

26 July 2017

Statement to the Security Council by the Chair of the PBC Burundi Configuration

Subject: Chair's visit to Burundi, 10 – 13 July 2017

Mr. President

Distinguished Members of the Council

From 10 to 13 July 2017, I undertook my fifth visit to Burundi as Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), focusing this time particularly on socioeconomic cooperation. The main objectives of my visit were (a) to pursue the dialogue on the socioeconomic situation and international cooperation with the Government and its partners in Burundi, (b) to insist on the relevance of the EAC-led dialogue process and to refer to the large support it enjoys among Member States as well as (c) to get a first-hand impression of the developments in the country.

I would like to start my briefing with a word of thanks to the Government of Burundi for its hospitality and confidence and to Ambassador Albert Shingiro, the Permanent Representative of Burundi, for his great support in organizing this visit.

1. Program of the visit and overall impression

During my visit of 10 to 13 July, I was received by H.E. Mr. 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 as well as H.E. Mr. Evariste Ndayishimiye, the Secretary General of the ruling party CNDD-FDD. Since socioeconomic cooperation was the main subject of my mission, I held numerous meetings with Burundi's international partners, namely with Representatives of Member States of the Configuration (Belgium, China, the European Union, France, Germany,



Japan, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, Switzerland, Tanzania, Uganda, the United Kingdom and the United States). I also met H.E. Mr. Michel Kafando, the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General, H.E. Mr. François Louncény Fall, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Central Africa, H.E. Mr. Ibrahima Fall, the Special Envoy of the African Union, as well as representatives of the private sector and the UN Country Team.

On 12 July 2017, I participated in a retreat which was organized by the Minister for External Relations and International Cooperation and dedicated to the socioeconomic situation in Burundi.

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All in all, the city of Bujumbura made a lively impression when I was there, and the security situation seemed calm. However, during my stay, some cases of violence were reported. I also continued to hear reports about the prevalence of a climate of fear and repression.

The importance of the EAC-led dialogue and interaction among political parties was highlighted by many interlocutors, including by the Secretary General of the ruling party CNDD-FDD. Most interlocutors also welcomed the dialogue initiative with Burundi's political parties which had been launched earlier this year by Burundi's Ombudsman, H.E. Mr. Edouard Nduwimana.

Many interlocutors characterized the economic situation as deteriorating and gave examples on how this development affects them personally (increasing prices, lack of foreign currency, fuel scarcity, migration of family members etc.).

Burundi's international partners described the broad range of their engagement with Burundi which reaches from humanitarian assistance to structural support for the health service and investments in the energy sector. At the same time, they are confronted with certain obstacles to their cooperation such as accessibility to foreign currency, the lack of reliable data, the restrictive law on NGOs and others.



2. Socioeconomic dialogue

A key event during my visit was the *socioeconomic retreat* which H.E. Mr. Alain Aimé Nyamitwe, Minister of External Relations and International Cooperation, organized on 12 July in Bujumbura. This retreat was the latest stage in the ongoing socioeconomic dialogue which the PBC Burundi Configuration had launched in cooperation with the then Resident Coordinator, Mr. Paolo Lembo, in November 2016 near Geneva with consultations among Burundi's main multilateral partners (UN, World Bank, European Union, International Monetary Fund, African Development Bank and European Union). In March 2017, I had participated in a meeting between the Government and UN agencies in Bujumbura which focused on the socioeconomic challenges in the areas of agriculture/food security, health and education. In the context of that meeting, the Government expressed its wish to organize a retreat with partners in Bujumbura on the challenges in the same three sectors in summer 2017.

Besides the Chair of the PBC Burundi Configuration, Foreign Minister Nyamitwe had invited Mr. Garry Conille, the UN Resident Coordinator in Burundi, Representatives of several UN agencies, the World Bank and the African Development Bank in Burundi to the retreat of 12 July. Participation from the Government also included the Minister of Agriculture and Livestock; Representatives of the 2nd Vice-Presidency; of the Ministry of Education, University Teaching and Research; the Ministry of Public Health and the fight against Aids; the Ministry of Finance, Budget and Privatization and of the National Platform for Risk Prevention and Disaster Management.

The main objective of the retreat was to specify the main socioeconomic challenges in the three priority areas of agriculture, education and health and to discuss possible responses.

