



World Chronicle

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The Peace Process in Burundi

UN peacekeeping has often met its toughest challenges in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

Can the people of Burundi – with help from the United Nations – avoid the tragic fate of Rwanda in the 1990's, and the civil strife that still plagues the Democratic Republic of Congo? Can peace be durable in one of the poorest and most densely populated countries in the world? Will the party that claimed responsibility for the atrocities at the Gatumba refugee camp in 2004 be brought into the peace process?

Those are some of the questions discussed in this edition of World Chronicle, together with the UN's Special Representative to Burundi, Carolyn McAskie.

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ANNOUNCER: From the United Nations in New York, an unedited interview programme on global issues. This is **World Chronicle**. And here is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

JENKINS: Hello, I'm Tony Jenkins. Armed with the best intentions, but seemingly indifferent to the plight of its people, the international community has paid dearly for its inability to put a lid on violence in the Great Lakes region of Africa. Think of the Rwandan genocide...and of a decade of war and civil strife in the Democratic Republic of Congo... And there's another country in the region that has also experienced the tragedies of war and inter-ethnic violence: Burundi. But can the people of Burundi – with help from the United Nations – finally make progress on the road to peace? That's what we'll be talking about today with the UN's Special Representative to Burundi, Carolyn McAskie. Carolyn McAskie welcome to the Programme.

MCASKIE: Thank you.

JENKINS: Burundi is not just ethnically divided; it's also one of the poorest and most densely populated countries in the world and you still have fighting going on in parts of the country. Is this another one of those UN missions that is almost condemned to failure from the start?

MCASKIE: Well, that's a good opening line – but in fact my sense is that we, and when I say we, I don't just mean the United Nations, I mean the Burundians themselves, are well on the way to what just might be the first successful peace process in the Great Lakes Region. You have to recognize that they've been at it a long time. The current crisis started in nineteen ninety three but what a lot of people don't realize is, the peace process started in December of ninety five with the former president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, who was a well known - of course - international figure. And as a result, we have a peace accord, we've had a transitional government that came out of the peace accord and now we're going into a whole process of putting into place a proper elective government. And it's amazing, that there's a lot of delays, a lot of problems we can go into some of the details. But on the whole, my sense is that things are moving forward positively.

JENKINS: Alright, we're going to go into some of those details and to help me out on that, we've got Stephen Handelman of The Toronto Star and Susannah Price of the BBC. Susie....

PRICE: Well as you said, there is a huge task here and it may well be one of the most successful missions. But do you think you have the right number of people there? The right number of peacekeepers? You've talked before about the difficulty of keeping the peace in this very densely populated area. What do you think of the main threats now? You

have one armed group that hasn't signed up to the whole peace deal. Where do you think this all could unravel and how do stop it?

MCASKIE: Right. Well that nice handy diplomatic phrase 'cautiously optimistic' has been terribly overused. But there is a lot of optimism here, and to sort of go back to the first part of your question in terms of whether we have the tools to do the job? The fact is, I have almost a third as many troops as there has been put in place in MONUC, and when you look at the size of Burundi on a map of Africa in relation to the DRC, five and a half thousand troops – is actually quite generous.

JENKINS: I think I should explain just a bit of this to some of our viewers...

MCASKIE: Right...

JENKINS: ...Is the Congo...

MCASKIE: That's correct...

JENKINS: Which is how many times larger than Burundi?

MCASKIE: At least ten or twenty times larger in land mass, and ten times larger in population. So we have five and a half thousand troops – the sister mission next door has sixteen and half thousand. So we're actually rather well endowed and if you look at the history of peacekeeping, I think if we had gone out there five years ago we would have been lucky to get two thousand troops in a Chapter Six mandate. We have five and a half thousand and a Chapter Seven mandate.

JENKINS: That's another one you're going to have to explain...

MCASKIE: Yes absolutely [all laugh]. Well it means that we can use force. Now that does not mean we can go in guns blazing, this is not the Wild West. But it means that we can respond with force if we're attacked, or if we need to...to protect civilians. So we can intervene if we have to...

PRICE : Has that been important in terms of...

MCASKIE: The threat of attack? We haven't had to and my sense is that our very presence has calmed things. We have troops on the ground. You mentioned the fighting still going on, and part of the transitional process has been the negotiations with all the rebel groups. And there was a series of cease-fire agreements in two thousand and three, but we still have this one group – FNL – who were the original rebels, the first shall be last, etc. They're not giving up. They still see themselves as the protectors of the Hutu people despite the fact that they've been run by a Hutu president and they are well on the way to electing the country's, the country is well on its way to electing a Hutu based government.

