

A mile forward for Burundi's darkest peace process and reconciliation

Every post colonial country in Africa has its own historical diary that to some extent mirror the *status quo* and Burundi is no exception. It will be however, an overstatement to conclude that Africa today is shaped solely by its colonial past. She gained independence from Belgium in 1962. The years that followed was marked with unspeakable atrocities that led to the slaughter of hundreds of ethnic Hutus and Tutsi minority between 1993 and 2005. After pressure from the international community for power sharing agreement, a deal was finally struck in Arusha, Tanzania in 2000 to end the conflict.¹ This piece will attempt to assess the roles of the United Nations, the Government of Burundi and other actors in the peace process and the challenges ahead.

On 20th of June 2005 the Security Council during its 5207th meeting adopted resolution 1606 reaffirming the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi. Fifteen years on, the country has finally set up a Peace and Reconciliation Committee to examine the atrocities committed since 1962 to this effect, the Security Council submits that:

[F]or the consolidation of peace and reconciliation in Burundi, to establish the truth, investigate the crimes, and identify and bring to justice those bearing the greatest responsibility for crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in Burundi since independence, to deter future crimes of this nature, and to bring an end to the climate of impunity, in Burundi and in the Great Lakes of Africa as a whole.

The above statement vindicates UN commitment to bringing lasting peace in the region. The Security Council emphasized that this process requires support from the international community so that the Burundians can determine their future with democratic governance and the application of the rule of law.² After considering the letter addresses to the Secretary General by Mr. Pierre Buyoya the then president of Burundi on 24 July 2002; the report of the UN Secretary General to the Security Council on March 11, 2005 on establishing a Commission; the report of the Minister of Justice Didace Kiganahe on June 15, 2005 with regard to creating in Burundi a mixed Truth Commission and a Special Chamber in the court system in Burundi; building on this premise, the UN Secretary General commenced talks with the Government and all concern Burundians on

¹ <http://www.irinnews.org/report/100361/burundi-s-troubled-peace-and-reconciliation-process> [Access date, 20 July 2014].

² S/RES/1606 (2005).

implementing the recommendations by giving details of cost, structures and time limit to the Security Council by 30 September 2005.³

Speaking of efforts towards setting up a Commission for peace talks, the fifth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi outline some exciting achievements; the said report is based on the Security Council Resolution of 1858 (2008) and provides some bold measures that have been adopted as will be encapsulated briefly under the following paragraphs below.

On the peace front, a Summit for heads of states and governments of the Great Lakes region was held in Bujumbura on 4th of December 2008 wherein the president of Burundi Mr. Pierre Nkurunziza under took the responsibility of integrating 33 top officials of the Forces Nationales de Libération (FNL) into civil service positions and also 247 FNL prisoners were released as part of the reconciliation process.⁴ In this light of the Bujumbura accord, a time – lag was bearing on the government and the FNL to accomplish the following:

“(a) the commencement of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process by 30 January; (b) the release of the remaining FNL prisoners by 21 January; (c) the separation and release of children associated with FNL combatants by 30 January; and (d) the submission of an application to the Ministry of the political accreditation of FNL”⁵

In order to accomplish the above mentioned challenges following the winding up of the World Bank’s Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Programme, a triple step approach led and supported by many actors was adopted; it includes the following:

“(i) assembly, disarmament and verification under the leadership of the Joint Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, supported by the Facilitation, the African Union, the Government and the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB); (ii) demobilization and reintegration led by the Technical Coordination Team of the National Commission for Demobilization, Reintegration and Reinsertion, with support from the World Bank; and (iii) a

³ S/RES/1606 (2005)

⁴ United Nations, (2009), Final report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1858 (2008), S/2009/270, para. 2 – 3.

strategy for long-term socio-economic reintegration of ex-combatants at the community level to be developed under the leadership of the Government with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other partners”⁶

However, this painful process is not without disagreements and other encumbrance that many contend the process is perhaps a hoax.

