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Dialogue on Burundi

28 July 2016

Executive Summary

On the 28th July 2016, SALO facilitated a dialogue in Tshwane entitled *Building Regional and International Consensus: Burundi.* This Policy Brief is part of the SA-EU peace and security cooperation dialogue series facilitated by SALO. Ambassador Marcus Cornaro, Head of the European Union Delegation to the Republic of South Africa & Mr Richard Smith, Coordinator of the African Insider Mediators Platform, Technical Advisor to the ACTION Support Centre (ACS) and SALO Board Member, gave opening remarks.

The aim was to initiate an informed and representative dialogue on the current crisis as well as the international community's response to it. In 2015, Burundi was plunged into another crisis since the

end of the civil war in 2005[1]. The current crisis began when President Pierre Nkurunziza decided to run for a third Presidential term in April 2015. The resultant outrage and protests provoked an attempted coup, in which members of the military tried to seize power.

The key outcomes of the discussion include:

- An acknowledgement of the deteriorating situation in Burundi and the reality of the violence that has plagued the country.
- The important role that the international community has to play in creating lasting peace in Burundi.
- A realisation that South Africa needs to reengage with both the Burundian officials and opposition in order to initiate a constructive dialogue around Burundi's future prospects, in light of the dire socioeconomic context and tremendously volatile political situation

The dialogue further pointed out some key issues related to contemporary concerns and issues, these included: the East African region's peace and security challenges, on-going violence between the Burundian government & rebel forces and the subsequent threats to stability both in Burundi and the region.

KEY ISSUES

International community efforts bear little positive outcomes

The International Community has been hesitant in terms of being more involved in bringing an end to the conflict. The UN, EU, USA & AU have been involved in dialogue, but very little has come out of the dialogue process.

There is a lack of a coherent initiative in terms of taking meaningful steps towards advancing a credible and inclusive dialogue processes. The February 2016 dialogue is the obvious case in point. President Pierre Nkurunziza publicly promised to hold talks with opposition groups in a bid to end the violence, but this commitment was largely ineffectual.

South African President, Jacob Zuma, led a delegation to serve as a credible mediator in the Burundi dialogue process, his mediation was enhanced by his role as a mediator in the 2000 peace agreement that ended Burundi's civil war. A major stumbling block has been Burundi's refusal to allow 5 000 peacekeeping troops into the country with violence escalating.

The challenge of inclusivity to a peace and political reconfiguration process

The challenging task is how to ensure inclusivity and persuade some of the actors to renounce violence in order for them to come to the negotiating table. Ambassador Cornaro pointed out that there is a need for stronger and continued pressure by the international community on the Burundian government, as well as a need for the main opposition to engage in these processes.

According to Ambassador Isaïe, the Burundian government is ready to engage with those seeking constructive engagement. This related to the claim by the Burundian government that some civil

[1] The civil war in Burundi lasted from 1993 to 2005

society leaders have been involved in violence at the same scale as the military insurgents. Which is why the government has often declined to meet and engage with them.

The proposed intervention of the AU

Burundi has stood resolute against sanctions and warnings from international powers, such as the US. The AU proposed sending peacekeeper troops into the nation after violence and tensions had escalated. Due to President Nkurunziza's threat to counter the deployment of peacekeepers, the AU withdrew its proposal. It is argued that this could have created a precedent in which the AU could intervene in other sovereign African countries.

The EU responded by cutting most of its funding for the country's anti-terror contingent in Somalia, this is significant in that Burundi provides nearly a quarter of the 22 000 AU troops which are stationed in Somalia. The AU faced a challenge in achieving its objectives in Somalia through its African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM), and therefore opted against sending troops to Burundi. The Burundian contribution to the AU mission in Somalia is a critical component of peace efforts that benefit the entire region. Any actions that undermine or threaten this contribution could have adverse consequences.

The Displacement of Burundians

Estimates are that more than a quarter of a million-people have been displaced by the violence occurring in Burundi, into neighbouring countries. According to **Ms Mediatrice Barengayabo** (a member of civil society from Burundi), women have paid the heaviest price, in terms of sexual violence in the form of rape, as well as other forms of gender based violence. Refugee camps that are in Burundi's neighbouring countries have become sites of sanctuary in terms of these displacements.

