

MISSION REPORT
FACT FINDING MISSION TO BURUNDI
30th January to 1st February, 2017

“I do not understand why a country with over 80% Christians is not peaceful? Only hatred, exclusion, bitterness, suspicion and revenge are what we see. In the Bible when John the Baptist preached he told the people the truth. So the church should do the same. Christianity should not only be seen in the churches on Sunday but also on everything we do.” A Burundian political leader

Burundi has been in turmoil over a year now with the disputed elections and attempted coup that turned the country into a crisis. The UN reports that, the security and political situation in Burundi, which deteriorated sharply after April 2015 still remains dire. While the number of casualties has declined and the security situation has improved, serious human rights abuses continue to be committed daily with impunity. The overall level of oppression and state control over Burundian society has increased, manifested by arbitrary deprivations of life, enforced disappearances, cases of torture and arbitrary detention on a massive scale.¹

At the regional level, Burundi is a country of concern and focus for many regional faith based organizations and church institutions. These organizations have met twice to mainly pray for Burundi and analyze the situation with an aim of synergizing our efforts together in seeing a peaceful Burundi. The situation in Burundi has been evolving hence the urge for us as a regional faith network to conduct a visit to Burundi to better understand situation on the ground.

The delegation comprised of 6 persons from regional church organization's² visited Burundi from the 30th to 1st February. Through this visit the delegation was able to have meetings with; **Churches leaders:** National Council of Churches in Burundi (CNEB); Confederation of Christian and Revival Churches (CECRBU);The Islamic Commission of Burundi (COMIBU);Conference of Burundi Catholic Episcopal Conference **Christian Organization's;** Women of Faith; Christian Aid **Political Parties-**CNDD-FDD (Ruling party); FRODEBU (Opposition); AMIZERO Y' ABARUNDI (Opposition) and The Netherlands Embassy.

Emerging issues from the various discussions;

1. **Security:** The country is not in any visible war hence deemed peaceful. However, the absence of war does not always mean or guarantee peace, there are still reported sporadic criminal acts happening in part of the country, attempted killings of prominent politicians, ministers, and innocent citizens, sporadic and arbitrary arrests of citizens. This has created a paralyzing fear within the population due to uncertainty of who is behind the targeted killings. This is an indicator that peace in Burundi has been compromised as citizens still feel disgruntled and

¹ http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2017-02/burundi_12.php

² Tearfund, AACC, FACLAHA CAPA

unhappy and has bred suspicion and mistrust. This has increasingly weakened concerted effort among civil society to actively engage in offering options out of the current political impasse. This brings out the need for initiatives on reconciliations.

2. **Unity of the Church:** It was noted that after the break out of conflict and the instability experienced in the country thereafter elections in 2015, the church has largely been silence either because of fear or lack of space to express themselves and adequately engage. Disunity within the church is driven by some churches feeling more superior than others and also because of the bureaucracy of some churches which then slows down decision making and joint action/common voice. Particularly, there are different efforts by the church towards working together for sustainable peace e.g. the CNEB has developed the Peace and Reconciliation Framework; the inter-religious meetings among others. However, it was noted that all these processes have not yielded any results as there are superiority and inferiority complexity and mistrust among the church leaders. Some leaders felt the added value of Christian organizations teaming up/uniting in responding to the concerns of insecurity in Burundi.
3. **Humanitarian:** Many Burundians have fled the country after the break out of conflict in 2015 and few people have returned. Many other Burundians are still leaving due to the uncertainty influenced by fear of the state of security and instability in the country. As a result of these conditions and fear, many farmers did not plant in season coupled with the effect of dramatic environmental changes has now resulted to a looming famine and the poverty situation in the country. The instability at the borders points have limited how much the traders could access the markets to bring in goods from other countries. E.g. the border with Rwanda is mentioned to be a hot point.
4. **Internal Burundian Dialogues:** There are two national dialogue efforts by the Government which are the internal National Burundi Dialogue and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Formed in 2014 the TRC was as a result of the Arusha process and is comprised of 11 members.³ With a mandate of 4 years, the TRC team is currently in its 3rd year. The commission has had a daunting task to put to an end the cyclic conflicts that happen almost every 10 years. Since inception the commission has had challenges from funding to lack of trust from the public and the question of '*Justice*' to be able to effectively work. Undeniably, they have a huge task. The Internal National dialogue on the other hand, though reported to have been held dialogue with communities, it has primarily been seen as a vehicle to advance Government agenda hence many Burundians are afraid to speak out because they may be accused of sabotaging the Government and may put their lives in danger. Dialogue is an important tool towards peace, however, there is need to reflect further on how the dialogue will be organized. This is because if the same is not adequately organized, then the outcome of will not be representative of the Burundian.

