

## **Open letter**

**Date :** August 12, 1999

**To :** Politicians of Burundi

**Re :** Home situation and peace process

Mister President of the Republic, Honorable Speaker of Parliament, Mister First Vice-president of the Republic, Mister Second Vice-president of the Republic, Lady, Gentlemen Ministers, Honorable Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the approach of the last Arusha " rounds ", Burundians-in their majority- are divided between feelings of hope and of despair that are linked to the multiple contradictory signals of the peace process itself and the home situation. The latter reaches the swinging as a gust of wind- so as not say a draught-that would speed up to the chaos. The approach of Arusha's date, the living together of peace chances with the real dangers of explosion and the necessity to confront the chances and the hopes of peace call out to Burundian political class and civil society. The present silence of Burundian does not have to pass for either the government or the opposition as a safe-conduct to undertake without considering lessons drawn from the past and the challenges to come.

Burundians know each other sufficiently to manage to listen to their silence. Some are pacific. Others, passive on the surface, are filled with an inexpressible violence ; the one that their culture and the time has taught them to contain, to repress. In the past, from crisis to political replastering, from political replastering to crisis and from silence to silence that violence has always ended up to exploding, to " freeing oneself " blindly on thousands of innocent people. You also know how to listen to those silence and today, the silence still seems to smoulder an uncontrollable violence, ambushed violence, ready to " free itself ". Burundians are not in the least tired of war. But being too desperate of peace, they fall back on that artificial substitution, that is the physical security. For five years, the political game, viciated, only seems to convince Burundians, everyone called out to his " ethnic " consciousness, that to struggle for peace or negotiate peace exclusively means to negotiate his physical security and that to negotiate his physical security can not be seen other than by terms of " ethnic " groups as well as in terms of forces.

Today, for more than on year since the beginning of Arusha peace talks, and for some months as people say so, to their end, ITEKA league notes that many political divergences still exist on the background of social and economical difficulties deeply accentuated. That situation places Burundi in the evident state of fragility and instability, with risk that social frustrations, today exacerbated, serve more than before of catalyst to violence and agitation, as the ones known since October 1993 to 1996

## **AN INCREASED PAUPERIZATION**

For one year, the social home situation has considerably degraded. Despite the lifting of the embargo last January, Burundi has almost remained in autarkical situation. The Burundi State, deprived of Public Aid to Development (PAD) that has always sustained its economy at more than 50% and embarrassed by its enormous security expenses, it is from month to month always worn-out and more overburdened by the social repercussions unavoidable to the war continuation : public aid to development freeze, scarcity of currency resources, import freeze, disastrous monetary devaluation, cost inflation of goods and services, market speculations, wage freeze, the collapse of purchasing power, the increase of social scourges (corruption, organised crime, villainous criminality, and so forth.), paralysis of private sector, recruitment and hiring freeze, rising unemployment, disengagement of the state from social sectors, massive disinvestment and so forth).

In the capital and the province headquarters, sugar and fuel shortage has widely been talked about because it was conspicuous and struck especially the middle and upper classes. But the major problem, for thousands of Burundians is to subsist and provide for their family daily expenses. It does not show throughout the citizen quiet appearance. Nevertheless, that makes more than two years that it has been unbearable for the overwhelming majority of the workers of the second and tertiary sectors and too hard for those of the primary. In the same way, the state cannot grant increase in wages for fear to worsen his budgetary disablement and inflation. Workers of the primary sector farmers in particular are incapable of providing for the expenses and investments that are required for production increase and productivity of their lands which are more and more parceled out. The Burundi state does not give them any support facing that need as it is disengaged from investment sector.

That listing is not exhaustive. It easily leaves to be guessed how the repressed anger of a rising group of Burundians, entangled in inextricable social difficulties. The history of Burundi and of the world has proved that social frustrations have always served as compost to violence. Yet, the depicted scene also constitutes the social blackcloth of the peace process that entered in the decisive phase.

Whereas those complications increase, the state loses its means as time goes. The more it accuses disablement the more it loses its authority that it had been able to show since July 1996. So as to say, all happens a bit as if, in the balance indispensable to seek between measures of force and measures of the right in order to reach the point of stability, the state has resorted to measures of force without succeeding to promote the measures of the right proportionally.