A Third Element involved in the conflict

There have been claims of third force involvement in the Burundi crisis. This has made it difficult for the Burundian government to trust neighbouring countries and commit to dialogue. Claims that neighbouring countries, such as Rwanda, are harbouring Burundian rebels aligned against the current government has resulted in Burundi threatening to counter any peacekeeping mission. According to a Refugees International report, refugees from Burundi are being recruited into non-state armed groups as part of a campaign involving Burundian and Rwandan nationals. Ambassador Isaïe Ntirizoshira highlighted that around five hundred fighters attacked Burundi from Rwanda in July 2015, and three military camps in Bujumbura were attacked in December 2015. On those two occasions, Burundian Security and Defence forces defeated the insurgents.

Any intervention effort or external involvement has been met with hostility from the Burundian government, and the AU has had challenges brokering an agreement. Burundi's government has taken a firm stance against foreign intervention. It is clear that the government views such

interventions as unfavourable. The reason for this could be the role of Rwanda in terms of endowing rebel groups with weapons as well as housing camps for recruitment and military training.

Recommendations

The need for a political solution to the Burundi crisis is vital so as to support efforts towards lasting peace and democratisation

It was noted that democracy has started to gain traction in Burundi, however the country continues to face many political and economic challenges. The conflict in Burundi risks undermining plans for political, economic and social initiatives within the region. Hence a combined effort by AU, ICGLR[2], COMESA[3] and EAC[4] to arrive at a political solution that involves both government and the opposition is necessary.

Importantly, the speakers noted that there is a need for security sector reform, programs for disarmament (government demilitarisation), demobilisation (rebel forces standing down) and reintegration (the dropping of sanctions and the return of refugees). Once these measures are met, Burundian society will be able to build the confidence to undertake political reforms.

The role of regional bodies in addressing regional issues

The speakers noted that the Burundian crisis provides another window of opportunity for the notion of "African solutions to African problems". The AU, ICGLR, COMESA and EAC need to act meaningfully in order to prevent civil war, show leadership in conflict management and bring about a resolution to the conflict. Regional intergovernmental organisations are key actors; they can ensure complementarity and subsidiarity between the UN, the AU, the EU and civil society. In this view, the role of the South African government, the EU and AU was highly commended, and it was noted that their work and cooperation should be strengthened and enhanced. There is need for consistent and coordinated pressure that insists on bringing all Burundian parties into the East Africa Community led dialogue framework. Those efforts should not be derailed by interventions that have the potential to do more harm than good.

Preserving the principles of the Arusha agreement

The realisation of the Arusha Accord is vital. There is a need to ensure the full and equal inclusion of groups involved in this current conflict, only then can inclusive and representative dialogue, based on the respect of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement and the Constitution of Burundi, pave the way for a lasting political solution that will help to consolidate and preserve peace; as well as strengthen democracy and the rule of law in the country. It was noted that the Arusha Agreement remains the single most important reference point for the dialogue process being driven by the African Union and the East African Community.

AU-EU partnership for peace and security in Burundi

[2] International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR)
[3] Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)
[4] East African Community (EAC)

The AU-EU cooperation for peace and security should be enhanced and strengthened so as to allow for more assistance and strategic support to regional bodies. The EU needs to also focus on helping key continental actors, such as South Africa, consolidate their peace and security initiatives on the continent. It is highly important for the AU, EU and SA to continue their mediation efforts in Burundi.

South Africa's foreign policy and its peacekeeping efforts

The speakers pointed out that it is important for SA to focus on creating a peaceful, stable and prosperous Africa as a key tenet of its foreign policy objectives. As such, South Africa's political leaders and diplomats need to work with their Burundian counterparts to engage President Nkurunziza through dialogue. The Great Lakes Regional member states are critical to these initiatives.

As the mediator that led to the signing of the Arusha Agreement, South Africa upholds sound bilateral relations with Burundi. It is then essential that SA invest heavily in Burundi's peace and stability.

*List of Speakers

1. Ambassador Isaïe Ntirizoshira, Head of Mission, Embassy of Burundi in South Africa
2. Mr Piers Pigou, Southern Africa Project Director, International Crisis Group
3. Dr Martin Rupiya, Associate Professor, Institute for African Renaissance Studies (IARS) UNISA
4. Mr Andre van Strate, Deputy Director, Indian Ocean Islands, South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO)

The dialogue was enhanced by the participation of a representative and involved grouping of participants including members of civil society, policy makers including a number of African and EU diplomats (*notably* ***His Excellency High Commissioner Julius Peter Moto,*** *High commission of Uganda*) as well as academics and members of the public (***Dr Martin Rupiya****, Associate Professor, Institute for African Renaissance Studies (IARS) UNISA*).

About the Southern African Liaison Office:

The Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) is a South African-based not-for-profit civil society organisation which, through advocacy, dialogue, policy consensus and in-depth research and analysis, influences the current thinking and debates on foreign policy especially regarding African crises and conflicts.

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