



**ICGLR UGANDA CIVIL SOCIETY REFLECTION MEETING ON THE
SITUATION
IN BURUNDI**

Theme: "Rejuvenating Peace"

24TH MAY 2016, HOTEL AFRICANA, KAMPALA

Report

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Acronyms

AAI – Action Aid International

ACCORD- Agency for Cooperation and Research Development

AMwA- Akina Mama wa Afrika

CSO- Civil Society Organizations

DVA – Domestic Violence Act

DRC- Democratic Republic of Congo

GBV – Gender Based Violence

ICGLR- International Conference of the Great Lakes Region

IRRI – International Refugee Rights Initiative

ISIS – WICCE – Isis Women’s International Cross Cultural Exchange

JLO - Justice Law and Order

NAP – National Action Plan

NCM – National Coordination Mechanisms

SGBV-Sexual and Gender Based Violence

UN - United Nations

1.1 Introduction

Since April 2015, Burundi has experienced political unrest triggered in part by the announcement that President Pierre Nkurunziza would seek another term in office. A Briefing paper by the International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI), "*Burundi: A country on the edge*"¹ demonstrated that the government of Burundi is acting in a highly repressive way. There are regular accounts of disappearances, arrests and arbitrary killings and limited freedom of press and association. As a result, the government is shrinking the spaces available for non-violent opposition, spurring some to resort to violence that could tip over into civil conflict.

Akina Mama wa Afrika in partnership with the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) Uganda Civil Society committee members including Actionaid International, ACORD, International Refugee Rights Initiative, Regional Associates for Community Initiatives, and ISIS WICCE held a one day reflection on the Burundi crisis at Hotel Africana on 24th/05/2016. The meeting brought together 23 CSO representatives from Uganda that are working on issues of peace, security and development and representatives from the Burundi Women and Girls for peace who are based in Uganda. The main goal of the meeting was to deepen Uganda CSOs understanding of the Burundi question and generate strategies for building sustainable peace in Burundi.

The reflection meeting sought to build on previous initiatives that the ICGLR Regional Civil Society Forum partners had implemented including the Women and Girls Movement for Peace Strategy meeting that was held in December 2015 that brought together over 40 Burundian Women to champion peace in Burundi. A follow up meeting by the ICGLR Uganda Civil Society Forum in April 2016, further resolved that to take forward some of the resolutions from the December 2015 meeting. The members noted that areas such as capacity building in leadership, lobbying and advocacy, mediation and negotiation among others are critical so that they are able to effectively engage in the Burundi peace processes.

2.0 Summary of Presentations and Discussions

2.1 Presentation on the History and Dynamics of the Burundi question by Mr. Edgar Tabaro

Mr. Edgar begun by giving a brief history of Burundi which has been characterized by assassinations the most pronounced being the assassinations of immediate Post Independence Prime Ministers Prince Louis Rwagasore (1961 three days to his inauguration), Pierre Ngendandumwe 1965 (three weeks after his inauguration), Joseph

¹<http://www.refugee-rights.org/>

Bamina in 1965, King Ntare V, President Ndadaye 1993, President and more recent assassinations of senior military officers. The corollary of this ugly history has been unrest following every election cycle in Burundi with the exception of 2005 when the current President was elected by the national assembly.

He further stated that currently, youth unemployment in Burundi stands at 83%; subsistence Agriculture takes 90% of the population livelihoods while only 3% of the population has access to Hydro Electric Power. The Justice, Law and Order sector in Burundi has proved inadequate; the sector has failed to address and follow up on the brutality of the police, there is a great disconnect between the Justice Law and Order Sector with the aspirations of Burundi citizens as well as the Arusha Peace Accord which forms the basis of the Burundi Constitution. The skills of the judges and magistrates are still lacking and their record keeping is very poor.

Mr. Tabaro noted that the three contentious issues in Burundi are access to justice, land acquisition and gender disparity. The presenter sounded the alarm on some external forces that are negatively contributing to the situation in Burundi who he referred to as the “invisible political players.” For example he noted that the finding of **Nickel** used in airplane manufacturing has changed the terrain for the international players like China, Russia and South Africa who exhibit interest in the Nickel exploitation as well as regional forces which have different interests too.

