

Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission

21 Nov 2018

Statement delivered by H.E. Mr. Jürg Lauber, Swiss Ambassador to the UN on Chair's visit to Burundi and South Africa, 5 – 9 November 2018

Mr. President

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the pleasure to inform the Council today about my recent visit to Burundi and South Africa which I undertook in my capacity as Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission from 5 to 9 November. In consultation with the Members of the Configuration, I focused on socioeconomic cooperation during my visit, namely on the new National Development Plan (NDP). The political situation in the aftermath of the fifth round of the EAC-led dialogue, the path towards the elections in 2020 and the return of refugees were other key subjects of my conversations.

In Burundi, I met H.E. Mr. Joseph Butore, the 2nd Vice-President of the Republic of Burundi; H.E. Mr. Ezéchiel Nibigira, Minister of Foreign Affairs; H.E. Mr. Domitien Ndiokubwayo, Minister of Finance, Budget and Privatization; H.E. Mr. Pascal Nyabenda, President of the National Assembly; H.E. Mr. Sylvestre Ntibantunganya, former President of the Republic; H.E. Mr. Evariste Ndayishimiye, the Secretary General of the ruling party (CNDD-FDD); representatives of the opposition parties FRODEBU and Amizero y'Abarundi; Mr. Michel Kafando, Special Envoy of the United Nations; Mr. Basile Ikouebe, Special Representative of the African Union for the Great Lakes Region; representatives of the private sector; representatives of the civil society; numerous bilateral and multilateral donors; and the UN Country Team. Due to a last-minute change in his schedule, the meeting with H.E. President Pierre Nkurunziza did not take place.

From Bujumbura I travelled to Pretoria for meetings with representatives of the Government of South Africa as well as several think tanks on 8 and 9 November.

I wish to use this opportunity to thank UN Resident Coordinator Garry Conille and Ambassador Albert Shingiro, the Permanent Representative of Burundi, for the rich and insightful program which they ensured.

During my stay in Bujumbura, I was informed by various interlocutors that the security situation in the country remains calm and stable. We encourage all stakeholders to refrain from violence in order to safeguard the current situation.

The announcement of President Nkurunziza not to seek **reelection in 2020** was one of the most significant developments since my last trip to Burundi in March 2018. When I met the leaders of the ruling party during my trip, they confirmed the intention of the President. Some interlocutors expressed the hope that this announcement would contribute to easing the tensions among political actors ahead of the elections of 2020.

When Burundi's Foreign Minister Nibigira had met UN Secretary-General Guterres in late September in New York, he had raised the question of UN support to the Burundian elections of 2020. I referred to this conversation when Minister Nibigira received me in Bujumbura. Mr. Nibigira highlighted that preparations for the elections were already ongoing and indicated that the international community could play a role in encouraging the opposition in exile that was not involved in May 2015 coup to return home and participate in the elections. He mentioned that, in August, leaders of political parties had agreed in Kayanza on a "road map" towards the elections.

Representatives of some opposition parties and certain civil society actors reminded me, however, that not all political parties had subscribed to the Kayanza roadmap. They expressed concern that the elections of 2020 would not be inclusive and the hope that the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) will be truly impartial.

Many interlocutors regretted that the Government had not participated in the fifth and last round of the **EAC-led talks in Arusha** in late October while the Government, the ruling party and some other political parties justified their absence by indicating that October is a month of national mourning when Burundi commemorates the anniversary of the assassination of Prince Louis Rwagasore, father of the independence of Burundi, and Melchior Ndadaye, the first democratically elected President of Burundi.

My recent visit also offered the opportunity to pursue the **socioeconomic dialogue** with the Government and Burundi's international partners which I had initiated two years ago together with the then UN Resident Coordinator. On 22 August, the Government had launched a new **National Development Plan** for the period of 2018 to 2027. The objective of the plan is to transform the economy of Burundi structurally in order to achieve "strong, sustainable, resilient and inclusive growth able to create decent employment for all and to improve the social wellbeing." In the next ten years, this plan will be a key reference document for Burundi's development partners. I therefore encouraged the Government and the donors to use it as an entry point for a substantive discussion on development cooperation and, specifically, on the implementation of the NDP.