³ 6 of whom are from the Christian faith – 3 Catholics, 1 Bishop from the Anglican Church, 1 from the Methodist Church, and 1 Muslim Cleric.

5. **A Government in Denial:** The Government sees Burundi as a very peaceful country and blame the media and international community specifically the Belgium for misrepresenting the situation in the country citing interior motives. Whereas the economic situation is still difficult in the country, the Government believes the refugees issues and famine situation is being exaggerated so as to paint the government badly. Despite, the citizen living in paralyzing fear, refugees, economic hardship and now famine ailing the country, the Government strongly maintains the Language of self-sufficiency. This is indeed a great concern as it seems to block even those who wish to provide the much needed support/help to the people of Burundi. Additionally, the Government has taken hard position against negotiating with anyone who is opposing the government as they are seen as the enemy of the state. This has limited its own effort of engaging the citizens through the national dialogue initiative which are aimed at re-building the confidence between Burundians.
6. **The Regional Mediation Process; Lead by H.E Benjamin** Mkapa, the EAC regional mediation has not yielded the much progress and meeting its objectives. According to the UN report, On 9 December 2016, at the end of a three-day visit to Burundi, Mkapa reportedly said that the legitimacy of Nkurunziza's presidency should not be questioned and that his facilitation was focused on creating favourable conditions for free, fair and credible elections in 2020. Since then, the opposition has demanded that Mkapa step down as facilitator. It also voiced its wish to see the UN and AU become more involved in the process. With and the hard line position by government of not negotiating with rebels compounds the progress of the negotiations. The question of how the participants to the negotiations are done was crucial as some categories of people are not well involved. For instance, there was a concern that the people appointed to represent the church to take part in this process are often not representative of the view of the churches. The appointment of these church leaders is not consultative and the church leaders are not involved in the process.
7. **The plight of women and youth:** Many women and youth have lost as sense of hope due to the cyclic violence that recurs in the country. The youth are most vulnerable to being manipulated to cause violence during and after elections. This is largely because they are not well trained and also because of unemployment and lack of a stable source of livelihood. Even those who have graduated are not employed as most companies and business are closed or on a go slow due to fear hence creating idleness. The lack of information on the current situation and hope for future provides ground for rumors and these are taken to be the truth by the youth further breeding fear and uncertainty. The women on the other hand carry the burden of families as most men and their children have either run or disappear, this leaves them exposed to abuse. The women and youth are not adequately participating in high level engagements and dialogues.
8. **Voices of Opposition Leaders: (AMIZERO Y'ABARUNDI & FRODEBU):** Both opposition leaders asserted that there is still no peace in the country. Whereas the country is not at war and there are no more shootings, the citizens are still not fully enjoying their rights. For instance, *people are still not able to express themselves freely because of fear, some people are still excluded from power nor provide positive criticism to the government of the day, there*

is still poor governance in the country. The main issues of concern are security; feel insecure because many times people are found died and others are arrested arbitrarily and no answers to the same are given to the community; refugees both political exiles and citizens who have left the country for various reasons have to be reassured of their safety for them to come and the electoral process and preparations need to allow all leaders and those in exile to come back into the country. The attitude of the Government should be that of having a strong opposition helps governments deliver on promises meaning a better life for the Burundians.

