

**Security Council**

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**Letter dated 24 March 2020 from the Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission addressed to the President of the Security Council**

It is my pleasure to share with you, in my capacity as Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, the report of my visit to Burundi from 2 to 6 February 2020 (see annex).

I remain at the disposal of the Security Council to provide further information and clarifications as may be required. The Peacebuilding Commission remains ready to accompany Burundi and to inform the Council on peacebuilding-related developments, as appropriate.

I kindly request that the present letter and its annex be circulated to the members of the Security Council and issued as a document of the Council.

(Signed) **Jürg Lauber**  
Chair

Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission



## **Annex to the letter dated 24 March 2020 from the Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission addressed to the President of the Security Council**

### **Chair's visit to Burundi, 2 to 6 February 2020**

1. In my capacity as Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, I visited Burundi from 2 to 6 February 2020. On my way to Burundi, I travelled through Addis Ababa, where I met with senior officials of the African Union. In Burundi, the Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, Bintou Keita, joined my delegation. The Peacebuilding Support Office accompanied the visit. I thank the Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations, Albert Shingiro, and United Nations Resident Coordinator Garry Conille and his team for their efforts to organize my programme.

2. In line with the conclusions of the meeting of the Burundi configuration on 27 January 2020, the priorities of my visit were (a) the political situation and possibilities for supporting Burundi in creating the conditions for peaceful, inclusive and transparent elections; (b) the socioeconomic dimension and engagement between Burundi and international partners around the national development plan; (c) national reconciliation, initiatives to prevent and resolve conflict at the community level and capacities to ensure the full realization of all human rights; and (d) the immediate and longer-term needs of the Burundian people, including with regard to the voluntary return and sustainable reintegration of refugees.

3. In Addis Ababa, I met with the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Minata Samate Cessouma, and the Commissioner for Peace and Security, Smaïl Chergui, of the African Union, as well as with the Permanent Representative of Burundi to the African Union and the Economic Commission for Africa, Joël Nkurabagaya. My exchanges in Addis Ababa confirmed the readiness of the African Union to support Burundi in its peacebuilding priorities before, during and after elections, including through the deployment of African Union human rights observers and election observation, in consultation with the Government of Burundi.

4. In Burundi, I met with Ezéchiel Nibigira, Minister for Foreign Affairs; Domitien Ndiwokubwayo, Minister of Finance; Martin Nivyabandi, Minister of Human Rights, Social Affairs and Gender; Aimée Laurentine Kanyana, Minister of Justice; Evelyne Butoyi, Minister of Youth; the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) led by its President, Pierre Claver Kazihise; the Secretary-General of the ruling party Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces pour la défense de la démocratie (CNDD-FDD), Évariste Ndayishimiye; the First Vice-President of the country, Gaston Sindimwo; the President of the Congrès national pour la liberté, Agathon Rwasa; the designated candidate for the presidential elections of Front pour la démocratie au Burundi, Léonce Ngendakumana; the World Bank and the African Development Bank; bilateral donors; the United Nations Country Team; representatives of the private sector; civil society; and members of the diplomatic community.

5. The visit also provided the opportunity to meet with the Secretary-General of the East African Community, Libérat Mfumukeko, who led a delegation of the Community secretariat for consultative meetings with key stakeholders in Bujumbura ahead of the announcement by the Community to observe the May 2020 elections in Burundi.

6. My meetings in Burundi provided important insights into political developments and preparations for the general elections in May 2020, as well as the security, socioeconomic and humanitarian situation. The elections are an important milestone

for Burundi. High levels of participation, zero tolerance for violence and an outcome that is perceived as legitimate by the Burundian people and accepted by all participants in the election – winners and losers – are crucial for the consolidation of peace in Burundi, as well as for continued partnership and cooperation around the country’s peacebuilding and development priorities.

