

Consultative Group Burundi
26 and 27 October 2009, Paris

Joint presentation Norway and the Netherlands

Excellence M. le Deuxième Vice Président,
Excellences Madame et Messieurs les Ministres,
Chers collègues, dear colleagues,

It is an honour and a pleasure to speak today on behalf of the godparents of the 2007 Round Table, Norway and The Netherlands. This address will represent our last words (but not ‘famous last words’) as godparents. As of today we meet as a Consultative Group, which means that our role as co-godparents (which is part and parcel of a Round Table), a role we assumed in 2007, is over.

We would like to compliment Burundi on the progress made. Making the step from a Round Table country to a Consultative Group country is not a small step. Yet, Burundi has managed to make it in just a few years. We would also like to thank the World Bank for organising this Consultative Group meeting. We believe this meeting comes at a crucial time for Burundi, where over the last few years we have been witness to and partners in major achievements.

The peace process consolidated, and remnants of the tensions spurred by too many years of civil war faded, culminating in April of this year in the registration of the FNL as a political party, the integration of 3500 FNL-combatants in the army and the police, the disarmament and the start of demobilisation and reintegration of 5000 FNL-combatants and the disengagement of more than 10.000 associated adults. In the past couple of years, more than half a million refugees returned to Burundi.

International friends, in particular the Regional Initiative, especially represented by Uganda and Tanzania, South Africa, the members of the Political Directorate, but also the Burundian civil society have been crucial partners in this peace process. Together with the Burundian authorities, a political context has been created in which today 43 political parties exist, transforming Burundi into a multi-party political system. A socio-economic environment emerged, which encouraged refugees to return to their home country and which has allowed small, medium and even larger enterprises to operate and invest.

Burundi reached the Heavily Indebted Poor Country, HIPC, completion point last year – an impressive achievement so soon after a conflict. Obviously, the HIPC-completion point did not appear out of thin air. It is a sign of sound socio-economic management. We applaud the Burundian government for its economic policy and increased pro-poor spending. We also welcome the

improved public financial management, crucial for any donor country to justify budgetary support.

We are proud to have played a role in assisting Burundi in achieving this progress. But as in all countries emerging from conflict, key challenges remain. Rebuilding the country after so many years of conflict is not an easy task. We are convinced Burundi's prospects remain bright, as long as the commitment to peace and stability is kept in the forefront.

Norway and the Netherlands want to continue to assist Burundi in overcoming the challenges ahead. Provided we see a clear will, progress and positive engagement by all political actors in the promotion of peace and stability, democracy and the rule of law, we are ready to maintain our political, technical and financial support to Burundi. We note that in the background information for this meeting, Burundi committed to, inter alia, promote human rights and to fight corruption.

The elections represent a major challenge in the near future. After some initial hick ups, the electoral process so far is moving on in an encouraging way. We call on the authorities to ensure free, fair and safe elections in 2010. This would include an environment in which the CENI can do its work independently, without political interference and with sufficient funding. An environment where all political parties are able to campaign freely and where the administration at both national and local level plays an enabling role. Free, fair and safe elections would also entail a setting where youth movements of political parties behave as movements and don't turn into militias. And where the security services act professionally, maintain a strictly a-political stance and ensure public order for all.

Problems regarding corruption remain. We ask Burundi to undertake serious investigations into the murder on the former vice-president of OLUCOME. Burundi needs to continue to build legal institutions and improve the legal framework. And, it is crucial to get culprits of corruption scandals convicted and punished. We also look forward to continued progress in the transitional justice process.

Burundi is a beautiful, yet small and very densely populated country. Access to land is a problem and too often results in violent clashes among citizens. Courts are overwhelmed by land issues. We therefore plea for fair land management, including a clear legislative and regulatory framework, a focus on demography and the development of alternatives for self-sufficient farming.

At this first meeting of the Consultative Group, Burundi will present its priority sectors for economic growth. Very understandably and in our view rightly so, these sectors comprise agriculture, energy, infrastructure and private sector development. These sectors will indeed be key to development and growth, whereby quality education for both men and women and health services for all should of course not be forgotten. Pro-poor spending will remain essential.

Economic growth and development can only happen if it takes place in an enabling environment. None of the economic growth sectors, whether agriculture, energy, infrastructure or mining will grow without good governance and security. Good governance entails democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law. Security entails professional a-political security services and strong regulations of small arms and light weapons in civilian hands. No international company or Burundian businessperson will want to invest in infrastructure, energy or the private sector if corruption is prone, the judiciary weak, and security not guaranteed. Visitors will be discouraged from coming to Burundi if security conditions are poor and corruption is widespread.

Allow us, before we get to our closing remarks, to focus on one particular group in Burundi: women. In spite of several constitutional arrangements, women in Burundi are far from equal to men. For instance, women – single, married or widowed alike - have no access to land ownership. Inheritance rights for women and girls are virtually non-existent. Women are also underrepresented in the administration and security services. The mortality rate of mothers is – in spite of the free health care – among the highest in the world. This is unacceptable. Sexual and domestic violence is not decreasing despite the relatively peaceful situation in the country. If Burundi wants to develop, it needs to include its women and ensure that every Burundian is treated equally and respectfully, regardless of gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

Let us conclude. We say good-bye as co-godparents of Burundi, but not as partners in Burundi's development. We look forward to continued engagement and hope that the Consultative Group – today and tomorrow in Paris – and the Groupe de Coordination des Partenaires in Bujumbura will be a platform where we can jointly work on the next Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and discuss and reflect on what matters to us all: a peaceful, stable and prosperous Burundi.

Thank you very much.