

Summary of the PBC Burundi Configuration meeting, 29 January 2018

1. On 29 January 2018, the Burundi Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission convened a meeting to discuss the situation in the country. The meeting was chaired by H. E. Mr. Jürg Lauber, Chair of the Burundi Configuration and members were briefed by H. E. Mr. Albert Shingiro, Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations, Mr. Garry Conille, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Burundi (connected via audio link), Ms. Ursula Mueller, ASG of the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Ms. Ninette Kelly, Director of the New York Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, ASG for Peacebuilding Support.
2. In his opening remarks, the Chair outlined the purposes of the meeting: to discuss his next trip to Burundi and to allow various UN colleagues to update on the latest developments and on international engagement in Burundi. The Chair mentioned the EAC-led Burundian dialogue, with the most recent meeting held from 27 November to 8 December 2017 in Arusha, Tanzania. The Chair also reported that on 12 December 2017 H.E. Mr. Pierre Nkurunziza, President of Burundi, officially launched a campaign for a referendum on a revised constitution to take place in 2018.
3. The Chair stressed that the socioeconomic situation remained difficult, and that the country's economy contracted by an estimated 1.3 % in 2017 according to the African Development Bank. The economy, which depends heavily on agriculture, is expected to remain in recession in 2018. He further informed that the Human Rights Council adopted two resolutions on Burundi: Resolution 36/19 which extended the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry for one year and Resolution 36/2 which requested the High Commissioner to dispatch a team of three experts. The Chair expressed the need for the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between OHCHR and the Government to be signed swiftly.
4. The Chair outlined the following five priorities for his next trip to Burundi, and in this regard sought input from the members of the Configuration: 1) International support for the EAC-led dialogue process, 2) the path leading to the 2020 elections, 3) continued socioeconomic dialogue between the Government and its international partners, 4) the humanitarian situation and 5) national reconciliation.
5. Mr. Garry Conille, Resident Coordinator, briefed on the current situation in Burundi. He expressed appreciation for the ability of the PBC Burundi Configuration to bring stakeholders together. He highlighted the need to ensure the democratic space in Burundi, and outlined how the UN country team is focusing on providing services that address vulnerability and the humanitarian situation, while implementing measures to prevent shocks. He stressed that now is a critical time to stay engaged in Burundi, with a new

assistance framework to be developed for 2019. He further stressed the need for the UN to provide an even more holistic package of services to the benefit of the population of Burundi.

6. Ms. Ursula Müller, Assistant Secretary-General of OCHA, briefed on the humanitarian situation. She highlighted that the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance had tripled over the past three years, rising from 1 to 3.6 million, more than a quarter of the population. Food security, nutrition and protection are areas of particular concern. Economic factors such as the negative trade balance, rising inflation, increased unemployment and shortages of foreign reserves as well as the impact of climate change have contributed to the current trend. Moreover, food prices have increased by more than 50 %, and 25 % of the population are now estimated to be acutely food insecure (a 7 % increase compared to 2016). Acute malnutrition rates exceed the emergency threshold in 11 of the country's 18 provinces. On displacement, she highlighted the dependency of IDPs on host communities that are already vulnerable. Returning refugees pose particular challenges to the host communities. To prevent further deterioration there is a need for continued support to the political dialogue, and for Member States to step up their support to the humanitarian response plan. The volume of the 2018 plan has doubled from last year's response plan (which was funded at 63 %). On a more positive note, the malaria epidemic, which resulted in some 9,400 deaths from 2015 to 2017, has successfully been contained.

8. Ms. Ninette Kelley, Director of the New York Office of UNHCR, informed on UN involvement in efforts to enable the return of refugees from Tanzania to Burundi. She emphasized that host communities are under significant stress in Burundi as well as in the countries of the region. Last year only 25 % of UNHCR's response plan were covered. She highlighted some of the specific vulnerabilities of the refugee population, stressing that more than 54 % are children, out of which 3,600 are unaccompanied. Under the auspices of the Burundi-Tanzania-UNHCR tripartite agreement, 13,000 refugees returned to Burundi in 2017, with another 60,000 planned for 2018. The level of confidence the refugees put into the return program depends, however, largely on the unresolved political situation. Ms Kelley informed that there has also been an influx into Burundi of around 7,000 refugees from the DRC, arriving predominantly into two communities, and posing a challenge for them. There is a risk of increased influx given the instability across the border.

9. Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary General of PBSO, highlighted how the PBC has been useful in terms of rallying continued support for Burundi. He highlighted that PBF investments are aimed at supporting projects that can help open a space to support and complement the political dialogue process. In late 2017, PBF had over the past year approved some 10 million USD for Burundi. The programs which PBF supports include a cross-border project between Burundi and Tanzania that will be

implemented as part of the Great Lakes Strategic Framework, as well as support to a UNHCR-led project that aims to strengthen the resilience of host communities. A large part of PBF's support is directed towards gender and youth promotion initiatives, and include a successful women's mediation initiative, support to cross-generational female leadership and to youth in political parties. Further, he stressed the need for PBC and the UN to continue to support the dialogue process, since current tensions can only be overcome through inclusive dialogue. PBSO believes that the scope of the dialogue can be broadened to include socio-economic issues, and in complementarity to the high-level approaches should also support local grass-root initiatives which strengthen peacebuilding and contributes to resilience.

10. Ambassador Shingiro, Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations, expressed in his statement his appreciation to the PBC and to the Resident Coordinator for his efforts in Burundi. He shared with the members an update of the latest developments. Ambassador Shingiro said that the return of refugees and the fact that the region entrusted Burundi with hosting the next COMESA summit in April 2018 testified of the greatly improved security situation. On the EAC process Ambassador Shingiro highlighted that agreement had been found on all but two issues, and that this could not justify holding further dialogue rounds abroad. Rather, the government wanted the dialogue to continue in Burundi. On the constitutional reform, its purpose was said to be longer-term stability. On human rights, there has been progress in terms of legislation, including a modification in the criminal code. Ambassador Shingiro reported that 2017 was an excellent year for crops and agriculture. In 2017 2289 businesses were created, resulting in a 5 % increase in job creation. The Government has further estimated their budgetary independence at 81 %, but called for additional international support, and described the European Union's sanctions as hampering development.

11. Following the briefings, PBC members took the floor to make remarks and ask questions. The interventions reflected a range of shared and diverging perspectives on the situation in Burundi and on how the international community should lend its support. There was recognition of the engagement of the Chair during 2017, and the usefulness of this PBC platform to be able to discuss the peacebuilding challenges that Burundi is facing. Members expressed support to the five priorities outlined by the Chair, some were pointing to the importance of a clearer interconnectedness between the EAC-dialogue and the 2020 election process.

13. While many delegates reiterated their support to the EAC-led political dialogue, they also underscored their concern regarding the lack of progress. Delegates argued that political dialogue is key for overcoming the current situation and that members should remain committed to this path. Some highlighted that the EAC-led dialogue allows for an international validation process, and is of particular relevance given the challenge of inclusion and cohesion. Many delegates expressed concern in regards to the timing of the

constitutional reform, stressing that the reform represents one of the thorny issues between opposition and the government, hence jeopardizing the dialogue process.

14. Several delegates expressed concern about the lack of socioeconomic development. Continued dialogue with the IMF and the World Bank was encouraged. Some delegations expressed the need for the European Union's economic measures against Burundi to be removed, stressing its negative impact on Burundi, while others offered their support to the European Union's decision, and highlighted that the EU is providing funds directly to civil society and other implementing partners in Burundi, for the benefit of the population. Many delegations appealed for continued and increased funding to the humanitarian response plan. Several delegations, particularly from the region, expressed their view that the situation is improving, seeing the return of refugees as well as the decision to host the COMESA summit as indicators of positive change.

16. Ambassador Shingiro concluded by responding to the delegates and appreciating the many messages of support to Burundi, while highlighting that some, in conflict with the views of Burundi's neighbors, were not recognizing the progress Burundi has seen since 2015. He further appealed for support in regards to funding, especially related to the return of refugees, and highlighted the need for accompaniment in the lead up to the 2020 elections, with the campaigning starting in 2019.

17. In conclusion, the Chair expressed his appreciation for the support for his five priorities, and ensured that he would reflect the points raised by members in the meeting with his Burundian interlocutors.