### **Political developments and preparations for the upcoming elections**

7. The authorities underlined that the security situation was calm and that Burundi was preparing for peaceful and democratic elections. In this context, they highlighted the steady return of refugees from neighbouring countries. The Minister for Foreign Affairs reiterated the Government’s decision to finance the elections with internal resources and indicated that the necessary infrastructure was in place. He pointed out that the number of candidates for the presidential elections had reached an unprecedented level. Many interlocutors welcomed the nomination of the candidate for the presidential elections by the ruling party CNDD-FDD, which they saw as confirmation of the decision by President Pierre Nkurunziza not to stand for re-election. In my interactions with representatives of different political parties, they reaffirmed without exception their intent to participate in the upcoming elections and expressed their hope for a peaceful, fair and transparent process. Several interlocutors stressed the importance for all political stakeholders to be able to gather freely with their constituencies in order to guarantee an inclusive electoral process.

8. CENI reported the publication on 3 February 2020 of the definitive list of registered voters, with a total of 5,126,351, including 12,933 from the diaspora. On the list of registered voters, women outnumber men. According to CENI, around 117,000 returned refugees were registered before the deadline. With regard to election observation, CENI indicated their readiness to receive the consultative mission led by the Secretary-General of the East African Community. In addition, they highlighted the accreditation of approximately 40 civil society organizations and the invitation to personnel accredited with diplomatic missions in Burundi to observe the elections. Several interlocutors pointed out the role of *mandataires*, which are nominated by their parties to be deployed as poll-watchers on election day. In accordance with the electoral code, political parties may deploy a maximum of two *mandataires* per polling station to observe election proceedings. I learned that there are approximately 18,000 polling stations countrywide. Representatives of several political parties highlighted the need for support for the preparation, training and deployment of their poll-watchers. The authorities pointed out that support by the Government depended on the availability of resources, as stated in the electoral code. Any additional support would have to be disbursed equally to all political parties without discrimination.

9. In my meetings with the authorities, I reiterated the readiness of the Peacebuilding Commission to support Burundi in its efforts to ensure peaceful, inclusive and transparent elections. I welcomed activities initiated by the Government and CENI to this effect, which include engagement with youth. I was encouraged to hear the Minister of Justice speak of plans to extend the work of women mediators beyond the seven provinces in which they are currently active. I underlined the importance for all initiatives to be inclusive and open to all stakeholders, regardless of political affiliation. I also commended public declarations by the authorities condemning violent incidents and insisted on the need for all stakeholders to be able to engage in the upcoming electoral campaign freely and without fear for their security.

### **Cooperation in the area of socioeconomic development**

10. While election preparations were at the centre of most discussions, my visit also highlighted the need for continued attention to Burundi’s socioeconomic

development. The authorities stressed the centrality of the national development plan and invited the United Nations, through the Peacebuilding Commission and the United Nations Country Team, to serve as a bridge between Burundi and its partners in mobilizing the necessary resources for its implementation. The Minister of Finance insisted that cooperation must not come to a halt during the electoral process. He highlighted the importance of socioeconomic development to create a conducive environment for peaceful elections. Several interlocutors mentioned poverty reduction, education and initiatives to reduce unemployment, in particular among youth, as imperatives for the country in the months and years ahead. Some partners highlighted the exceptional resilience observed in the context of Burundi, while also sharing their concerns about the consequences if this resilience reaches its limits.

11. I reassured the authorities that I would convey the call to avoid any slowdown in cooperation with the same urgency upon my return to New York. At the same time, I stressed how important it was for the authorities at all levels to facilitate cooperation programmes and projects, and to ensure access to the relevant goods and services for the population in need anywhere in the country. In this regard, I reiterated the availability of the Peacebuilding Commission to serve as a platform for cooperation on socioeconomic issues during and after the electoral cycle.

