

UN envoy urges 'inclusive' talks to resolve crisis in Burundi

Inclusive talks remain the only way to find a lasting solution to the political, socio-economic and humanitarian crisis that has engulfed Burundi since 2015, the United Nations envoy for the African Great Lakes country said on Thursday.

Briefing the Security Council a week after the country voted in favour of a new constitution, Michel Kafando, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Burundi said that voting has passed off with relative calm but that some irregularities had been reported by civil society groups and opposition.

Burundi's election commission also reported some incidents at the polls but, in the commission's view, these were not likely to influence the final result, added Mr. Kafando.

The crisis began in April 2015, when President Pierre Nkurunziza began his campaign for a disputed third-term in office, triggering protests and a failed coup attempt.

As Burundi now enters an important phase in its history, an inclusive dialogue, which also includes regional actors, is vital to overcome the obstacles in a climate of mutual trust, said the UN envoy.

The absence of such reconciliation talks could further polarize an already tense political situation, warned Mr. Kafando.

The Special Envoy also told the 15-member Security Council that while the security situation in Burundi is largely calm, isolated incidents of violence remain a cause for concern, calling on the Government to continue its efforts to improve security for ordinary citizens.

He also urged the Burundian authorities to resume cooperation with the commission of inquiry established by the Human Rights Council as well as with the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR).

'Gravely concerned' over northern Somalia clashes, UN and partners call

for ceasefire

The United Nations and its partners on Thursday expressed grave concern over armed clashes which have broken out in northern Somalia, urging all parties to immediately halt the violence.

According to reports, heavy fighting began in the morning, local time, near the Tukaraq area of the Sool region between Puntland and 'Somaliland' forces, involving heavy weaponry.

"The international partners call on both sides to bring [an immediate halt to the fighting](#), start dialogue between military commanders on the ground, secure humanitarian access for displaced persons, and enter into talks to discuss a separation of forces and an exchange of detained security personnel," said a joint statement.

The statement noted that the violence was compounding "an already-difficult humanitarian situation that has recently been aggravated by the impact of tropical cyclone Sagar – the clashes only add to the suffering of the people in the area".

Thursday's call for an immediate ceasefire was endorsed by the UN, African Union, European Union, the African regional body known as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Belgium, Denmark, Ethiopia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Not so fast on fracking, UN agency tells developing countries

The hydraulic extraction of natural gas, commonly known as fracking, produces cleaner energy than oil and coal, but it is not necessarily in the best interests of the world's poorest countries, UN development experts said on Thursday.

A new report by UNCTAD, the UN Conference on Trade and Development, describes natural gas as a useful "bridge fuel" for States aiming to move towards more environmentally-friendly renewable power sources.

But it has disadvantages too, not least the fact that its main component is methane gas, which has a global-warming potential 28 times higher than the carbon dioxide found in other fossil fuels.

The fuel “should contribute...to achieving a low-carbon economy” by 2030, the report says, while pointing to “gaps in local geological and hydrological knowledge” and inadequate regulations that may represent “major obstacles to hydraulic fracturing as a method of extracting shale gas”.

Whether it’s really good, or bad, depends on a number of factors that we analyze in this report: geology, sources of water for example; if you are increasing your water stress by using a lot of water, infrastructure and so on and so forth – *Janvier Nkurunziza (UNCTAD)*

Janvier Nkurunziza, Chief of UNCTAD’s Commodity Research and Analysis Section, said that the report was “not saying (fracking) is good or bad”.

That was something that only governments could do, the UN official added, based on variables including their investment capacity and the possible contamination of underground water sources.

“Whether it’s really good, or bad, depends on a number of factors that we analyze in this report: geology, sources of water for example; if you are increasing your water stress by using a lot of water, infrastructure and so on and so forth,” said Mr. Nkurunziza, adding that “we are not saying it’s good or bad, just look at the conditions and the region (where) you want to explore this resource, and then you can determine whether you can do it or not.”

Citing data from the United States Energy Information Administration, the UNCTAD report indicates that the world has around 60 years’ worth of shale gas left before the resource is exhausted.

Around half of the 215 trillion cubic metres this represents is in Algeria, Argentina, Canada, China and the United States – although the US is the world’s leading shale gas producer, with 87 per cent of total output.

“The U.S. is like an exception,” said Mr Nkurunziza, noting that no other country has the “huge investments” necessary to fund shale gas exploration on such a scale.

Thanks to this financial strength, the North American giant also became a net exporter of natural gas in July last year, while the country’s massive commitment to liquefaction facilities has also put it on course to hold the third largest processed stock of the energy source in the world, after Australia and Qatar between now and 2020.

Other factors such as land ownership, also explain the US dominance in shale gas exploration, Mr Nkurunziza said, highlighting that in the US, “if you want to use your land to frack it’s up to you”.

The UNCTAD official added that the world’s largest economy also has “highest technology that’s available” for fracking to happen, along with a highly flexible financial system capable of resisting the ups and downs of commodity

price changes.

