

Burundi: Security Council urges dialogue amid deteriorating political and humanitarian situation

Expressing deep concern over the slow pace of the inter-Burundian dialogue and the lack of engagement by the Government, the United Nations Security Council called on all stakeholders, in particular the authorities to commit to the dialogue and reach an agreement ahead of the 2020 elections.

“Dialogue is the only viable process for a sustainable political settlement in Burundi,” underscored the Security Council in a statement read-out by its President at a formal meeting Thursday afternoon.

In the statement, the Council also “strongly” condemned human rights violations committed in the country, including extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, arbitrary arrests and detentions, forced disappearance, torture and harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders and journalists.

The Security Council also reiterated its “regret” at the Government’s decision to suspend all cooperation and collaboration with the Office of the UN High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR) and called for a swift solution through dialogue between the UN human rights arm and Burundi in order to enable OHCHR to fully resume its mandated activities, including its monitoring and reporting functions.

Also in the statement, the 15-member Council voiced concerns over the continued worsening of the humanitarian situation in the country and, in the context of Burundians seeking refuge in neighbouring countries, called on those Governments to ensure that the return of the refugees is voluntary, based on informed decisions and in safety and dignity.

According to estimates, some 180,000 people remain displaced within Burundi and more than 429,000 have sought refuge across its borders.

Following the July 2015 election in which Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza won a disputed third term, violence broke out among state forces, suspected opposition members, and civilians.

UN chief applauds Sierra Leoneans for

peaceful elections; congratulates new President

United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres took note of the announcement by the National Electoral Commission on 4 April of the final results of the presidential run-off election in Sierra Leone, the UN Spokesman said Thursday.

“He congratulates Mr. Julius Maada Bio on his election as the next President of the Republic of Sierra Leone and all the candidates for their contributions to the successful outcome of the electoral process,” said Stéphane Dujarric.

“He also applauds the people of Sierra Leone for the sense of responsibility that they have demonstrated in [successfully completing the elections in a peaceful manner](#),” added the spokesperson.

The UN Spokesman said that Mr. Guterres commended the efforts of “the national, regional and international electoral observation teams” as well as those of his “Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel, Mohammed Ibn Chambas.”

According to media reports, the election went to a second round after neither of the candidates achieved the required 55 per cent of the ballot in the first round.

As some African outlets have reported alleged electoral malpractices, the Secretary-General appeals for continued calm and stresses the need for all stakeholders to seek redress of any grievances that could arise through established legal means.

“The Secretary-General reiterates the support of the United Nations to the new Government in consolidating peace and pursuing sustainable development,” the Spokesman concluded.

UN celebrates voice and visibility of women and girls with autism

Activists and ambassadors gathered at the United Nations on Thursday to underline their commitment to empowering women and girls with autism, a lifelong neurological condition that begins in childhood and is characterized by some degree of impaired social behaviour, communication and language.

Women and girls were the focus on [World Autism Awareness Day](#), observed on 2 April: a segment of the global population that faces “multiple challenges,” as UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) stated in his [message](#) for the Day.

Speaking at the commemorative event in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Chamber, Alison Smale, head of the UN Department of Global Communications, outlined some of the many forms of discrimination women and girls with autism face.

“They are denied equal access to education and employment, to healthcare services, justice and equal recognition before the law, and they are far too often denied the freedom to make their own choices,” she stated.

Julia Bascom, Executive Director of the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, provided an overview of the state of women and girls with autism.

She said they are diagnosed much less frequently than men and boys, and often much later in life: sometimes only after bringing in their own children for assessment.

“The diagnostic criteria for autism are normed off of four-year-old white boys in upper middle-class families in the United States,” she reported. “So, anyone who doesn’t fit in that box has an uphill climb.”

With one child in 160 on the autism spectrum, Ambassador Mahmoud Saikhal of Afghanistan stressed the need to fight stigma and promote inclusion, but also to highlight the contributions made by people with autism.

He gave examples such as Eileen Parker, inventor of a weighted blanket that helps some people with autism to feel calm enough to fall asleep, and Dr. Temple Grandin, a leading advocate.

“Events like this help to give a voice to those who may otherwise be left behind,” he said, reading a statement on behalf of Miroslav Lajčák, the President of the UN General Assembly.

Ensuring that “no one is left behind” is the promise of [the Sustainable Development Agenda](#) for a more just and equitable future that world leaders have committed to bring about by 2030.

Ms. Smale, the UN official, called for giving women and girls with autism a direct role in policy making on matters that concern them.

“To achieve the inclusive society to which we aspire, we must ensure that the fundamental rights enshrined in the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), adopted by Member States at the UN in 2006, are known and respected and are recognized as applying to everyone, including women and girls with autism,” she said.

Though based in the US, the non-profit Autistic Self Advocacy Network – Ms. Bascom’s organization – works to empower people with autism globally, under the rallying call of ‘Nothing About Us, Without Us!’