12. I was encouraged to hear about ongoing cooperation with the World Bank and the African Development Bank as well as with bilateral partners. The Government is also working closely with the United Nations Country Team and has made notable progress in the roll-out of a multisectoral strategy to tackle chronic malnutrition. With a current portfolio of upwards of \$10 million, the Peacebuilding Fund supports peacebuilding initiatives in the areas of localized conflict resolution and prevention, empowerment of youth and women, as well as displacement and returns. The authorities expressed their appreciation for the multidimensional support provided through the Peacebuilding Fund and welcomed the particular attention paid to women, youth, social cohesion and the voluntary return of refugees. Revised terms of reference for a sectoral sub-group on peacebuilding, which brings together the Government and national and international partners to ensure coherence between peacebuilding initiatives and the national development plan, were signed recently.

13. At the same time, the immediate and longer-term needs of the population require sustained attention. Climate change adversely affects the population, as torrential rainfalls and floods have led to the displacement of over 12,000 people in December 2019. Natural disasters have led to high numbers of internally displaced persons at the start of 2020 compared to the previous year. The United Nations Country Team commended the close cooperation with the Government in finalizing the humanitarian response plan for 2020, which is expected to require approximately \$114 million in financing. It estimates the number of people in need at 1.7 million.

#### **Final observations and recommendations**

14. My interlocutors in Burundi were unanimous in their appreciation of the importance of the upcoming elections for the future of their country, and united in their wish for a credible, inclusive, transparent and peaceful electoral process. This is a crucial moment for the international community to remain engaged in support of these aspirations, while respecting the sovereign decision of Burundi to finance the elections by its own means. The region and the subregion in particular should be encouraged to assist where called for, and supported in their endeavours.

15. In this context, I see a continued role for the Peacebuilding Commission to support, where possible, the Government of Burundi, political parties and other stakeholders in creating a conducive environment for peaceful, inclusive and transparent elections. As Burundi is preparing for a political transition, the

Peacebuilding Commission can serve as a platform to mobilize support and build partnerships in line with the country's priorities, in particular opportunities for youth. Any transition, everywhere, holds the promise of new beginnings, but also raises expectations on all sides. I believe the Peacebuilding Commission provides a space for Burundi and its international partners to respond to these expectations in a constructive dialogue.

16. Based on my recent visit, my recommendations are as follows:

(a) Transparency and credibility are of key importance to all stakeholders taking part in the upcoming elections. While the primary responsibility lies with the authorities and CENI, I encourage them to engage with relevant regional bodies for electoral observation to bolster transparency and enhance trust in the process. I also see an opportunity for partners to engage with the Government of Burundi on the question of support to poll-watchers ("*mandataires*") in terms of training, preparation and the logistics for them to deploy throughout the country.

(b) Leaders at the national and community levels play an important role in ensuring a conducive environment for a peaceful political transition. I call on the Government of Burundi, the CENI and all political stakeholders to take a strong stance against any form of hate speech and intimidation, and to insist on zero tolerance for violence. Violent incidents and human rights violations must be properly investigated and those responsible prosecuted.

(c) Initiatives to promote social cohesion and dialogue among all stakeholders at the community, provincial and national levels should be supported and where possible expanded. These include the work of women mediators, as well as efforts by civil society and faith-based groups to engage with youth across political affiliations.

(d) The United Nations system and the Peacebuilding Commission should continue to support Burundi in protecting and promoting the full realization of all human rights, including through the work carried out by national institutions and the implementation of the recommendations from the universal periodic review.

(e) I encourage bilateral and multilateral partners and the Government of Burundi to continue their dialogue on the implementation of Burundi's national development plan 2018-2027, as well as with a view to creating conditions conducive to the resumption of suspended assistance.

(f) The electoral period must not deflect attention from acute and chronic needs of the population. I encourage authorities at all levels to facilitate cooperation to meet those needs and to ensure access of providers of relevant goods and services throughout the country. I also urge donors to respond rapidly to the humanitarian response plan for 2020.

(g) The orderly and voluntary return of Burundian refugees remains a key issue, which requires additional funding in order to enable the voluntary and dignified return of refugees and to support their sustainable reintegration.

On 25 February 2020, I informed the Member States of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission of the outcomes of my visit.

As at 19 March 2020, the Burundi authorities have not reported any cases of COVID-19.

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