



NGO WORKING GROUP ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

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Enhancing Security and the Rule of Law: How can gender be better integrated into the priorities of the UN Peacebuilding Commission?

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Excellencies, Distinguished Ambassadors of the United Nations, Distinguished Guests:

It is a great moment for me to participate in this panel. Today, we have the honor and joy to participate in this meeting to exchange with the members of the Peacebuilding Commission, as well as the representatives of the Burundi government, other actors and international organizations that are engaged, whether they are near or far, in the processes of sustainable peacebuilding for the people of Burundi.

I would like to thank the Permanent Mission of Norway to the United Nations who chairs the PBC's work on Burundi and its specific attention to gender and security. Many thanks to International Alert and the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, and to the governments of the United Kingdom for supporting the Working Group's Women Peacebuilders Program which has brought me here to United Nations Headquarters today. Both International Alert and the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security have both always in their strategies connected the peacebuilder's voices from the community with those in the international community. In this regard, I strongly appeal to others to also seek to connect the voices of those who are experiencing problems on the ground. This is an important and vital role you can play.

My name is Goretti Ndacayisaba and I represent a National Women's Network called Dushirehamwe, which means "Let's Reconcile". Since 1996, the Network has been engaged in a training program of trainers in gender and conflict prevention, management and peacebuilding approaches in partnership with International Alert and UNIFEM. In 2002, we became an independent local women's peacebuilding association. Our work is conducted in 13 provinces where 158 trainers are present and 390 leaders at the community level are involved with peace education, community reconciliation, early warning activities and raising awareness of women's rights in relation to gender-based violence.

Permit us first of all to present to you the messages from the women of Burundi which contains three key points:

First, they would like to sincerely thank you for the support that the Commission has brought to them, enabling them to be represented in the National Steering Committee with the government and BINUB. This provides women opportunities to give observations and recommendations on gender issues.

Secondly, they congratulate your steadfast attention on the issue of peace in Burundi and, in particular, your visit and constructive engagement with partners, specifically the representatives of women in both the rural and urban areas.

Finally, they encourage you to continue to play a facilitating role working toward the development of national priorities. Keeping in mind the need to include those from groups which have been marginalized,

particularly women, with the aim that their needs and concerns are taken into account in the Integrated Peacebuilding Strategy and the implementation of peacebuilding programs and projects.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ambassadors and Guests,

With the combined efforts of all of the actors engaged in peacebuilding in Burundi: the government, BINUB, the international community and organizations in civil society, the process of consolidation of peace is working toward concrete and inclusive actions.

We rejoice at the opening which has been created for the participation of women, even if their participation in the peacebuilding process is still quite limited. This is partly due to existing discriminatory legislation – most notably the Family Code, which affects women’s well-being and prevents their full and effective participation in peacebuilding and development in Burundi. This especially impacts women who face extreme poverty, which constitutes almost the majority of women in Burundi.

Much work still remains to be done to better integrate women into national decision-making institutions and in national programmes in order to achieve sustainable national results in the areas of peace, security and development.

We urge decision-makers to integrate gender at each step of the peacebuilding and development as stipulated in United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1719.

The peacebuilding process is happening in a changing political environment at the national as well as regional level.

At the national level, the National Liberation Front (Front National de Liberation – FNL) and the government of Burundi have signed a ceasefire accord on the 7 September 2006. The implementation of this accord is still being negotiated. Therefore, important challenges must be addressed in the demobilization and reintegration of former combatants in the National Defence Force (Force des Defence National –FDN), the Burundi National Police (Police National Burundias) and state institutions. This is a challenge to the Commission’s process in regard to the effective establishment of prevention mechanisms in Burundi, because there is still the risk of active rebel groups.

At the regional level, we welcome the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region, which integrates Gender as an important dimension. We also welcome the fact that Burundi has joined the East African Community and the revival of the Economic Community of the Countries of the Great Lakes which provides Burundi a favorable environment for peacebuilding that includes gender as an important dimension. In this regard, one of the recommendations resulting from a donor roundtable organized in Burundi was to integrate gender into all the programs in poverty reduction.

Despite all of these advances, peacebuilding in Burundi remains the main concern of a large number of citizens in Burundi, particularly women. We believe that it there is not enough to arrive at peace and sustainable development in a country that has just experienced 12 years of civil war.

The crisis was characterized most notably by the excessive violation of human rights – particularly sexual violence. The absence of effective laws and a lack of effective advocacy for victims is still a problem. Women’s insecurity also results in large part from arms in which are still in the hands of the population which are used to commit crimes, especially sexual violence.

Women and gender must not only be mainstreamed into the strategies and programs on paper, but also in its application. This is especially important in regard to the distribution of the Peacebuilding Fund.

The projects already presented in the Integrated Peacebuilding Strategies touch upon important aspects in regard to security sector reform, strengthening of the rule of law, good governance and community reconciliation, but we must ensure that women and gender are effectively mainstreamed throughout.

Two major concerns affecting the entire population, which have serious implications for women, are famine and food insecurity which pose a serious threat to peace. Widespread corruption and the lack of equitable access to justice is also a serious threat to peace.

We sincerely wish that the governments be open to dialogue in order to better take into account the need of the populations prior to the implementation of the various projects.

Women's organizations are ready to contribute to reinforce the peacebuilding work and they have the expertise to do so.

Recommendations

1. We appreciate the fact that the project of women's role in the reconciliation and reconstruction process at the community level was allocated 10% of the budget of the peacebuilding fund for Burundi. However, this amount is insufficient in view of the enormity of women's needs, and we, therefore, urge the Commission to ensure that the necessary policies for peacebuilding as well as the Peacebuilding Fund mainstream gender.
2. The representatives of women's organizations who participate in the steering committee have joined the process at a very late stage and therefore were not able to input into the discussions on the first projects presented to the Committee. We ask the Commission to encourage the Government of Burundi, to put in place mechanisms to enable the integration of a gender perspective in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all peacebuilding policies and projects. Mechanisms for follow-up and monitoring of the implementation of the integrated peace consolidation strategies, particularly in regard to gender, the rule of law and security.
3. Despite the good-will of the key institutions in charge of peacebuilding, there is a lack of gender analysis submitted to the Steering Committee by the various ministries despite their goodwill to take gender into account. We recommend that the Commission ensure that the peacebuilding institutions are strengthened in regard to their capacity to conduct gender analysis and to mainstream gender in their different projects by, for instance, through the provision of gender training for the ministry staff and experts.
4. Currently, information concerning the peacebuilding process in Burundi is not known by the population – the knowledge of the PBC still rests in the hands of the elite in Bujumbura. We urge the Commission to ensure that the peacebuilding process be widely explained and organize debates that engage the population throughout the country.
5. We, in our roles as observers on the ground, see everyday that insecurity is still high both in rural and urban areas due to the proliferation of arms due to civilian attitudes and the behaviour of the police and FDN members. In order to see an improvement in freedom to go to work, to go to school and elsewhere we recommend the Commission:

Encourage the government to create gender desks in police offices where victims of gender-based violence go to report these crimes in safety and confidence

And Encourage the government to reinforce women's machineries within ministries and to effectively implement the National Gender Policy adopted in 2003.