“In the U.S. sometimes when the prices go down they stop fracking, when the prices increase the investments are there, so investors will come and do it, so it’s very flexible”.

[UN development official urges greater international support for Zimbabwe](#)

With a new administration in place and plans to hold free and fair general elections later this year, authorities in Zimbabwe are hoping to see greater international investment in their country, according to the top United Nations official there.

Bishow Parajuli, UN Resident Coordinator and Resident Representative for the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)), said now is the time to support the southern African nation.

“I think the international community should be very open, the UN should be very open, to engage and partner with – and support Zimbabwe – to come out of some of the major crises they have had in the last several years so they can stand on their own,” he told *UN News* during a recent visit to New York.

They are calling for a lot of investors to come in, private sector to come in, which is really fundamental, actually. Aid alone is not enough – *Bishow Parajuli (UNDP)*

Zimbabwe is emerging from the nearly 40-year rule of former President Robert Mugabe, who resigned in November.

His successor, Emmerson Mnangagwa, has pledged to build “a new Zimbabwe,” one that is not only openly courting foreign investment but also committed to upholding human rights.

“The Government has been very active in terms of promoting engagement and they have declared themselves as open for business, contrary to the past administration,” said Mr. Parajuli.

“They are calling for a lot of investors to come in, private sector to come in, which is really fundamental, actually. Aid alone is not enough.”

International investment will help Zimbabwe to address numerous development challenges.



UNDP Zimbabwe/Sirak Gebrehiwot

The UN Country Team tour of UN supported resilience and community asset building projects in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe. Mr Bishow Parajuli is front center.

Twenty-five UN entities are already operating in the country, supporting national efforts in areas such as stamping out HIV and AIDS, and driving down maternal mortality rates.

Last year, their 150 international staff and 800 local colleagues delivered more than \$400 million in projects and programmes.

Overall, they accounted for more than 60 per cent of official development assistance (ODA) administered in the country.

Mr. Parajuli explained that the relationship between the UN country team and Zimbabwe had always been “excellent” and now has now become stronger.

“For example, the UN system is supporting promotion of human rights,” he said.



UNDP Zimbabwe/Sirak Gebrehiwot

UNDP's Administrator Achim Steiner (2nd from left) and Bishow Parajuli (3rd from left) witnessed a 19-year-old register to vote for the first time using the new technology, Biometric Voter Registration, at the Mbare registration center in Harare, Zimbabwe.

"We are working in supporting strengthening of the Parliament, we are supporting in areas of peacebuilding, and we are also supporting in different areas of capacity building to the Electoral Commission to contribute to that process of free, fair and transparent elections."

The election is scheduled for July and the new Government has invited the European Union and other international observers to monitor the process: a first for the country.

UNDP chief Achim Steiner, travelled to Zimbabwe in March, marking the first time in years that a senior UN official has visited the country.

In discussions with the authorities, he discussed ways the international community could assist Zimbabwe with its economic recovery, as well as his agency's support for the electoral process.

Mr. Parajuli believes Zimbabwe is prepared to hold a credible vote.

"As far as we see it, there are some good signs because the new voter rolls are being developed, with 5.4 million in new voter registration," he said.

"There is a lot of engagement between political parties and the ruling faction; engagement between the Election Commission, civil society and others. The political parties themselves are getting together to agree on a code of conduct for holding peaceful elections. So, all these signs are

positive.”

UN chief ‘deeply concerned’ over cancellation of US-North Korea summit

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said on Thursday that he was “deeply concerned” by the cancellation of the planned meeting between the leaders of the United States and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), commonly-known as North Korea.

Speaking in Geneva on Thursday, where the Secretary-General [unveiled](#) his new Agenda for Disarmament, Mr. Guterres called on the two parties “to continue their dialogue to find a path to the peaceful and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.”

The decision to cancel the summit, which was due to take place in Singapore on 12 June, came in the form of a letter from the White House, although both sides had cast doubt in recent days that talks would go ahead next month, according to news reports.

US President Donald Trump was due to sit down to discuss denuclearizing the Peninsula with North Korea’s leader, Kim Jong Un, for what would have been the first ever face-to-face meeting between the leaders of the two countries.

The US announcement came just a few hours after an announcement from the DPRK, that it had dismantled and closed its nuclear test site at Punggye-ri.

According to media reports, three tunnels at the site were reportedly collapsed in explosions conducted Thursday morning and afternoon, local time.

The closure has, however, not been verified by international experts.

A spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General said it was “[regrettable](#) that international experts were not invited” to the site closing.

The statement added that Mr. Guterres hopes the site’s closure will contribute to efforts towards sustainable peace in the region.

The Korean Peninsula remains one of the world’s longest unresolved conflicts, which began in June 1950. An armistice brought about a ceasefire in 1953, but the war never officially ended.

The leaders of the two Koreas held a historic [meeting](#) on the line dividing their two countries at the end of last month.