“As a society we still see autism as a negative, sad, scary thing. But for autistic women, an autism diagnosis can be a tool for empowerment,” she told the UN audience.

“It’s an answer, it’s an explanation, it’s a way out of cycles of self-blame and guilt. It’s a passport to an entire community. And if we’re lucky, it’s a connection to the understanding, support and services we need in order to truly thrive –sometimes for the first time in our lives.”

[Marking Sport for Development Day, Japanese athletes take UN Global Goals forward](#)

“Let’s use the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics as an opportunity to let the world know about the importance of [SDGs](#) [Sustainable Development Goals],” said [Koji Murofushi](#), the gold medalist in hammer throw at the 2004 Athens Olympics, in his video message.

The [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and its 17 SDGs were adopted by world leaders in 2015 as a blueprint to achieve a healthy planet where people can live free of poverty and hunger by 2030.

“I often see poverty with my own eyes when I go overseas for tennis matches. Now, donation is probably the only way I can contribute but I support activities aiming to eradicate poverty,” said [Mai Minokoshi](#), a professional tennis player, in her message.

The campaign was launched by the UN Information Centre (UNIC) in Tokyo and Japan Sports Agency, with the support of Sport for Tomorrow, a Government-private joint venture, to commemorate the [International Day of Sport for Development and Peace](#), annually observed on 6 April – the day the first modern Olympics was held in 1896.

In the [2030 Agenda](#), sport’s role for social progress is acknowledged as “an important enabler of sustainable development.”



Video screen shot

A collage of screen captures from video messages by Japanese athletes joining a United Nations-backed campaign to promote Sustainable Development Goals through sports.

"I believe Olympics and Paralympics symbolize peace. I hope for a day where everyone can live peacefully" says [Taiki Morii](#), a silver medalist in Alpine skiing in 2018 PyeongChang Paralympic Winter Games.

The campaign has now gone beyond Japan, with [Sally Conway](#) of Scotland, who won the bronze medal in judo at the 2016 Rio Olympics, and [Kreshma Rasikh](#) from Afghanistan's national women soccer team, joining the growing ranks of athletes disseminating their video messages on social media platforms.

The International Day of Sport for Development and Peace was [created](#) by the UN General Assembly in 2013.

In her message for the Day, Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), said that sport relies upon the concepts of respect, understanding, integration and dialogue, and it contributes to the development and fulfilment of individuals regardless of age, gender, origins, beliefs and opinions.

"That is why [sport is a unique forum](#) for action and reflection to transform our societies," she said.

[UN envoy calls for restraint ahead of renewed protests at Gaza fence](#)

Ahead of tomorrow's planned protests at the Gaza-Israel border, the United Nations envoy on the Middle East peace process has called on Israeli forces to exercise maximum restraint and on the Palestinians to avoid friction at the Gaza fence, which was the scene of deadly violence amid similar demonstrations last Friday.

In a [statement](#) on Thursday, UN Special Coordinator Nikolay Mladenov said he is "[following with concern](#)" the continuing preparations and rhetoric for Friday's so-called 'Great Return March' in Gaza.

"Demonstrations and protests must be allowed to proceed in a peaceful manner. Civilians, particularly children, must not be intentionally put in danger or targeted in any way," he underscored.

Mr. Mladenov's warning follows deadly violence last Friday, 30 March, during which thousands of Palestinians marched to Gaza's border with Israel to protest the long-standing blockade of the enclave.

According to reports from the Palestinian Health Ministry 15 Palestinians had been killed and more than 1,000 injured.

Some of the casualties were reportedly the result of live ammunition used by Israeli security forces during the March. Other casualties followed armed clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces, including the shelling of a Hamas observation point.

There were also reports from Israeli security forces of militants attempting to get through the fence in an attempt to plant explosives. Palestinians also reportedly sent a nine-year-old girl through the fence, but Israeli forces were able to send her safely back.

In the aftermath of the clashes UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) called for an [independent and transparent investigation into the incident](#). The Security Council had also convened an [emergency meeting](#) on the clashes.

'Zero stocks' for nearly half of essential medicines

Quoting partners on the ground, a UN spokesperson said today that supplies of essential drugs and medical disposables are running low at health facilities in the enclave while an ongoing electricity crisis that has hampered the functioning of hospitals.

"There are currently zero stock levels for nearly half of the list of

essential drugs and for a quarter of the list of essential [medical] disposables in Gaza,” Stéphane Dujarric, the spokesperson of the UN Secretary-General, said at a regular news briefing in New York.

“An estimated \$1 million is urgently required to support the health system in Gaza for drugs, disposables, equipment, gases and lab materials in the coming 6 to 8 weeks,” he added, noting that humanitarian partners are working to prioritize urgently required medical items and coordinating the disbursement of supplies in preparation for the expected medical increased needs.