

Peacebuilding Commission – Burundi Configuration

Report of the Chair's visit to Bujumbura, 30 June-03 July 2010

In the context of the electoral process under way in Burundi, which the Peacebuilding Commission Burundi Configuration has been supporting from the early stages, and after consultation with the Government of Burundi, as well as with members of the Burundi Configuration and BINUB, I undertook a visit to Bujumbura from Wednesday, 30 June to Saturday, 3 July 2010 with the following objectives:

- i) To introduce myself to the Government of Burundi in my capacity as the new Chair of the PBC Burundi Configuration;
- ii) To have an update on the situation on the ground and better understand the progress made in the on-going electoral process as well as any important challenges that require the attention of the international community;
- iii) To pursue the PBC's engagement with the Government, the National Independent Electoral Commission (

support to the visit, as well as the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) for their continued support.

The report is structured along the four objectives set for the trip.

Objective 1: Personal introduction

This objective was entirely achieved thanks to the numerous contacts facilitated by the Burundian authorities and by BINUB.

I met with the President of the Republic of Burundi and the First Vice-President, the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Defense and the Minister of Public Security [in a joint meeting with the three Ministers], the Director of Cabinet in the Ministry of External Relations and International Cooperation, the political parties represented in the Parliament, the FNL, the CENI, electoral observers, the representatives of religious denominations, civil society, women's organisations, the media, Abashingantahe, the private sector, representatives of the international community, including the UN System and regional actors. I also had the opportunity to attend the ceremonies of the National Day on 1 July where, I was able to interact informally with a number of Government Officials and representatives of the international 41.9206 0 TD 0.1273 r

security situation in the country is under control and they were of the view that available legal means to challenge election results should be used. I was impressed by the reassuring tone of the three Ministers in charge of elections and security, as well as by their efforts to coordinate among themselves. At the same time I voiced concern about allegations of politically motivated arrests as well as of inhuman treatment or torture during detention. The Ministries concerned promised to look into cases of misconduct of law enforcement agents submitted to them.

Despite rising emotions, all political actors told me to be willing to engage in dialogue with a view to participate in the upcoming electoral process. At the same time, everybody is waiting for the other side to make the first move. Opposition parties, civil society and representatives of the Catholic Church expect the newly elected President of Burundi to initiate and lead this dialogue as a public gesture towards reconciliation before the beginning of the parliamentary electoral race.

Government officials and representatives of the international community underscored that in the communal elections the CNDD-FDD obtained 62% of the votes, and they regretted that the opposition parties might miss the opportunity of using the power of the remaining 38% to bring forward their agenda and contributions to the national institutions.

The representatives of the international community and from the region reaffirmed that the legitimacy of power comes from the polls, not from violence. They support flexibility and dialogue that could ease the current tension and encourage an inclusive process.

Objective 3: Pursuing PBC engagement towards safe, democratic and inclusive elections

This objective was partially achieved.

I met with the leaders of various political parties (CNDD -FDD, FRODEBU, UPRONA, CNDD-Nyangoma, and FNL) one by one in order to ensure a direct, personal conversation. I tried to convince the leaders of political parties which are threatening to boycott the upcoming parliamentary elections to reconsider their position and to participate in the elections in order to avoid being marginalized from the national institutions and the political process. I received mixed reactions and messages. UPRONA questions the fairness of the communal elections but its

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The consensus view of the international community represented in Bujumbura is that the PBC should continue its engagement in Burundi. However, the way in which PBC should work with the Burundian government and the possible areas of cooperation should depend on the outcome of the parliamentary elections.

Concluding remarks and suggestions

The current political situation, as I see it, presents itself as a mixed picture.

On the bright side, I sense a clear general commitment from all sides towards peace, the Arusha Agreements and change of government by constitutional means. All parties assured me of their unambiguous rejection of violence. This overall attitude reflects considerable democratic maturity given the fact that the society is just emerging from a not too distant violent past.

On the other hand, while there is pervasive desire for dialogue expressed, it appears that everybody is waiting for the other side to make the first move. The general feeling I sensed was one of “I want to talk but there's no -one to talk to”. This sentiment is particularly widespread with those political parties who did not

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generate a more positive disposition by Burundians and more international interest in cooperating with Burundi and investing in long term development/business.

The other scenario is that both sides don't reach out towards each other. The likely outcome is a hardening of positions. In the next five years, the ruling party might put an emphasis on security while consolidating its power. The opposition in turn might grow in its conviction of being excluded and might be tempted to react accordingly. It will be important that the Government doesn't over-impose its power if peace is to be sustained and potential crisis averted. Long term development programs, economic activities and employment opportunities could reduce current tensions and nurture a political space that is less determined by individual interests and needs.

After only a brief visit, it is difficult to assess which scenario is more likely to happen. The current dynamics in Bujumbura have a component of resentment and bitterness among several political personalities. While it is hard to determine how much of it is rhetoric and how much justified, it seems important to me to make sure that these interpersonal conflicts don't undermine the future of the country and don't take it back to a situation of violence.

My concluding suggestion is that the Peacebuilding Commission should continue to assist Burundi independently of the outcome of the parliamentary elections. However, the focus of co-operation should be determined according to the political situation prevailing thereafter. I recommend that the next visit of the Configuration to Bujumbura takes place early enough in the process to keep the momentum of our engagement with Burundians.