**The Burundian State has entered in a decreasing yield and capacity phase that it must and can overcome in imprinting a new logic and a new dynamic.**

## **IDEOLOGICAL POSITION STUCK-UP**

For some weeks, whereas the social problems increase, the interior opposition front tempt to reopen and to revive relying on the social grumble, the preoccupations based on Arusha peace talks and the difficulties of the government to face social needs and calm down those fears. Appeals to mobilization come up, threatening pamphlets are distributed. Imprisonment measures have followed without delay. On the armed front, since last March, the attacks have been made more incisive. Provinces so far quiet-Ruyigi, Rutana- have been the place of bloody incursions and violent confrontations. In rural Bujumbura, the outbreak of the armed confrontation accompanied by their usual share of violence towards civil populations, has provoked some violence thrust on the peripheral zones of the capital, Bujumbura where the night rounds of civilians have suddenly resumed. Putting the tension to paroxysm, the bloody ambush have suddenly reappeared last July on the national roads linking the capital to the north, the center, the east and the south of the country. The armed factions of the exiled opposition whether sitting or not in the Arusha peace talks put a point of honor to reaffirm their presence in implementing the increasing build-up violence.

Concurrently, the peace process does not show remarkable advance. Of course, the "peace talks" have been started since June 1998 in Arusha. In July 1999, they were at their sixth " round ". But, it would be extreme to call them " dialogue ", so much as the intellectual persons that are confronted and clashed there seem stuck in the divisions and the bipolar and manichean sketches that have characterized for six years- indeed even for 30 years-the " debate " at home as well as abroad. The speech of the different political groups stagnates in the assertion of the misdeed committed by the " other " and in the danger that he represents for himself. It also appears that the highlighting of the violence and injustice undergone ; the claiming of the judiciary damages, and radical, political measures that this would bring about are equally a turning point. But no matter which side we consider, no one seems to seek to understand the other's demands. Now and then, one side may justify or tolerate injustice, violence, or atrocities committed by members of his group. Each group duplicates the faults that it accuses the other group of committing. This reasoning leads to the same reflexes as those we have been experiencing for 30 years : negative ethnic solidarity, self - justification, globalization, ethnic blind vengeance, etc. As times fly and no pioneer generation is determined to give up violence, those practices are being transmitted little by little from parents to children, and eventually turning into a culture. We are not learning how to settle our conflict. For so long, we have learnt nothing but living with an abscess, that is, keeping it and then incising it every 10,15 years.

This situation has prevailed for decades. The page must be turned and change in Burundi must come from political class first. Only an open-minded political class which can come up with new alternatives,, dialogue, tolerance, and audacity, capable of transcending the ethnic differences and freeing from sectarian reflexes and prejudice can lead to a profound political and social change in Burundi. Burundians will not be freed from their ethnic blinkers by politicians who can not get

themselves rid of those blinkers. Likewise, the political class will not be able to settle the Burundian conflict if they do not have the guts to recognize one another and address the problems and needs expressed by the other side, on equal grounds and with respect and dignity.

A year and more after the Arusha peace talks the politician should stop comforting himself by outdoing his rivals in showing to his ethnic clientele that he is unequaled in the defense of his ethnic group. It's high time politicians demonstrated their will and capacity to understand the partner's concern and suggested serious, courageous measures aimed at gaining the other side's confidence ; even in case this would entail risks. There is no lasting solution to the Burundian conflict that does not require a minimum confidence and respect, real concessions to grant each other, and risks to run

### **ACKNOWLEDGING THE INJUSTICE EXPERIENCES BY THE OTHER AS THE BASIS TO SINCERE RECONCILIATION**

The need of justice for all Burundians is one of the key matters to the conflict . The fears and acute need of security and justice expressed by both Tutsi and Hutu people are rooted in a real history characterized by series of violent acts experienced by both groups, and which are nourished by ignorance and poverty.

Sincere reconciliation requires damages for the injustice undergone, which themselves require prior acknowledgement of that injustice. From 1965 up to now, the Burundian history has been characterized by violent events that are engraved on the Burundians 'minds and transmitted from parents to children.

The impunity of the authors of those violent acts is itself a vector of violence. The tragedy with Burundians is that everyone admits it but solely in the scope of his interests. We just think of the " justice due to ourselves and " our aliens ", but we do not care about the one that is due to the others. We only think of the struggle against the impunity " granted "to the authors of violent acts against our aliens, just as if the other form of impunity is justifiable or tolerable. The point reached in committing violent acts in Burundi will never allow the trial of all their authors. It is important, however, to initiate actions that will lead to the sincere acknowledgement of injustice.