On the political footing, there have been instances of political squabbles between the ruling party National Council for the Defense of Democracy – Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD – FDD) and the opposition party Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU), however, some progress was achieved when President Nkurunziza signed a decree that elevated vice-ministries to full ministries; this move was received with applause from Sahwanya-Front pour la démocratie au Burundi (Sahwanya-FRODEBU) and Union pour le progrès national (UPRONA)⁷

Security in the north-western provinces in Burundi experience some improvement and also momentary period of matching towards the cliff where there have been incidents of killings, abductions, rapes, lootings, armed robberies, grenade attacks and ambushes; to circumvent this situation UN security phase was adjusted from level IV to III in Bujumbura Rural and Bubanza to accommodate the situation.⁸ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in close collaboration with United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB) transfer over 14 rehabilitation army barracks to the Government of Burundi, it has also set up gender-based units to enlightened the populace and special training for the police so that the process of disarmament of civilian population can be attained; to this effect, under UN and Government supervision 7,600 small arms were destroyed.⁹

On regional cooperation, major steps have been adopted among the countries of the Great Lakes; they decided to re-launch the Development Bank of the Great Lakes States and also admitted Burundi into the East African Community (EAC) customs union.¹⁰

⁵ United Nations, (2009), Final report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1858 (2008), *S/2009/270*, para 5.

⁶ *S/2009/270*, para. 12.

⁷ *S/2009/270*, para. 14 – 20.

⁸ *S/2009/270*, para. 22 – 24.

⁹ *S/2009/270*, para. 32 – 34.

¹⁰ *S/2009/270*, para. 25.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect in this process is dealing with the human right issues which is largely gender based. Albinos are generally despised by many people in Africa. Burundi is not an exception; ten albinos were mutilated and killed in 2008, however, this matter was investigated and 12 suspects were captured in connection with the crime¹¹; also with regards to the improved human rights situation, two people who were charge for slandering and defamation of the head of state and were acquitted from prosecution, in any events there are plethora of scenarios that demonstrate that the country's human rights record is light years behind current standards for instance the brutal assassination of anti corruption activist Ernest Manirumva in April 2009¹² and the criminalization of homosexuality which contravene her international obligation under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).¹³ These instances signals that there is still much work to piece together and move the country forward.

UNICEF and BINUB are working selflessly to ensure that children are shield from the apparently hostile social setting that has engulf minors through out this struggle for instance in April 2009, a total of about 340 children who were formerly associated with the arm wing of FNL were separated and transferred to the Gitega rehabilitation centre¹⁴

On the economic front, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Government of Burundi in 2008 produced an annual report on Poverty Reduction Strategy aimed at reducing the level of poverty in the Country; and on 29 December 2009 the annual budget of US\$ 703 million was adopted by the Parliament; this figure signal an increase of about 40 per cent compared with the 2008 budget.¹⁵ However, this increase was not beneficial for the economy as pointed out by *Organization Observatoire de lutte contre la corruption et les malversations économiques* that over 51 per cent of the budget is earmarked for Government spending thus sucking revenue away from the primary sector of the economy which is the backbone of the economy. To ameliorate this dilemma, the World Bank on 30 January announced the cancellation of 92 per cent of Burundi's

¹¹ S/2009/270, para. 36 – 37.

¹² United Nations, (2009), Final report of the Group of Experts on the DRC submitted in accordance with paragraph 8 of Security Council resolution 1857, S/2009/603. Available in French, input this link to a google search and the fourth document will be the french version: http://www.un.org/french/document/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2009/603, [21 July 2014].

¹³ United Nations, (2009), Final report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1858 (2008), S/2009/270, para 42.

¹⁴ United Nations, (2009), Final report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1858 (2008), S/2009/270, para 50 – 51.

¹⁵ United Nations, (2009), Final report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1858 (2008), S/2009/270, para 58 – 59

budgetary relief, this was followed by another from the Paris Club in March of same year, \$134 million was cancelled.¹⁶

The challenges that lie ahead of Burundi are real and has to be approached from a holistic perspective primarily because her economic policies, political strategies, human rights record and other aspects in the country has not been satisfactory or consonant to the standard set by international documents like the UN Charter, the ICCPR which she has signed. The government with the support of the international community is working its way forward. She needs bold and innovative policies and measures to combat poverty, integration of former combatants and rehabilitation of victims especially the most vulnerable class (women and children). In any event, the government should be given some credit for its effort towards this peace process.

To dovetail this discussion I will humbly submit that as Burundi grapple with its peace process, there is obviously overwhelming consensus that she needs the UN, the international community, civil society and the Burundians in this process which in my view will be long and odious but it can work if they engaged in sincere dialogue and learn from examples like South Africa that emerged from the evil hand of Apartheid, I believe they can also walk through it.

¹⁶ United Nations, (2009), Final report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1858 (2008), *S/2009/270*, para. 59 – 60.