

Burundian authorities 'shut doors' to engagement, cooperation – Security Council told

9 March 2017 – Nearly two years after the political impasse started in Burundi, national authorities are reducing their cooperation with the United Nations system which risks undermining efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the crisis and cutting assistance to a population in need, the Security Council was told today.

Presenting the first Secretary-General's report on the situation in Burundi, the Special Adviser on the topic noted that "the report is factual and speaks for itself."

Jamal Benomar told the Council the UN has tried to constructively engage with the Government and support the people of Burundi in their search for peace and stability, to no avail.

"We have engaged quickly, refrained from public criticism and encouraged modest, small steps to build confidence with the parties. Despite this modelled approach, the doors to engagement and cooperation have been largely shut by the authorities," Mr. Benomar said.

In the past several months, the Government has decided to withdraw from the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, suspend cooperation and collaboration with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and refused cooperation with the commission of inquiry mandated by the Human Rights Council.

The Government has also avoided signing a document with the African Union that would allow human rights observers and military experts to be deployed, to aid Burundians.

These actions were taken as "human rights violations and abuses continue to be reported on a worrying scale," according to the report.

In addition, at the end of February, President Pierre Nkurunziza suggested that he might seek a change to the Constitution allowing him to seek a fourth term in office. The move, as written in the report, "has the potential to plunge the country into an even deeper crisis."

Referring to the report, Mr. Benomar called on the Burundian Government "to fulfil its moral obligation and political responsibility to return the country to a path of peace."

He noted that most Burundians do not want to continue on the track of "international isolationism, violence and repression."

The UN envoy urged the international community "guided by the Security

Council to do its part to support those who seek a peaceful resolution of this crisis, and underscored the UN's continued commitment to helping the Burundian people.

The Security Council also heard by video-conference from former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa, who is facilitating discussions between the Government and the opposition in accordance with the Arusha Agreement. Mr. Benomar stressed in his statement that Mr. Mkapa has the UN's full support in his work.

Also speaking to the Council today was Jurg Lauber, the Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission. Mr. Lauber will visit Burundi at the end of this month to get first-hand impression of the situation and meet with the Government, opposition and civil society representatives.

In his statement, Mr. Lauber echoed Mr. Benomar's call to the international community to remain active in Burundi: "Abandoning Burundi now would mean wasting past efforts and putting the country and its people at risk of recurring conflict."

[‘Holistic thinking’ needed for peace, development in Lake Chad region – Deputy UN chief Mohammed](#)

9 March 2017 – Highlighting the multifaceted nature of the crisis in Africa's Lake Chad Basin, the deputy United Nations chief underlined the need for a holistic approach that includes responding to the Boko Haram as well as closing the gap between humanitarian assistance and development interventions.

"Lasting recovery will entail supporting reconstruction of schools, health centres, and reviving essential infrastructure [...] that support the necessary livelihoods," Amina Mohammed, the UN Deputy Secretary-General, told the Security Council today.

"Effective prevention of future radicalization and violence will also entail comprehensive responses that benefit all members of society," she added.

Ms. Mohammed's briefing follows last week's visit of the Security Council to the region and a global UN-backed conference to raise funding to sustain critical aid operations in the region, held on 24 February.

According to estimates, more than 10 million people in the Lake Chad Basin

are in need of humanitarian assistance, including more than seven million needing food support, with 515,000 children affected by severe acute malnutrition.

Noting the response by UN agencies to support the local populations and the contributions pledged by countries at the Oslo Humanitarian Conference, the Deputy Secretary-General said that the needs outstripped the resources and urged UN Member States to ensure that the \$1.5 billion humanitarian appeal is funded fully.

RELATED: Donors pledge \$670 million at UN-backed conference to support aid operations in Lake Chad region

Speaking on the region's security challenges and the activities of Boko Haram, Ms. Mohammed informed the Council of UN's work to document information on human rights abuses, as well as its assistance to affected countries to ensure that their counter-terrorism efforts fully complied with international human rights, humanitarian and refugee laws.

In particular, she spoke of the plight of women affected by Boko Haram, many of whom are still displaced in camps, detained by the authorities, or are struggling to reintegrate into their communities.

"We also need to scale up efforts to provide access to sexual and reproductive health and psychosocial support and livelihood support for female-headed households," she said, noting the need to ensure that women have key roles in the response from food distribution and camp management to all efforts to counter violent extremism, restore state authority and build peace.