A collective movement of opinion aiming at the mutual and sincere acknowledgement of that injustice would contribute to securing all Burundians. It is up to Burundians to conceive and implement policies and mechanisms that are the most adequate to the promotion of that movement of opinion. On the contrary, ITEKA League does not believe in the peace and reconciliation that would be grounded on keeping the current ethnic divisions- bipolar and Manichean-of the society. That would be a matter of new respite.

## **EXCLUSION - FREE DISCUSSION WITH THE OPPOSITION**

The political deadlines to come seem to tense the politicians. The government reacts in the same way to armed rebels' and internal opposition's attacks : very strongly.

ITEKA league understands the government's concern about fighting firmly anything that would disturb security over to territory or harm the respect of State's institutions and authority.

However, ITEKA league finds that the government causes political unrest by silencing some opposition media organisations. The media and other channels of expression remain tightly closed to those who are against negotiations with the armed rebels. Under such conditions, it is not surprising that pamphlets are resorted to. However, there could be a debate with that same opposition on frank and objective grounds and in a way that hampers neither public security and order nor the peace process's stability.

That debate is so much necessary as those against the Arusha peace talks base their arguments on quite understandable fears and that key represents a considerable number of Burundians, particularly among Tutsi. The silent support they enjoy derives from nowhere else than real life experience they have had. They should be given as much consideration as those who go to Arusha to negotiate. The debate would contribute to the forwarding of that discussion on the conduct of the peace process and taking it beyond commonplaces, cliches and ideas. The muzzling of the internal opposition must stop.

## **PREVENTING, DETERRING, REPRESSING VIOLENCE AND INCITATION TO VIOLENCE**

The threat inspired by that opposition is no doubt understandable. It refers to the sad role played by opposition political parties during street troubles and violence of the so-called " dead city " days. If it is mandatory that the government get rid of that censoring and excessive repressing practices, it is also necessary that, opposition political parties and movements display their capacity to definitely give up their form of opposition that is factional and carefree of ethnic excesses that they generate. The government should allow all internal, opposition political parties to express themselves peacefully and legally, who, on their part, should endeavour to change their actions. They must avoid any act or talk susceptible of triggering arbitrary and indiscriminate violence, or raising ethnic tension. They would be judicially held responsible for this. The pursuing of war and the need to have a place in the Arusha peace talks should not lead the armed rebels to violate humanitarian rights either Attacks on civil populations - especially deadly ambushes on roads - can no longer leave anyone indifferent, nor could they be accepted as the " natural order of things ".The end of the Arusha peace talks lets think of the danger of an outbreak of violence and agitation on several fronts. Burundians should overcome the fears and tension that proceed any peace accord. They should on the contrary reach a real, just, and lasting agreement that is accepted by all parties It is

hard to understand how Burundians as well as the international community remain passive whereas they are aware of the danger coveted by the short term political deadlines that they are faced with.

**ITEKA League recommends that :**

the government endeavour to take all concrete and adequate public measures that are required by the current drift and dysfunction within State services and structures ;

the government take actions aiming at opening up the political spectrum to the opposition, both interior and exterior ;

opposition political parties too undertake public actions that would display their capacity to observe public order and law as well as their will to give up practices leading to arbitrary and indiscriminate violence ;

the Burundi civil society set itself apart from the political class and therefore display their intention to lead Burundi and its youth to new options of conflicts reduction and development in Burundi ;

the international community concretely support initiatives by the Burundi civil society and international NGO's which are aimed at preventing and repressing crimes and violence that political protagonists may attempt to halt the ongoing dialogue and impose forceful solutions to the Burundian conflict.

with the help of international partners. ITEKA League suggests to make a list of political acts and armed violence to submit to national and international institutions for judicial action. ; international partners (bilateral and multilateral) reconsider, in the light of the internal situation in Burundi, their suspension of development cooperation, in order to prevent and not fuel the conflicts and frustrations that the country's economic situation generates.

Done in Bujumbura, on August 12,1999

Christophe SEBUDANDI

President, ITEKA League

E-mail: iteka@cbinf.com