HANDELMAN: But as Tony said in his opening, Burundi is on of the poorest nations in the world. How is it possible to have a peace process work at all, and hope that it will last, if you don't have the main elements in place? You don't start working in poverty reduction; you don't get the refugee situation in place, what chances are there for success?

MCASKIE: I have to say thank you Steve because you answered my favorite question, or you've given me the opportunity to give my favorite answer. What I said to the Security Council and to people here in the UN Secretariat and to the donors, particularly the donors, is that the Security Council within the limits of its particular frame of reference have given me a strong mandate and very good resources. But if I don't get the development and the humanitarian...if I don't help Burundians get access to the development and humanitarian assistance, I have what is in a sense, a three wheel truck that could crash. The whole debate in Africa as you know... about the link between conflict and development, my view is that Burundi is a classic textbook case. Because of the pressures of population, because of the abject poverty, because the government is so lacking in resources, that if they don't get that, it's going to be extremely difficult.

HANDELMAN: What...

MCASKIE: Yeah...

JENKINS: Sorry, let me just throw some numbers out Steve because I've actually done some research on this. The UN estimates that Burundi needs a hundred and thirty four million dollars in development assistance...

MCASKIE: ...Humanitarian...

JENKINS: Humanitarian...

MCASKIE: That's the humanitarian appeal for 2005.

JENKINS: ...Of which you've only received five percent.

MCASKIE: That's right – yes.

JENKINS: Why so little? Have you got any prospective donors lined up? What's the situation there?

MCASKIE: Well I heard a phrase on Saturday from a World Bank colleague of AIDS orphans. In a way, Burundi is a bit of an aide orphan. There are not a lot of people interested in Burundi. The big players are the European Union, the World Bank, Belgium of course is the former colonial power, with which by the way, the Burundians have a very good relationship and a couple of other donors. France, UK, US, I'm sure of the Dutch. But it doesn't have a very broad donor base. In two thousand and four we got about forty five percent of the hundred or so million we were looking for and a lot of this money tends to end later in the year.

It follows the financial cycles of the donors; you get it in March or April, or June or whatever. You don't usually get much in the beginning of the year.

HANDELMAN: Is this apathy? Is it aid fatigue? What does it take to get people interested in a place like Burundi?

MCASKIE: Well I'm still trying to find out. One of my favorite expressions and I said it this morning to a very senior person in this building, is that my favorite quote is the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. And just constantly putting out appeals and asking for donor assistance and not getting anywhere isn't working. We've got to find a new formula for Burundi and we may have to sit down with the key players who really are interested - say you're it - here's the problem - how do we divvy it up the power? How do we make it work? Because if we don't, there's a whole process that is going to be gone through over the next period, whereby all of the agreements laid out in the peace accord and now enshrined in the constitution, will go into effect. And that's the power sharing and that is fifty-fifty, Tutsi - Hutu, in the army; sixty-forty Hutu- Tutsi in the Parliament; one third - two third in the local government. That means some people are going to lose jobs.

HANDELMAN: Presumably other countries in Central Africa are looking at this too as a test case, and if they don't get the kind of aid that you're asking for, then you could have a ricochet affect.

MCASKIE: Well Congress already is giving now an awful lot more. It's interesting; I think Burundi suffers from a double syndrome. A, there's the African after everybody else syndrome, and then within Africa, we are overshadowed by two big crisis - Sudan to the north and the DRC to the west. And Burundi doesn't attract the same attention. Now we did have...

JENKINS: Perhaps you need a tsunami. I'm sorry to sound so, so what's the word? Callous, irreverent. Perhaps you can explain...why is it that a natural disaster will open people's purses, their hearts, open whatever and the money will flood in. Is it that they think that these people deserve the situation they are in because this is a man- made problem? That they're busy hacking each other up and killing each other... I mean associating Burundi with Rwanda....

MCASKIE: I'm going to turn that one right back to you folks because, in my previous job I was in OCHA. OCHA is the Office for the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs here in the Secretariat. We did a study and tracked the contributions to natural disasters, tsunamis, earthquakes whatever and complex emergencies as we call them; these wars that bring all sorts of things in their wake. And if you'll pardon me using the competition - the CNN factor,

maybe the BBC or Toronto Star factor I should say - is alive and well and living in humanitarian response.

JENKINS: It's your fault [all laugh]

PRICE: Do you think part of the problem is that Burundi is in transition? So you're not in a terrible disaster, you're not images and you're not a stable...Burundi isn't a stable democracy where a lot of the funds flow to. So people are saying we really don't want to put money in there now, let's wait and see...

MCASKIE: No...