In his opening remarks, the Foreign Minister suggested to focus on the most urgent needs of the population and emphasized the readiness of the Government to engage in a dialogue with its partners. In my statement, I situated the socioeconomic dialogue in the broader peacebuilding engagement of the PBC and underlined that sustainable peace is not possible if we do not advance simultaneously within all three pillars of UN engagement, i.e. peace/security, socioeconomic development and human rights.



Macroeconomic analysis was not the main focus of the event, but the indicators cited during the retreat showed that the situation remains concerning: For instance, the Central Bank of the Republic of Burundi rated headline inflation at 21.1 percent for March (year to year) mainly driven by a rise in food prices of 34 percent.

I will now give you a few examples of the specific socioeconomic and humanitarian challenges in Burundi and of the recommendations which were reflected in a joint summary at the end of the retreat: In the **agricultural sector**, the participants identified low productivity, the impact of climate change, insufficient infrastructure for stock-piling and transportation for agricultural products, the lacking mechanization of the sector, the lack of fertilizers and plant diseases among the main challenges. In response, the participants recommended measures such as the agro-industrial transformation of agricultural products, additional investments and addressing the problem of land scarcity.

The continuing malaria epidemic was a priority subject among **health** experts. Other challenges include the high mortality of mothers and small children, HIV/Aids, demographic growth and malnutrition. The participants concluded that additional qualified staff and financial resources, a better access to health data and a range of other measures could help to meet the current challenges. The **educational sector** is facing challenges such as insufficient school infrastructure and a lack of school material and teachers. 46 percent of the children at school age are currently not attending school. According to the participants, additional resources would be needed to train teachers, improve infrastructure, build additional school canteens, produce textbooks and strengthen the peacebuilding perspectives in school education.

With regard to the macroeconomic sector, one of the recommendations of the joint conclusions says: « In order for the country to gradually achieve a balanced payment balance, assistance to the budget is needed for which the government and its development partners are invited to enter into a dialogue.»

Apart from such specific elements, the participants also formulated some general recommendations such as the need to obtain more reliable socio- and macroeconomic data; to



align Burundi's socioeconomic priorities with the SDGs and to involve Burundi's international partners in the current elaboration of the National Development Plan.

One of the recommendations which the Government and the participating partners noted in their joint summary and which is of particular relevance for the Configuration says that the socioeconomic dialogue should continue and involve additional partners who were not invited to attend the retreat of 12 July.

4. Meeting with the President

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On 13 July, the President of the Republic received me in Gitega, the second-largest city of the country. He reiterated his appreciation for the efforts of the PBC Burundi Configuration. I thanked him for the cooperation between his Government and the PBC and informed him about my current engagement and the outcome of the socioeconomic retreat of the previous day. I mentioned that the regional engagement in follow up to the EAC summit of 20 May and the report by President Mkapa, had received very positive feedback from the Configuration, adding that the broadly shared expectation among Member States is that the Government fully engages in this process.

The President outlined Burundi's national development efforts with a particular focus on education, health, agriculture and energy supply, mentioning both progress achieved and challenges remaining. He made clear that Burundi continues to need international partners and expressed gratitude for the current assistance. He also mentioned the demographic challenges which the country is facing and thanked UNFPA for its support in this area. Furthermore, the meeting with the President was an opportunity for me to raise the question of national reconciliation/the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as the outstanding MoUs with OHCHR and the African Union in relation with the deployment and engagement of human rights and military observers in Burundi.



5. Conclusions

Based on my latest conversations in Burundi, I'm drawing the following conclusions regarding peacebuilding in Burundi:

- 1) The international community should continue to follow developments in Burundi carefully and take all aspects of the current situation into account.
- 2) The mediation efforts which President Museveni and President Mkapa are undertaking on behalf of the EAC deserve our full political and technical support.

The socioeconomic conversation must complement these efforts as well as the work done by the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General, Michel Kafando.

- 3) A frank and open discussion between the Government and its international partners on socioeconomic cooperation and conducive environment ~~conditions~~ for effective assistance is necessary to improve the economic situation and thus an essential element of peacebuilding in Burundi. I therefore intend to pursue the socioeconomic dialogue between the Government of Burundi and its partners.

- 4) It is important to pay increased attention to the question of national reconciliation and dealing with the past. I would suggest that the PBC and the PBF support efforts in this area.

- 5) I would like to underline the importance of creating a good environment for the organization of peaceful and democratic elections in 2020, including through the full and equal participation of women.

I would like to conclude my statement by thanking the Security Council for its continued interest and support for the engagement of the PBC in Burundi.

Many thanks for your attention.