'They argued that for peace to be achieved in the country there is need to couple internal and external inclusive dialogue. This dialogue will set the agenda for the current government and those in the opposition to engage. The government must accept positive criticism as that is how democracies thrive. There must equitable distribution of resources and power. The leaders must rise above their personal interests.'

9. **Voices of the CSOs and international community:** They affirmed their continued work in Burundi, though the environment has changed e.g. accessing communities requires international organizations as a *'note verbale'* has been sent to requiring them to obtain permission 10 days prior to travelling up country which was not the case before. At some point they had to downscale their programmes and withdraw working directly with the Government in the case of the Embassy largely due to concerns of human rights abuses in the country. However, dialogue on going with the Government as there is a need to work with Government in the long term towards and a peaceful and prosperous Burundi. The situation each day is becoming dire; famine looming as maize and rice is quickly drying; the political situation in the country is breeding uncertainty; and the economic crisis being experience in the country with the increase of prices of commodities. With an approximately 367,000 people have left the country and are now living in Tanzania or Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The economic situation is further complicated by the fact that the Government has reduced its budget for basic amenities such a agriculture, health, education among others.

Summary of challenges that are key to moving the peace building process forward.

1. **The paralyzing fear** within the population due to uncertainty of who is behind the targeted killings. This has bred suspicion and mistrust. This has increasingly weakened concerted effort among civil society to actively engage in offering options out of the current political impasse.
2. **The diminishing power among faith bodies/ platforms** to convene their members and engage them in creative conversations regarding the possibilities and challenges of contributing to sustainable peace in the country.
3. There are various initiatives that could become vehicles for mobilising the population to tackle the existing obstacles to security and restoring confidence among those who sought refuge in various countries. Initiatives like, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the internal dialogue Initiative by Government don't seem to enjoy the **legitimacy and integrity to achieve the above objectives.**

4. The **existing political environment is not enabling** of political players outside government to contribute to the search for a political solution.
5. The initiative by the Regional Leaders headed by Hon Mkapa is seen as a possible vehicle for creating a safe place for the participation of all stakeholders in meaningful dialogue. There are however legitimate **concerns about the current pace and inclusiveness** of the initiative which need to be addressed.
6. The **next elections are just three years away but there** seems to be no concerted effort among civil society organizations to engage with the implications that these elections present to the already delicate political environment. What is obvious is the anxiety within the population about what will happen to the country if existing issues are not resolved before then.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Unity of the Church – It is critical to restore confidence and to address the current mistrust among the religious leaders and refocus them from church complexities and personal agenda's to issues of concern towards the nation. For instance, Famine, climate change, Youth unemployment, peace and security. Through a facilitated process, the faith leaders in Burundi could be envisioned on their role in the current situation in Burundi and steered on identification of key common concerns/issues that are affecting all Burundians regardless of their denominations, faiths, and/or doctrine differences. It's against this common issues/concern that the church leaders should dialogue on towards a common goal affecting all Burundians. Lessons could be drawn on how church leaders have overcome disunity and managed to consolidate their voice towards issues of common concern regardless of their doctrinal and faith differences.⁴ The success of this dialogue is solely dependent on first the inter-faith church of Burundi and the top leadership church structures and the citizen of Burundi to own such a process. The detriment of such a process is if it is externally driven then its success will not be sustainable. Hence the role of other faith based organizations and the wider civil society will be to accompany.

The strategic role of women and youth – The women and youth agenda has largely been driven by donors/partners. Women and youth then need to take up a more proactive role and map out the 'Burundi they want'. There is a need for the Women of Faith to map out women and youth who are strategically placed in Burundi who can begin to ignite change within the country. The focus should therefore not running projects and programmes, rather building movements of women and youth who will inspire change. The movement should be representative of all Burundians regardless of the religion, tribe, among other divisions. The regional organizations could accompany the women of faith in thinking through a sustainable framework of building strong and bold women and youth movements in the country.