As a way forward, Mr. Tabaro proposed the need for all actors including Burundi citizens in and outside the country, government, political parties, development partners, and stakeholders in the region to go beyond conflict resolution to conflict transformation. Urgent need is required to stop rewarding impunity as this will affect future generations. In addition there is need to address the shrinking political space being currently experienced and has been expressed in the UN reports and by the Commission on Human rights.

Regarding the ongoing dialogue process currently being spearheaded by H.E Benjamin Mkapa, the presenter noted the need to intentionally engage President Paul Kagame and President Yoweri Museveni if the Burundi question is to be amicably solved. In conclusion the presenter called upon actors to expand the dialogues beyond the usual elite who often times are most interested in power sharing and leaves out the masses in these debates that are directly affected.

2.2 Presentation on Drivers to the Burundi Conflict by Ms. Andie Lambe the Executive Director of IRRI

Andie gave a highlight of Burundi conflict through the years, she highlighted how the post colonial era of Burundi's history was dominated by conflict starting as early as the 1960's, 1970's when over 250,000 were killed and there was political unrest marked with violence, human rights abuses, murder, torture, death threats and as a result over 150,000 fled out of the country to seek refuge in other countries. 20years later , those that fled saw opportunity for return but unfortunately this optimism was misplaced and conflict broke out again for another 15years till 2008 when peace reigned once again.

She noted that the Arusha Peace Agreement presented a genuine attempt to breaking the cycle of violence tackling issues such as political equality and military neutrality but regrettably lacked focus on issues of (re) integration of civilians, equal opportunities, creation of institutional mechanisms to ensure equitable access to resources and equitable representation in institutions such as the judiciary, police and ministerial portfolios as well as failure to extensively embrace issues like transitional justice mechanisms such as truth telling, vetting and prosecution which watered down this impact.

The presentation further affirmed that the return of over half a million refugees in 2013 to Burundi also increased tension arising from land disputes, high population density, deficiencies in the rule of law, perceived or actual lack of common identity and income inequality among others. She thus equated the return to a metaphor that, *"Two people can't share the same pair of shoes"*. It was seen as both positive and negative in that they were able to go back home and in Tanzania where they were received and fed, they never had freedom, they were always called refugees; Negative because they were landless and therefore viewed as worthless.

The option of sharing back home presented its own challenges and was not an exquisite idea because in the peace villages which were gazetted for their settlement ,they still felt as if they do not belong as one said, *" ... I'm in exile...I do not feel Burundian at all. "I feel I am a refugee in my own country"*

The presenter highlighted that we cannot isolate Burundi from the regional dynamics as regional events are interpreted in light of historical injustices and this reinforced and reignited underlying conflicts. With Rwanda, tension aggravated in 2013 with the current crisis exacerbating and rumors have it that Rwanda is behind the coup attempt and the opposition in Burundi have faith that in case of anything, Rwanda will “*come to the rescue*”. It is believed that Rwanda is training and/or supporting an army in exile and has been directly intervening in Burundi issues. DRC on the other hand risks that armed groups might be drawn into the current crisis as the [*interahamwe*](#) are operating alongside the [*imbonerakure*](#) and the EAC itself is split over the conflict.

To note was that the situation in Burundi would have deteriorated much worse if it hadn't been for the resilience of the Burundi masses thus need for CSOs to stand together with our sisters in Burundi show solidarity and appreciation for the work they have done in trying to keep calm in this situation. The Army too has kept calm which is commendable.

As most people tend to think however and as the government portrays, the ethnicity issues of Hutus and Tutsis was diagnosed not to be the actual problem in Burundi but rather the governance issues of Nkurunziza and poverty to be the chief causes of the most wide spread conflict.

