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Mr President,

First of all, we would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Burundi, the Chairperson of the Burundi Configuration of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission and the representative of the African Union for their briefings this morning.

These briefings offer us a better view of the current situation in Burundi and its ramifications at regional level.

Mr President,

Today, we want to focus our speech on three main messages:

Firstly, while we welcome President Nkurunziza's repeated intention not to stand as a candidate in the 2020 presidential elections, **we remain concerned about the internal situation in Burundi.**

- From a political point of view, the region and the international community agree on the objective of credible, fair, inclusive and free presidential and legislative elections in 2020. To that end, we would like to stress once again the need for a consensual and inclusive roadmap and the importance of respecting the Arusha Agreement for any solution to the Burundian crisis. In this regard, we welcome the substantial work undertaken by the former East African Community (EAC) facilitator, Mr Mkapa. And we share his observation that it is regrettable that the Burundian government refrained from participating in the last round of the dialogue. However, many differences remained at the end of the process.

- Respect for the freedoms of opposition parties will be a fundamental part of our assessment of the electoral process. On this point, we are pleased to see that the new party of the main opponent, Agathon Rwasa, has received approval. This is an undeniably positive development.
- The Burundian human rights situation unfortunately continues to be problematic. We are particularly concerned by the continuing high number of arbitrary arrests and detentions, threats and restrictions on freedom of association, expression and movement, as reported by the Commission of Inquiry, as well as in the latest written report by the Secretary General. In this difficult context, we particularly regret the decision to close the OHCHR office, the persistent lack of cooperation with the Commission of Inquiry (COI) and the new restrictions on AU human rights monitors. We call on the government to make progress on human rights and to intensify dialogue with a view to re-establishing close cooperation with UN bodies and the African Union in this area.
- From a socio-economic point of view, and particularly with regard to the National Development Plan (2018-2027), which should provide part of the answers, we consider it essential to deepen and intensify the dialogue with the various cooperation partners in this plan; it is essential that we deepen and intensify the dialogue with them. As a partner in cooperation and humanitarian aid, Belgium remains ready for this dialogue. We would also like to stress that Burundi's socio-economic development must always be based on consensus data and the involvement of all its other main actors - in particular women and youth, but also civil society. That is why we would like to reiterate our concerns about the suspension of foreign NGOs by the Burundian government and the departure of some NGOs, as well as our support for strengthening the open dialogue on Burundi's socio-economic developments.

Secondly, while the Burundian context continues to be of concern, its regional ramifications are no less so.

- The latest report by the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo seems to indicate that the activities of some Burundian rebel groups in South Kivu are escalating. The Group of Experts' report also points to Burundi with regard to the recruitment of combatants and the transit of weapons, ammunition and combatants.
- I am also referring to reports of cross-border incidents with Rwanda. Although the origin of these incidents is not always clear, they have the potential to destabilise the region.

- In addition to these cross-border incidents, the persistent problem of Burundian refugees and their significant presence in the region in general also requires a sustainable regional solution.

Thirdly, regional problems require regional solutions.

This is why we support strong and increased *leadership* by the East African Community (EAC) and strong involvement by the African Union (AU) and the other guarantors of the Arusha Agreement on this issue. Strong *leadership* by the region is certainly a necessary condition for resolving the current crisis, but other factors are also essential.

The commitment of the Burundian authorities remains essential.

We therefore call on them to be truly open and to continue the dialogue without conditions.

Finally, we remain convinced that the Security Council can and must contribute to this debate until the crisis is resolved. The Burundian situation continues to have ramifications throughout the region. In this context, we welcome the Secretary-General's announcement that a series of options will be submitted to the Council on the role of the United Nations in Burundi. The Council must remain seized of this matter.

Thank you for your attention.