On 6 November, the government organized a presentation and **roundtable discussion** on the new National Development Plan between its authors, the UN Resident Coordinator, myself and our teams. Furthermore, I held two separate meetings with bilateral and multilateral donors about the plan. The donors expressed readiness to support it and reiterated their commitment to remain engaged in Burundi. At the same time, they underlined their wish to enter into a profound dialogue with the government on the implementation of the plan and on expectations towards donors. They expressed their wish to engage more intensively with the government, both on a strategic level and on a more technical level, regarding the sectorial implementation of the plan. They remain interested to participate in a joint retreat or workshop with the government focusing on the main objectives of the plan and on opportunities for support. The Government informed me that it is currently preparing a roadmap (“feuille de route”) for the implementation of the plan and will reach out to donors in that regard.

The recent suspension of the work of international non-governmental organization in Burundi was an important subject in many conversations. Government representatives informed me that about 25 international NGOs had already adapted to the new regulation and will be able to resume their work soon, while the requests of another 60 organizations are currently under consideration by the respective authorities and should resume operations shortly. Progress has been made regarding the funding of the Humanitarian Response Plan which is currently covered by 58 percent (compared to 2 percent during my last visit).

Representatives of the Government, the Heads of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and of the International Organization for Migration drew my attention once again to the **return of refugees**, mainly from Tanzania, which is taking place on the basis of a Tripartite Agreement between Burundi, Tanzania and UNHCR. More than 52,000 refugees have been assisted by UNHCR and partners to voluntarily repatriate to Burundi since August 2017, the vast majority from Tanzania, but also from Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Government called assistance aimed at supporting the return and reintegration of refugees particularly welcome. UNHCR and Burundi’s international partners stressed the indispensability of the voluntary character of returns. In cooperation with Burundi’s authorities, UNHCR together with partner organizations such as IOM, UNDP, WFP, UNICEF, OCHA, WHO, UNFPA, and IRC is offering assistance to persons who decide to return to Burundi taking into account both the needs of the returnees as well as those of the communities of origin. Although various actors, including the Peacebuilding Fund, are financing international assistance for returns, the program remains severely underfunded. Difficulties with enrolling in schools, lack of means to rehabilitate shelters and food insecurity are among the challenges.

I also met the new Head of the OHCHR office in Bujumbura who reported about allegations of continuing human rights violations and abuses. In my meetings with the government officials, I encouraged them to rapidly conclude the outstanding MoU with OHCHR and to engage with

the Office and other parts of the UN Country Team on the entirety of human rights, i.e. civil and political, as well as social, economic and cultural rights.

Based on my recent conversations, my conclusions and recommendations are the following:

- (1) The elections of 2020 are already very much at the center of political attention in Burundi. It will be crucial for the future of the country that these elections be free, inclusive, democratic and peaceful, and that their results enjoy high legitimacy primarily inside the country, but also internationally. I encourage the Government of Burundi and its international partners to pursue their discussions about possible forms of assistance which the country may need in order to ensure the conduct of successful elections.
- (2) The upcoming elections should not distract from the fact that the socioeconomic development of the country continues to require more attention and additional efforts. Burundi's international partners in Bujumbura unanimously welcomed the fact that the Government had issued a new National Development Plan. The plan has the potential to contribute to the well-being of the Burundian population and to enable an increased cooperation between the Government and its international partners. I encourage the Government of Burundi and their partners to engage in an open and substantive strategic dialogue on the implementation of the plan, followed by sector specific discussions on concrete projects. I also encourage bilateral and multilateral partners and the Government of Burundi to continue their dialogue with a view to create conducive conditions for the resumption of suspended assistance.
- (3) An orderly and voluntary return of Burundian refugees is another element which can contribute to inclusive and thus successful elections. UNHCR and its partners offer crucial assistance for the voluntary return of refugees, ensure the respect for international standards and thus enable a sustainable reintegration of returnees. In these efforts, they require additional resources, accompaniment and support by the international community.
- (4) Finally, I encourage the Government and its UN partners to work in a constructive and practical manner, based on mutual trust and respect, towards the full realization of all human rights – civil and political as well as social, economic and cultural – and to swiftly conclude the outstanding MoU between the Government of Burundi and OHCHR.

The PBC Burundi Configuration remains committed to facilitate the dialogue between the Government of Burundi and their international partners on all issues mentioned above, as they are all essential to peacebuilding. Meanwhile the Configuration's focus will remain on the socio-economic.

A more comprehensive report will be presented to the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission on 26 November.

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