PRICE: ...What would you say should be the priorities now? Should it be shoring up that piece?

MCASKIE: Well it's partly that. But I'd still like to go back to my previous point. The tsunami got tremendous response because it was on the TV screens not just every day or every night on the news, but twenty four seven for weeks. It was an amazing disaster and people saw picture after picture of these incredible waves washing over. As many people have died in the conflict in Burundi has died in the tsunami. But it's over ten years and frankly, the press are gone. I get phone calls from the BBC, I got an article in the Toronto Star. I get on the news on Radio France Internationale too. But it's not...we forget, because we are in the business all the time, we forget that in fact the vast majority of people don't know what's going on.

HANDELMAN: I don't want to minimize the effect of the press, I mean you're clearly right, the press is...[inaudible], don't special reps have maybe a new role or function....

MCASKIE: Absolutely...

HANDELMAN: Shouldn't you be going around and selling your....

MCASKIE: And you think I'm not?

HANDELMAN: I don't know, are you?

MCASKIE: [laughs] Well I was just up in Canada, Steve, and Burundi is off the map as far as Canada is concerned.

JENKINS: Were you able to put it back on the map?

MCASKIE: No, no because they just had a policy review and they are cutting down the number of countries they deal with, and Congo is one of them and Burundi is not and they said forget it. There's a special peacebuilding fund through Foreign Affairs we can access for particular things, but in terms of a concentrated effort by Canada – no. Burundi is not on the map.

HANDELMAN: Maybe special reps need their own pr people in? Do you have to stand on your head and say...

MCASKIE: I have public information unit that is on the phone to the press a lot - but let's face it, you know what's the press representation in Africa right now? There are people in Nairobi and you know, there's not a lot of overseas press. But don't get me wrong, I'm not blaming the press, all I'm saying is we would love to have more attention.

PRICE: Yeah, but what about governments? How important do you think it is to have a lead government? Does a country like Burundi really need a government that's going to pick it up and run with...like a...

HANDELMAN: ...Sponsor...

MCASKIE: ...Yes, yes...

PRICE: ...Like the British in Sierra Leone...

MCASKIE: ...Yes, yes, absolutely, absolutely...

PRICE: ...and do you just pull through otherwise?

MCASKIE: And it was really very touching soon after I arrived, the current president who is the transit president of the transitional government, Domitien Ndayizeye confessed to me that he phoned up Kofi Annan and said, "I don't have a sponsor, will you be my sponsor?" And Kofi Annan said "yes, of course, we'll sponsor you."

JENKINS: But Kofi Annan doesn't have any money...

MCASKIE: Of course not, he said will help – but I mean – he's been comforting, come on! Give him a break [all laugh]. But Sierra Leone as you say, had the UK and Cote d'Ivoire had France, the US has its own countries that it sponsors. You know, there's Belgium but Belgium is not on the Security Council and Belgium does quite a lot actually. But Burundi would benefit a great deal from a powerful lead sponsor if it had it.

JENKINS: Sorry Steve, I just want to turn things a little bit in a slightly different direction because...

HANDELMAN: ...I was going to...

JENKINS: ...You are doing a good job of selling, you doing a good job at telling us why this can work and that you are already on the right track.

MCASKIE: Yes.

JENKINS: What happens if you don't get the money you need? In other words, is there a possibility, is there a potential for this to degenerate again? Is there a potential for the civil war to break out again? Is there a potential for the FNL resistance that's still left in...I think it's called Burundi Rurale...

MCASKIE: Bujumbura Rurale

JENKINS: ... Bujumbura Rurale to spread further metastasize... can this still get out of control again?

MCASKIE: There are a lot of things that we have to keep an eye on. My sense is that the FNL are ready to come to the table. We are talking to them, the countries of the region who are the guardians of the peace process are talking to them, other countries, the Dutch for example, are talking to them and slowly but surely, I think we're reeling them in. Now time will tell and they have already promised not to disrupt the electoral process, they kept their promise during the constitutional referendum and I think that we will be able to bring the FNL to the table. But it is a danger. The real danger however, is more in the upcoming political process.

JENKINS: We'll get to that in just a moment. Let me just say this is World Chronicle and our guest is Carolyn McAskie who heads the UN peacekeeping mission in Burundi. Steve, I cut you off earlier, I don't know if you want to...

HANDELMAN: That's perfectly ok. I was just going to say this has been...this week at the UN, as you are probably aware, has been a big week to talk about reform.

MCASKIE: Yes, absolutely.