In conclusion, she highlighted the common drivers to include legacy of conflict at a societal level where small arms are accessible, trust fractured between communities and between the citizens at large and the political establishment. Human rights violations, media repression and a crack down on civil society further undermines the national unity and reinforces the culture of oppression and impunity. Therefore the longer the incidences of direct violence continue, the deeper the cracks keep getting and the harder it is to divert from the predictable course.

2.3 Plenary Discussion

A) The meeting discussed the question of the invisible players that are either exacerbating the situation or can be potential allies in ending the conflict and yet are not engaged in ending the conflict. The question as to how the big companies can be engaged to solve the problems of poverty and unemployment facing Burundians was tabled.

B) The role of Women was further emphasized by many of the participants who cited examples of what engagements are ongoing to influence the process right from the grassroots level where messages of peace are being preached to the international level.

It was proposed that a high level champion for peace in Burundi needs to be identified to engage President drawing from experiences elsewhere.

C) The need to enhance documentation of the role women are playing in ending the conflict needs to be documented for posterity. There are many involved in the peace processes but are not recognized

D) Participants supported the proposal to move beyond conflict resolution to conflict transformation. How do we get citizens to realize who the enemy is and involve them in non violent means to address their problem?

E) The critical issue for ordinary Burundian citizens remains security and personal safety. People are most worried about the killings, abductions, harassment and lack of justice.

F) Burundi has developed good policies like the Constitution and Arusha Peace Accord but their implementation still remains the big problem.

G) Building consensus of the root causes of the Burundi question was considered imperative for solving the problem once and for all.

3.0 Generating a way Forward

3.1 Advocacy Actions

- Advocate for the immediate deployment of an International Police Force due to the present fear of life and property
- Proposed having a civilian force for peace keeping , probably an only female peace force or mixture of male and female
- Documentation and raising voices of women for instance flagging out the women's position
- Mobilization of women to increasing visibility and developing awareness messages

- Organizing a peace march to raise awareness among the population, leaders and stakeholders

3.2 Capacity Building

- Capacity building for women in mediation, negotiation and transformative leadership to better engage with stakeholders and their leaders in peace processes.

3.3 Solidarity Actions

- Organize a visit to Burundi to carry out an exploratory expedition
- Mobilizing, eminent women from Uganda like Julia Sebutinde, Elizabeth Lwanga and Thelma Awori to liaise with others in Burundi
- Engagement with the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights
- Mobilizing CSOs, women in Uganda and those of Burundi in Uganda to approach and have a talk with President Museveni.
- Build a voice with the media, condone the rapes, murders, etc; bring out the real truth regarding the level of killings, etc

3.4 Administrative

- Form a Google group for members present so that we connect with each other, share information and ideas on the Burundi question.

4.0 Conclusion and closing Remarks

In her closing remarks, Dr. Thelma Awori from the Institute of Social Transformation emphasized the need for Members support the people of Burundi to achieve lasting peace. She noted that the organizations represented in the room all have strength which can be harnessed to achieve the set objectives and prayed that we should all have the courage of our conviction and not let fear and depression overcome us.

Since regional CSOs and Governments are working hard to resolve this, Burundi women willing, the Academics interested and international friends lending a hand, peace in Burundi will be possible.

Appendix I: Programme

Time	Activity	Responsible
8.00am	Registration	AMwA staff
9.00am	Welcome Remarks	ICGLR Member
9.15am	Opening Remarks	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
9.30am- 10.30am	A background paper on Burundi	Academia
	CSO Rejoinder Discussion	International Refugee Rights Initiative
11.30am	Panel presentations of key considerations going forward: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Revisiting the Arusha Peace Accord ➤ Towards an Inclusive Dialogue Process ➤ Regional and Global Processes ➤ CSO Initiatives Discussion	Four panelists including 2 women and 2 men

2.00pm	Development of strategies in groups	Facilitator
2.45pm	Groups report back: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Group One ➤ Group Two ➤ Group Three ➤ Group Four 	Group Rapporteurs
3.45pm	Summary and Conclusions	Facilitator
4:15pm	CLOSING	AMwA Executive Director

Appendix II: List of Participants

No	Name	Organization	Tel/ Email
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