachit Sinhaseni, Permanent Representative, Thailand;
- 5) Amb. Xavier Michel, Permanent Representative, Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie in Gabon;
- 6) Mr. Piet de Klerk, Deputy Permanent Representative, Netherlands;
- 7) Mr. Karel Komárek, Minister Counsellor, Czech Republic;
- 8) Mr. Jorge Tagle, Counsellor, Chile.

Support to the delegation:

- 9) Mr. Johann Aeschlimann, Counsellor, Press and Public Affairs, Switzerland ;
- 10) Mr. Danilson Lopes da Rosa, Department of Political Affairs;
- 11) Mr. Vincent Kayijuka, Peacebuilding Support Office.

III. Stakeholders met:

The President of the Republic , the First Vice President, the President of the Senate, the Minister of External Relations and International Cooperation, the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Public Security, the Minister of National Solidarity, the National Independent Electoral Commission, the Political Parties represented in the Parliament, the FNL Leadership, representatives of the Civil Society Organisations, regional stakeholders, representatives of the International Community, the National Council on Communication and the Business Community.

On 27 February the delegation visited Bubanza province and met with the Governor, the Provincial and Communal Independent Electoral Commissions and the Communal Committee for Community Development in Bubanza.

IV. Results of the visit

1) *Overall impression:*

The delegation is aware that mutual trust and reconciliation which are the essence of peacebuilding are still at fragile state. At a time of political controversy it is difficult to assess the difference between rhetoric and reality in Burundi. Sustainable peacebuilding requires for all stakeholders to be included in the political process and for all to match their political rights with political responsibilities.

The delegation was impressed by the seriousness of the political engagement of all interlocutors to build peace.

2) *On the preparation of elections:*

Technical preparation of the elections continues to progress as planned. Voters registration is completed. Data processing for the production, publication and review of the voters list and production of voting cards (cartes electorales) is currently being carried out according to schedule.

There is a general confidence and trust in the work of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) which continues to show strong leadership in the election preparation process. Electoral Commissions at provincial and communal levels (CEPI and CECI) are in place and operating. Interactions with CENI, CEPI and CECI both in Bujumbura and in Bubanza result in an impression that electoral institutions are working and producing results. Political stalemates and blockages that loomed a few months ago have been overcome. One example is the successful campaign of issuing national identity cards and the provision of an alternative document for voters who could not obtain the identity card in time.

A number of elections-related challenges persist and/or have emerged.

Security issues: The Government expressed a need for strengthening operational capacities of the police, particularly regarding transportation and communications equipment. Other interlocutors stressed the need for additional training of the police in matters related to security of elections.

Some opposition parties reported cases of verbal and physical attacks and complained about occasional inaction or lack of impartiality of the security forces. References were made to cases of intimidation by youth groups, to unequal access to media and to restrictions of freedom of assembly. The periods after the first ballot on communal elections (21st May) and around the Presidential election (28th June) were identified by some civil society leaders as potentially security-sensitive periods.

There were some concerns about a perceived ambiguity of election disputes resolution mechanisms.

All interlocutors agreed on the need for continuing political dialogue among all stakeholders. However, some opposition parties complained about a reluctance of the ruling party to engage in a meaningful dialogue. Some political parties questioned the relevance/utility of the recently established Permanent Forum for Dialogue among the Political Parties.

Interlocutors in the government showed awareness of these challenges and assured the delegation that they are being addressed. A second initiative to disarm the civilian population is being planned. Regarding the youth groups affiliated to political parties, the government expressed readiness to ban potentially threatening activities.

All interlocutors stressed the need for national and international election observation, especially on a long-term basis. They called for immediate deployment of observation missions. Partners such as the EU, AU and EAC and national actors such as COSOME have started preparations for such deployments. Coordination of different observation missions and communication with existing mechanisms will be important.

The delegation noted a general commitment by all actors to achieve successful elections.

The election process in Burundi is at critical stage. The delegation is of the view that the funding gap in the electoral budget should be closed urgently.

3) *On the socio-economic reintegration of war-affected populations:*

The national reintegration strategy and its action plan have been agreed to in principle by the Council of Ministers. The delegation was informed that all government entities are committed to implement the strategy that aims at resolving precarious situations of particularly vulnerable groups of demobilized, returnees and internally displaced people. A funding gap of 18.5 millions USD has been identified by the government.

The delegation visited the Ruyange IDPs site in Rugazi commune, Bubanza province, and was informed on the socio-economic reintegration pilot project “ Appui aux populations affectées par les crises”. Representatives of returnees, demobilized individuals and IDPs participated in the meeting. The project is funded by the Peacebuilding Fund in support to the implementation of the national reintegration strategy.

The delegation recommends that the PBC Burundi Configuration engages in the resource mobilization effort in support of the implementation of the reintegration strategy and action plan.

It is important for the government to accelerate the resettlement of war affected populations, including efforts to make state owned land available for those populations in dire need such as the Ruyange group that has been internally displaced since 1993.

The delegation recommends that the government ensures implementation of the national free-primary education policy to all, in particular to children in IDP sites. One member of the delegation was told that only 1/3 of the children of the Ruyange camp go to school.

4) *Longer-term perspective of the PBC engagement in Burundi*

The delegation noted an overall agreement that successful elections are a key milestone to the consolidation of democracy and therefore to sustainable economic development. But peacebuilding in Burundi doesn't end with the elections. The Peacebuilding Commission should remain engaged with a longer-term perspective focused on transitional justice, rule of law, creating an environment conducive to developing economic activity and attracting national and foreign investment.

Next steps on the peacebuilding agenda should focus on post-conflict issues that are blocking economic development such as the weakness of institutions, land reform and national capacity to fully participate in the regional integration that includes organizations such as EAC and CEPGL.

The delegation is of the view that the key for national reconciliation and sustainable peace in Burundi lies in sustainable economic development leading to poverty reduction and employment creation. The political peacebuilding agenda and economic development have to be further integrated. The delegation recommends that the PBC Burundi Configuration aims for closer strategic partnership with the EU, the ADB and the IFIs as well as with the institutions of regional integration. The Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper should be harmonized to the fullest extent, while preserving the inclusion of national stakeholders.

The United Nations remain a key partner in peacebuilding and economic development in Burundi. The delegation calls for continuous communication between the Government of Burundi and the UN in the spirit of a mutually respectful partnership and trust.
