

GENDER AND THE WORK OF THE PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION IN BURUNDI

Roundtable Discussion on the Peacebuilding Commission & SCR 1325

Presentation by Gorette Ndayisaba

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Distinguished representatives, it is a great moment for me to participate in this panel and to discuss the role of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) in promoting peace, security and gender equality in 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 and Canada 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 peacebuilders' 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 Gorette Ndayisaba 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.

One of our key priorities has also been to ensure that women are in decision making positions. To that end, Dushirehamwe together with the coalition of women's organisations (Synergie des partenaires pour la promotion des droits des femmes), did much to ensure that the new constitution is gender sensitive. As a result, there is now 30% representation of women in the government.

To reinforce elected women's capacities to successfully fulfill their roles after elections, the Dushirehamwe Network set up an additional training program on democratisation and peacebuilding focused on local good governance with a gender perspective. The programs promote dialogue and social cohesion for a durable reintegration of internally displaced persons, returnees, ex-combatants, ex-prisoners and those who remain in the community. Bringing together these actors has resulted in the signing of Social Contracts – a commitment to peaceful coexistence and community reconciliation.

Dushirehamwe can offer its expertise to the Peacebuilding Commission. Our experience is well known at local, national, regional and international level. We can be useful to the work of the PBC - if the PBC is opened to women's expertise and experience. We can contribute in many ways including: training activities, promotion of the dialogue and community reconciliation, needs assessment and planning activities and linking with other organisations by the ICTs.

The Peacebuilding Commission is a very welcomed opportunity for our country - especially women, after many years of civil war which caused widespread destruction at individual and collective levels. The PBC can play a central role in Burundi on its road to recovery by supporting lasting peace, security and durable development, good governance with a gender perspective at all levels, an end to

impunity, effective community recovery and reconciliation, disarmament and the civic participation of all stakeholders in peace consolidation.

The Commission can help to coordinate many remaining issues including:

- The reduction of the poverty through the strategic plan elaborated by the government (PRSP) in which we all expect a quick reaction from the international community to relieve women, children, and aged persons who are in vulnerable situations due to hunger, disease, physical and psychological violence, and the lack or non access to basic social needs;
- The establishment of an adequate legal machinery to end impunity;
- The creation of mechanisms and strong laws against gender based violence;
- The mobilization of funds for rehabilitation, DDR and development programs with a gender focus;
- The framework of conflict prevention and management;
- The reinforcement of the women's capacities and gender expertise and the improvement of women's leadership roles;
- The involvement of women's civil society organisations in the execution of the PBC program.

Unfortunately, the dissemination of information about the establishment and functions of the PBC in Burundi has not been done in a transparent and participatory manner. Although the government, together with BINUB, are responsible for conducting the process and disseminating information, it is imperative that the Commission also share information and document each step, and encourage the government of Burundi to do the same. Inclusive involvement of civil society organisations will help the Commission and the government to disseminate information to the population and can coordinate feed back to the PBC and government from the ground.

Thus far, however, civil society organisations in Burundi have had to rely on information and international advocacy efforts from NGOs like GIPAG and the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security in order to know what is happening – often both nationally and internationally.

After Burundi came onto the PBC agenda in July 2006, a forum for civil society in Burundi called FORSC (which is comprised of 60 organisations) started coordinating meetings to mobilize and inform members about PBC process. In August, recommendations were developed and sent to New York, recommending that the Commission integrate civil society organisations and their recommendations.

Despite much advocacy at the national and international level, the PBC National Steering Committee created in Burundi is comprised of male members from the government and male members from BINUB, with one observer from civil society (a man). Unlike Sierra Leone, (also on the Commission's agenda), the National Steering Committee accepted only one civil society representative – a representative who has only observer status.

One person cannot represent the whole of civil society in Burundi, and we recommended that the National Steering Committee invite a women's representative to join the committee. This representation is crucial to ensure that policies are being created which are gender sensitive. The Steering Committee has recently devised a national strategy which is not at all gender sensitive. On the budget line, for example, women will likely be left out.

We must ask ourselves what kind of effective peacebuilding programs do we hope to build if these efforts, programs and policies are not inclusive of women's issues? Especially considering that women comprise 54% of the population in Burundi. *How will the PBC, in their coordinating efforts, help to ensure that gender perspectives will actually be implemented at the national level in efforts to build an effective development plan for peace and security consolidation?*

Careful consideration is necessary to ensure that women, their security needs and the implementation of SCR 1325 are mainstreamed into the work of the PBC in Burundi, particularly in relation to good governance, the rule of law, security sector reform and community recovery.

As you may know, Burundi is coming out of a long armed conflict which destroyed social fabrics. In that regard, women's organisations demonstrated their commitment to their communities and worked very hard to keep peace in many ways. The work done by organisations like the Dushirehamwe Network has had significant impact on the entire peace process. Dushirehamwe programs have changed negative political and ethnic views to positive opinions toward gender perspectives and girls' and women's rights. It has also brought families together, as well as trust, solidarity, mutual acceptance among them, and has helped women to come together and to organise in different working groups to engage for peace and community reconciliation. It has also mobilised women's organisations around the issues of political participation and decision making.

Today, those efforts in achieving peace must be considered key existing elements for continuing to build peace in Burundi. The Commission and the government have, already in place, an effective, established base to start from. It is, therefore, imperative that women be involved in the process of reflection, planning and execution in the work of the Commission in Burundi - and should be viewed and integrated as central stakeholders, not just as beneficiaries.

A significant budget from the PBC Fund should be allocated to women's organizations and to those working on gender issues, in order to build upon and strengthen peacebuilding activities. We urgently request the members of the Peacebuilding Commission to encourage the government of Burundi to create ear-marked funds for gender in the PBC allocated funds for Burundi.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING GENDER IN THE WORK OF THE PBC IN BURUNDI:

Considering the lack of representation of women and women's advocates in the PBC National Steering Committee and the vast contributions made to peace and security by women during the transition period:

We urgently ask the National Committee to integrate a gender component and to open space for representation of women civil society organisations as stakeholders - not just as observers.

Considering the increasing poverty among Burundian people, and knowing that poverty is one of the important root causes of conflict and cycles of violence in Burundi,

We recommend that the Commission utilize the PRSP in their coordination efforts and ensure long term support to help tackle the root of conflict, to fund it in all its dimensions, including strengthening the gender component.

To achieve peace in post conflict countries like Burundi, there is a need to know and to plan according to the priorities and needs of all the population and to take into consideration the significant and differential impact the war has had on women and girls. Women and girls have faced and continue to face a myriad of intersecting issues including sexual violence, domestic abuse, malnutrition, marginalization by humanitarian aid, infection from HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, lack of access to justice, to credit, to information, and to basic social needs. Given their vulnerable situation and its potential impact on durable security,

We recommend the Commission:

- Set up a dialogue with women's organisations, to get to know the needs and priorities of women and to design a gender strategy within the national plan of the PBC in Burundi.

- To create a PBC gender advisor desk or focal point at the national level, and to put in place a gender mechanism and framework for linking with women's organisations.

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.

Thank you