

Summary of the PBC Burundi Configuration meeting of 8 November 2017

1. On 8th of November 2017, H. E. Ambassador Jürg Lauber, the Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), convened and chaired a meeting of the Configuration. PBC members were briefed by H. E. Ambassador Albert Shingiro, Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations, Garry Conille, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Burundi, OCHA Coordination and Response Division Deputy Director Wafaa Saeed, and Henk-Jan Brinkman, Chief of the Policy, Planning and Application Branch at PBSO.
2. In his opening remarks, the Chair provided an update on his engagement since the last PBC meeting in July 2017, including on his recent discussions in Addis Ababa, New York and Geneva. He reflected on the dialogue process, and the challenges it is facing due to a lack of consensus on both its scope and participation. The Chair reported on the deteriorating socio-economic and macro-economic situation, including rising inflation. He highlighted the return of Burundian refugees from Tanzania that followed the tripartite meeting of late August 2017.
3. Resident Coordinator Garry Conille briefed members of the Configuration on the current situation in Burundi. He expressed his appreciation to the Chair, and the PBCs institutional role in organizing a proactive response to avoid relapse. Furthermore, he stressed the deterioration of basic services and the fragility of the population that continue to be impacted by multiple shocks, including the political crisis. He underscored the need to prevent a further deterioration by strengthening the resilience of the population while resolving the political crisis. His analysis pointed at multidimensional challenges, chronic vulnerability and a series of shocks that need to be addressed simultaneously. While progress in the dialogue on a political/elite level remains slow, the RC highlighted the need to continue to work and strengthen the resilience of local communities to address the chronic vulnerability. The RC stressed how PBF funded activities including women peacebuilders and youth reconciliation are working towards this objective and PBSO/PBF was encouraged to continue to strengthen projects working on grassroot resilience, while also supporting a broadening and intensification of the political dialogue process.
5. The representative from OCHA briefed the Configuration, highlighting the gravity of the humanitarian situation and large funding gap for the humanitarian response plan which to date is only 50% funded as well as for the Regional Refugee Response Plan which is currently funded at 19%.
6. PBSO highlighted its continued support to the political dialogue process, and stressed that a resolution of current tensions can only come through inclusive dialogue. Moreover, the scope of the dialogue could be broadened to include socio-economic issues; and efforts could be made to engage other national stakeholders such as women and youth.

7. Ambassador Shingiro, the Permanent Representative of Burundi, underlined in his statement that the EAC-led dialogue process continues and that a new dialogue round is being prepared. He gave examples for the continuous constructive cooperation between the Government of Burundi and international and regional organisations, namely the UN, EAC and ICGLR. Ambassador Shingiro also highlighted that the security situation has considerably improved and that a high number of refugees had returned to Burundi in 2016 and 2017. Regarding the economic situation, he indicated that macroeconomic stability remains the priority for the Government which will thus continue to pursue a policy of budgetary prudence also in 2018. The Permanent Representative also stressed that the suspension of direct budgetary support by certain donors affects the lives of the most vulnerable parts of the population.

8. Following the briefings, PBC members took the floor to give their remarks and ask follow-up questions. Germany, Sweden, Japan, Indonesia, Morocco, the United Kingdom, Colombia, Angola, Belgium, France, Mexico, India, Kenya, the European Union, Egypt, the Netherlands, the Republic of South Africa, Uganda, United States, China, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation took the floor.

9. They complimented the role of the Chair, showed appreciation for the briefing from the RC, OCHA and PBSO, and expressed the useful and very complementary role of the PBC for providing the space to engage with Burundi, particularly regarding socio-economic challenges. Some delegates underscored the PBC contribution to the Security Council's work; reference was made to the Security Council Presidential Statement of 2 August that calls the PBC to help re-engage development partners. They noted the engagement with IFIs, including their participation in PBC meetings.

10. They reiterated support to the EAC-led dialogue process; and several delegates encouraged all stakeholders to take advantage and engage with the EAC-led process. Many delegates underscored their concern regarding the lack of progress in the dialogue process. Moreover, countries expressed that the population of Burundi should not pay the price for a slow political dialogue, and offered their support to the UN strategy to strengthen the resilience of the population. Colombia shared a useful lesson of how the presence of UN agencies over many years in areas far outside of the reach of the Colombian state, had supported the resilience of populations, who were able to survive and be part of the current peacebuilding process.

11. Participants also expressed concern over the current human rights situation and the Government's cooperation with the OHCHR. The Permanent Representative of Burundi indicated that they were in the last step of discussions towards the finalization of a MoU between his Government and OHCHR. He underscored the need to support capacity building and local institutions as a way to help improve the human rights situation; he warned against politicizing the issue and rumors.

12. A number of delegates enquired about the prospects of constitution amendment, and stressed their concern on the potential impact on the spirit of the Arusha Accord. Other delegates noted that amending the constitution is part of the Burundi's sovereign rights. The PR of Burundi reiterated this point, stressing that this was an internal matter that should not be discussed in this forum; he reassured PBC members that changes to the constitution would not be detrimental to the spirit of the Arusha Accord.

13. Some called for the international community to support a roadmap for the 2020 election, while also highlighting the need for a medium-term perspective, possibly around a National Development Strategy, in the global framework of the SDGs/Agenda 2030.

14. In conclusion, the meeting reflected a momentum that should be seized, and it demonstrated once again the relevance of the PBC as a platform to sustain engagement with Burundi. In this regard, the PBC role in reinforcing the partnership between Burundi and international financial institutions was highlighted. The Chair reiterated the continued efforts to engage with international financial institutions. He reiterated the continued support to the EAC-led dialogue process, as well as the imperative to broaden the conversation on a possible roadmap towards peaceful elections in 2020. He further indicated that the PBC would pursue efforts along the socio-economic tract. He also suggested that the PBC should consider supporting national reconciliation efforts in its agenda.

He indicated that his next visit to Burundi would take place in early 2018, to be confirmed with the Burundian authorities.