Further in her remarks, Ms. Mohammed also underlined the need to address the root causes of the crisis to achieve durable peace and of the importance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for the region.

"My single clear message today is that the solution lies in holistic thinking," she noted, hailing the role of the African Union and the continent's regional organizations to peace, security and the integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and Africa's own Agenda 2063.

[UN agriculture agency warns of water scarcity in North Africa and Near East](#)

9 March 2017 – Accessible fresh water in North Africa and the Middle East has fallen by two-thirds over the past 40 years, posing a huge challenge requiring "an urgent and massive response," the head of the United

Nations agriculture agency said today.

Access to water is a fundamental need for food security, human health and agriculture, and sustainable water use for agriculture requires transforming food systems and diets, said Jose Graziano da Silva, the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in a news release on his visit to Egypt.

Per capita availability of fresh water in the region is now 10 times less than the world average, he said, underscoring the need for a significant overhaul of farming systems.

A recent FAO study showed that higher temperatures may shorten growing seasons in the region by 18 days and reduce agricultural yields a further 27 per cent to 55 per cent less by the end of this century.

The rising sea level in the Nile Delta is exposing Egypt to the danger of losing substantial parts of the most productive agriculture land due to salinization.

Moreover, competition between water-usage sectors will only intensify in the future between agriculture, energy, industrial production and household needs, he said.

Mr. Graziano da Silva attended a high-level meeting on FAO's collaboration with Egypt on the '1.5 million feddan initiative,' the Government's plan to reclaim eventually up to two million hectares of desert land for agricultural and other uses.

Policy advice and best practice ideas on the governance of irrigation schemes is a key offering in FAO's Near East and North Africa Water Scarcity Initiative, backed now by a network of more than 30 national and international organizations.

The initiative has gained momentum, buoyed by its endorsement by the League of Arab States as well as donor support, Mr. Graziano da Silva said, noting that urgent actions supporting it include measures aimed at reducing food loss and waste and bolstering the resilience of smallholders and family farmers.

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[Americas region adopts 'historic' disaster risk reduction plan at UN-backed forum in Montreal](#)

9 March 2017 – Around 50 countries and territories of the Americas at a

United Nations-supported conference in Montreal, Canada, agreed a Regional Action Plan today to better protect their citizens from the destruction caused by natural and man-made disasters.

The plan, which is the centerpiece of the Montreal Declaration outcome document, marks the end of three days of deliberation and discussion by close to 1,000 government delegations and officials; non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society and other representatives, under the umbrella of the UN-backed Fifth Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Americas.

The conference, supported by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), aimed to put into action the principles and priorities agreed by more than 180 countries across the world in the 2015 Sendai Framework on disaster risk reduction, named after the Japanese city in which it was adopted.

That enshrined the same priorities outlined by the Canadian Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Ralph Goodale, who chaired and hosted the Montreal Conference, when he summarized the thrust of Thursday's Regional Action Plan.

He said there were 16 "specific actions" arising, covering four key areas, namely understanding risk better; improving governance when it comes to dealing with disasters; improving on resilience at all levels regarding risk reduction efforts, and finally, better preparedness.

According to UNISDR, while disaster deaths have gradually fallen around the world "expect in anomalous years marked by mega-disasters such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami or the 2010 Haiti earthquake" economic impacts have skyrocketed and are now estimated at \$500 billion a year.

Hurricane Matthew alone caused damage estimated at \$15 billion when it ripped across Haiti, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, the Bahamas, the United States and the Canadian Maritimes last October.

UNISDR chief Robert Glasser gave *UN News* more details of the 16-point action plan, saying "there are things like cooperating on science and technology research; on developing early warning and building back better after disasters; on embedding risk in core economic planning, on building coherence between disaster risk, climate risk and sustainable development more broadly."

Mr. Glasser said the Montreal Declaration was an "historic" moment for the Americas, and marked the first time that Member States in the region had come together and agreed a collective plan to make the Sendai Framework a reality.

"This is the number one issue that affects both less developed and highly developed countries alike. It is an issue that results in huge loss of life each year and that is causing at least \$500 billion a year in economic losses that is all money that could be used to fight poverty, increase access

to education or healthcare or promote economic development.”

“So this is not a hypothetical subject. It is a subject that is a matter of life and death and prosperity,” added Mr Glasser.

The Regional Action Plan now goes forward to the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction, taking place in Cancun, Mexico, in May.