HANDELMAN: The Secretary-General has come up with a plan for reforming UN machinery, among which, are plans such as peacebuilding commission, new conflict settlement mechanisms, would they help Burundi? Would they change your job at all if they were accepted, if they went through the UN machinery and if so, how?

MCASKIE: Well, it's interesting because one of the reasons I am in town this week and a lot of other heads of missions is because we've had the annual meeting of Heads of Mission with peacekeeping missions. And it was amazing how many of us had the same concern that we've got the troops, we've got the political interest, we've got resources to do the elections and the disarmaments and all of this and we're missing this development chunk. And the peacebuilding commission has the potential to help them to provide that. The big issue is...if I said assessment budgets and voluntary budgets would you know what I'm talking about? The big issue is that once the peacekeeping mission is approved, the budget is assessed. That means that if your government "X" the long arm of the Security Council reaches into your pocket and you have to pay your share – game over, no questions asked. If you have a development programme it's voluntary and country "X" will put in a, or b, or c, or whatever they feel like. So you end up with your peacekeeping mission fully funded and your development programme – you mentioned the statistics for the humanitarian field – voluntary funding – if it's voluntary – will give when they can, if they can, what they can. And the

peacebuilding commission is... the proposal is to have a group of countries which includes the donors and therefore, once a peacekeeping mission is approved, if I understand the proposal correctly - and I sat up last night reading the report – is that the peacebuilding commission will then look at country “X” in crisis and say what does it need to get over the hurdle? And how can we as a community pull our resources and our analysis to decide what’s the problem, how should it be addressed and how can it be funded? Now it still will not be the surety of an assessed budget, they won’t decide Burundi needs a hundred and thirty four million dollars this year – oops! – There’s my three point three percent out the door – won’t happen. But hopefully because they will make these decisions together, there will be a sense of shared responsibility that we have to make it happen. Otherwise, we’re jeopardizing the three hundred million dollars we just passed for Burundi’s peacekeeping, because it’s coming out of the same governments.

PRICE: And talking about peacekeeping and other subjects that I’m sure you’ve been talking about and it came out in this report, is of course these allegations of sexual abuse by peacekeepers and this is something that has come up in Burundi. What can you do to stop this? What can you do as well to punish those responsible to have an example to stop this kind of thing from going on?

MCASKIE Well the UN now has a very strict policy I’m glad to say and....but you also have to say to yourself, you tell me one army in the world that has never used prostitutes and I will ask you to send me that countries army to Burundi.

PRICE: But this does seems so widespread within the....

MCASKIE: Well, there has been...well, I’m not going to justify it because frankly it’s just horrifying and so please... we’re absolutely on the same wavelength on this. I’ve had a couple of cases in Burundi where soldiers have used prostitutes and they’ve said we didn’t know it was against the rules and that’s a chain of command problem because everybody has been informed. But you’re also dealing with troops who are in a French speaking country, who don’t speak French, I even have some troops who don’t speak English which is the language of the mission – although I would like my missions language to be French, I’m trying....it’s hard. And what we have discovered – I’ve sat down with the experts because I’ve gone out there with an attitude that we have to have a very strong preventative approach, which includes disciplinary measures so that there are consequences. And basically you have to have a very good set of military police who will patrol certain areas; you will decide that certain areas are off limits, you will make sure people will know it’s against the rule to have non-UN personnel in UN vehicles without signing a waiver.

JENKINS: Is all this happening in Burundi?

MCASKIE: It's being put in place. Some of it's happening, the instructions have already gone out, and I sent out early instructions when I first arrived, now I'm reinforcing them and putting in stricter measures – if that doesn't work, we'll get even stricter. For example, there are certain things you can do – tell the soldiers they are not allowed off base unless they stay in uniform. And if that doesn't work, you say you are not allowed off base period. There are some missions where they only go off base to do their patrols and for six months they live behind the fence. If that's what it takes, that's what the UN will do. We are absolutely prepared to do it.

HANDELMAN: Speaking of living behind the fence. What's it like for you personally, Special Rep in a situation like this, we were talking a little bit earlier about living in a bubble, is it a bubble? And what happens when the bubble breaks?

MCASKIE: It's a bit of a bubble. First of all the security situation in Burundi is affected by two things. One, you mentioned the fact that the rebel groups are still operating in the hills around the city of Bujumbura, which means that if you go out of Bujumbura and into the countryside, we generally operate during the daylight hours only and with armed escort, just in case. We take very strong precautions, you can say we maybe try to hard but in fact, we've had a number of incidents that make us realize that things can be dangerous. Because in addition to the fact that there is still some fighting going on, there's also a very sad increase in criminality in the countryside because of the number of guns that are out there. One of the biggest jobs for us will be getting rid of the guns around the countryside. So, just let me finish answering the question – the other thing is, because of the security regulations in the UN there is a tendency to assume that if somebody wants to take a pot shot at the UN, in the Burundi sense, it would be me, I would be the target. So I tend a level of protection which my colleagues don't have. They can drive around town, drive their own cars to work and me, I have bodyguards and an armored vehicle. You just get use to that – you just accept it.