Accompaniment to the Dialogue processes (Internal and External) – The Mkapa process should broaden the Agenda from power sharing among political parties to evolving a process of a citizen-

⁴ For example, a prominent Church leader in Kenya could be asked to share their experience on how the Church leaders were able to overcome their differences after the 2007/2008 post elections violence as well as how the faith community was able to take leadership during the recent stalemate on the IEBC commissioners between the opposition and the political leaders

centred inclusive dialogue on a wide range of issues that are responsible for the current political environment. The Tear fund- led platform should seek to support the Mkapa process, and act as a resource to the Religious Institutions in Burundi to play an active role. The neighboring Countries and the International community should be encouraged not to abandon Burundi, but to use their influence for the wellbeing of all Burundians. This was mentioned as one of the most urgent needs in the country. The process by the Truth and Reconciliation process seemed more comprehensive than the internal dialogue process. This is because the internal dialogue's mandate ends at listening and presenting the report to the different institution of Government; while the Truth and Reconciliation aims are healing wounds and reconciling communities. To this end, efforts can be made to accompany this process either through technical skills or provision of resources. Lessons on how Truth and Reconciliation processes have been done in other parts of the world can be documented and adopted/contextualized to fit the Burundian context.

Education on Peace and Reconciliation - The need to empower the church leaders (*provide technical skills and resources*) on how they can not only teach and preach about forgiveness and reconciliation; but also on how they can provide spaces and form structures within the places of worship for community conversations/dialogues where truth is spoken and forgiven is provided. The available platforms (weekly services/masses; Bible Studies; Women Groups; Youth Groups; Men Associations among others) as well as the well-structured network of the Church provide platforms for sustained community conversations and dialogues on peace and reconciliation. Through these platforms, communities can begin to explore and discuss pertinent issues like forgiveness, acceptance, and peaceful coexistence at the community and national level.

Humanitarian Support- The country is struggling without the international community, this is truly reflected in the hard situation that the country is operating in. The church needs to be the voice of reason to create a platform for the international community to create trust with Burundi. The church needs to address the joblessness of the youth and provide technical training to the youths who are vulnerable and exposed to be used as agents of violent in Burundi. The church need to think proactively in long term. However, in short term the church needs to provide humanitarian response to the vast communities affected and the refugees who are struggling in the camps in neighboring countries

Conclusion.

Ultimately, the church in its totality has a big role to play in the current impasse in Burundi. Nonetheless, this requires boldness, forgiveness and building trusts among the church leadership in Burundi which will then cascade to the church congregations to the villages. The church leadership in Burundi are central in owning the different processes in place influence them positively to create change. However, this can only be done, when the leadership are awakened of their God given mandate beyond any other interests. The church needs to move beyond their denominations superiority and inferiority and realignments to be able to focus on the issues that are affecting them and their congregations/communities across board. This should be the starting point for church leaders in Burundi.

The upcoming next elections in 3 years should inform and guide the on-going efforts towards establishing a sound foundation for sustainable peace in Burundi. As a way forward, there must be an assessment of what the different processes (Internal dialogue, external dialogue, and the truth and reconciliation commission) with regard to what they were expected to do. There must be a forum that integrates all these fora. Further, there must be a mechanism of encouraging all stakeholders to speak out. The Burundians must also show commitment to the Mkapa process for it to succeed. As not every Burundian can be reached in the dialogue process, there must be efforts to identify representative groups of the community. These include Government representatives; the opposition (inside and outside the country), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), women, youth, business community, and the clergy/faith community.

Another methodology to solve the crisis in the country is compromise. Nobody should feel like they have lost, it is a win-win situation. The government must be open to negotiate and talk with everybody even those that have been accused of carrying out genocides and killings. If this is not well managed, the crisis may extend to become a regional crisis. Further, the sporadic assassinations and the military rule through instilling fear among the people must stop. Political parties, CSOs, and media must be allowed to operate and express themselves.