

The situation in Burundi
Statement by Ambassador Jürg Lauber,
Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission

20 November 2017

Mr. President

Distinguished Members of the Council

On behalf of the Members of the PBC Burundi Configuration I would like to thank you for inviting me to brief the Security Council today about my engagement as Chair of the Configuration and for the continuous constructive cooperation between the Council and the Configuration. I noted with appreciation the positive reference to the PBC contained in the Council's presidential statement of 2 August 2017.

As per established practice, the following statement has been submitted to and approved by the Members of the Configuration, including the country concerned Burundi.

Since my last briefing to the Council on 26 July, I had a number of meetings in New York, Addis Ababa and Geneva on Burundi in my capacity as Chair of the Configuration. During the high-level week of the General Assembly, I met H.E. Alain Aimé Nyamitwe, Burundi's Foreign Minister, and we discussed the continuation of the socioeconomic dialogue. Minister Nyamitwe confirmed that the next round of the socioeconomic dialogue shall include additional partners, as agreed at a socioeconomic retreat held in Bujumbura on 12 July. Also during the high-level week I met the Secretary General of the East African Community, Mr. Libérat Mfumukeko; the EU Senior Coordinator for the Great Lakes, Mr. Koen Vervaeke, as well as the Special Envoy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Great Lakes Region, Ms Katja Lasseur.

On 12 October, I had a meeting with H.E. Benjamin Mkapa, the former President of Tanzania and EAC Facilitator for Burundi, as we were both in Geneva on that day.

From 25 - 28 October I used the opportunity of a visit to Addis Ababa to discuss the situation in Burundi with the Permanent Secretary of Burundi's Foreign Ministry, H.E. Mr. Jean de Dieu Ndikumana; the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, H.E. Mr. Smaïl Chergui,; the new AU Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region (and successor of Ibrahima Fall), H.E. Mr. Basile Ikouebe; the Head of UN Office to the African Union, H.E. Mr. Haile Menkerios; the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, USG Vera Songwe; as well as with experts from the AU, OHCHR and with Members of the diplomatic community.

On 8 November, I updated the Configuration on my engagement and recent developments in Burundi. At that meeting, Garry Conille, the UN Resident Coordinator in Burundi, characterized the situation as "chronic vulnerability" and informed Member States about UN efforts to strengthen the resilience of the population. Representatives from OCHA and UNHCR highlighted the gravity of the humanitarian situation and indicated that the number of persons in need of humanitarian assistance will possibly soon reach 6 million people, i.e. over half of the population. They noted a funding gap for the humanitarian response plan of 50% as well as for the Regional Refugee Response Plan currently funded at 19%.

In the subsequent discussion, the Members of the Configuration expressed support for the engagement of the Configuration, namely for its efforts to draw attention to the deteriorating socio-economic and humanitarian situation. Member States reiterated their unequivocal support for the EAC-led dialogue process, although some of them expressed concern over the lack of progress in the process. The human rights situation was described by several delegations as concerning. In that regard, the Permanent Representative of Burundi, Ambassador Albert Shingiro, indicated that the negotiations between his Government and OHCHR about the outstanding MoU were in their final phase. A number of delegates enquired about the prospects of an amendment of the constitution, and stressed their concern about the potential impact on the spirit of the Arusha Accord. Other delegates noted that amending the constitution is part of Burundi's sovereign rights. The PR of Burundi stressed that this was an internal matter and reassured PBC members that changes to the constitution would not be detrimental to the spirit of the Arusha Accord.

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From my interactions in recent months, I'm drawing the following conclusions:

- (1) Political Dialogue: President Mkapa remains committed to facilitate the EAC-led political dialogue and he continues to enjoy support inside and outside the region. At the same time, the facilitation remains challenging. While I heard disappointment regarding the lack of progress in the dialogue process, I was encouraged to see that UN Secretary General Guterres as well as the Members of the East African Community, of the African Union and of the ICGLR continue to pay considerable attention to the situation in Burundi. The holding of the next Arusha Round has been tentatively scheduled for late November. I would like to encourage Burundi's political stakeholders to fully commit to the continuation of the EAC-led process and to constructively participate in the planned session.
- (2) Socioeconomic situation: National and international actors continue to highlight the challenges in the area of food security, health, education and energy. Against this background, international partners are increasingly focusing on strengthening the resilience of Burundi's population and on its immediate humanitarian needs. On 20 October, for example, the European Union announced a new Population Resilience Support Program with a volume of 95 million euros.
- (3) Human rights: I continued to hear reports about human rights violations in Burundi in my contacts as well as regrets about the outstanding MoUs with the OHCHR and the AU for their work in Burundi. In my meetings with Representatives of the Government of Burundi, I continued to encourage both parties to swiftly conclude these agreements.

The human rights situation has been discussed in the Human Rights Council in mid-September and by the Third Committee of the GA on 26 October. In its 36th session the Human Rights Council in Geneva, adopted two resolutions on Burundi, one of them extends the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry for a year; the other one asks the High Commissioner to appoint an expert who will provide technical assistance and capacity building to the government in the area of human rights.

- (4) The question of refugees: Many of my interlocutors pointed to the return of refugees from Tanzania to Burundi. On 31 August 2017 in Dar es Salaam, the Governments of Tanzania, Burundi and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees agreed to assist the voluntary repatriation of 12,900 refugees who had by then registered their desire to return. Ms. Wafaa Saeed, Deputy Director of the OCHA Coordination and Response Division, underlined at the last Configuration meeting that the voluntary character of these repatriations is essential and be respected in the current movement of return. As for reintegration, Ms. Saeed said: “there is a strong need to improve the socio-economic and human rights situation in Burundi to ensure the sustainability of returns and reintegration at the community level, both for refugees and those returning from internal displacement within Burundi.” In the subsequent discussion, it was also underlined that it is essential to safeguard the civilian character of refugee camps in accordance with the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees

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In view of this situation, I suggested to the Members of the PBC Burundi Configuration to focus on the following 4 points for the time being:

- 1) National, regional and international actors should continue to fully support the **mediation efforts** undertaken by President Museveni and President Mkapa on behalf of the EAC.
- 2) While the ongoing efforts on the political track remain important, the forthcoming election cycle of 2020 requires increasing attention from all of us. I believe that some kind of a **roadmap** is required defining the necessary conditions for free, fair, peaceful and democratic elections as well as the necessary steps to get there. I also believe that the PBC should be able to contribute, in one way or another, to such an endeavour.
- 3) The **socioeconomic conversation** must complement these efforts with a focus to address the needs of the population as well as existing obstacles for cooperation. Such conversations with the government need to involve additional partners who were not able

to participate in the Bujumbura retreat of 12 July. I remain committed to engage on the socioeconomic situation not only with the Government and Burundi's main donors, but also with the private sector, African economic actors and academia.

- 4) **The question of truth and nation reconciliation** should receive more attention and support. This will be one of the issues which I am planning to raise during my next visit to Burundi which is tentatively scheduled for early 2018.

Many thanks for your attention.