JENKINS: You mentioned the number of guns that are out there, I'm interested to know where they are coming from, or are they all just leftovers from the previous conflict. But I am also interested; I don't want to sound like the prophet of doom here but I am interested in how this can still go wrong? I'm wondering for example...

MCASKIE: Yes, we didn't quite finish up on that...

JENKINS: ...One of the things I'm wondering is... does this peace agreement contain within it potential seeds for future problems? In other words you mentioned the fact that the

Tutsi's have forty percent of the seats in Parliament but they're only fourteen percent of the population...

MCASKIE: Fifteen...

JENKINS: ...They're going to be half of the security and police forces. It's not really very democratic, is that a problem that is waiting for us down the line? Could that still be the motive for recalcitrants in the FNL to say no we won't accept this agreement? Could it still fall apart?

MCASKIE: Well, I don't think so, not in the short term anyway. The fact is...

JENKINS: Why?

MCASKIE: ...I have an answer to that. The fact is that these formulas were agreed over a whole process of negotiations. If you look at the power structure over the past ten, twenty years in Burundi, you will see governments in place where either eighty- five percent or a hundred percent of the cabinet were Tutsi. So if it drops to forty percent, that's already an adjustment. And there was a sense, and frankly, the Hutu as the majority party, who have perhaps been marginalized over the history of Burundi, and they've actually have been pretty generous. They've accepted the fact that you don't dislodge a group a hundred percent one percent in one go. And that the Burundians, Hutu's, Tutsi's and there is also a smaller group, the Twa about one percent, and they unlike Rwanda, they have decided their problem has been based on ethnicity and their going to base their solution on ethnicity. They have embraced ethnicity in their solutions and they have decided that in order to sort out the army, they can only do fifty-fifty Hutu-Tutsi in the first instance. But that over time it will evolve. Because it has been close to a hundred percent you're bringing the rebels in to what has been a highly trained army, where are you going to find fifty percent of Hutu's to be enough generals and colonials and majors and that? The rebel groups have them, so it's a long process and people have bought into it and they're going to give it a try.

HANDELMAN: But can that formula really hold? Just to follow Tony's train of thought....

MCASKIE: It's in the constitution.

HANDELMAN: The constitution, if it works in the constitution...

MCASKIE: It's in the constitution. To change the constitution, it will take a ninety percent vote and Parliament...

JENKINS: Can you tell the different ethnic groups or the different tribal groups apart that easily?

MCASKIE: No, no, sometimes. People say you can, they say there's a Tutsi... they say Tutsi's are taller and slender and Hutu's are shorter and broader....

JENKINS: It doesn't always hold does it?

MCASKIE: No. There are a few examples where it's obvious, but and when you see all the guys in uniform sometimes you think it is - but no.

PRICE: Last year we saw this terrible massacre at the Gatumba refugee camp and I wondered how worried would you be if something like that happened again. Would you be able to prevent it this time? I mean you had peacekeepers in the country then, they couldn't do it that time, if the rebels decide with the help of outside that they're going to have another go....

MCASKIE: Well since Gatumba over the last few....in the early part of this year, we've had a disturbing incident of hate literature floating around, tracts, paper claiming that attacks are going to be made against this same group the Banyamulenge which is the name for the Tutsi residence of Eastern Congo. The Gatumba victims were Banyamulenge Congolese refugees.

JENKINS: The FNL were responsible?

MCASKIE: They claimed responsibility. We tried very hard and we're still trying by the way, exactly who did what.

JENKINS: Am I right in thinking that you actually insisted at some point that the FNL should apologize or...

MCASKIE: In fact, once we get them to the table to discuss ceasefire, I don't think we will be able to move forward unless they make some kind of conciliatory statement around this. But whether the peacekeepers could prevent another one? It's not a large country and fifty-five hundred troops are a lot. But fifty-five hundred in fact, are not enough to be everywhere all the time and we must be very careful not to pretend that because we have a peacekeeping mission that we can prevent all the bad things that might happen to people. We will do our best to keep track of what's going on, to try to be in the places that we should be and the fact is the government has responsibilities in this area. There was an army post close to the massacre site; the government has the responsibility for guarding these camps. But since the appearance of these other threats against the Banyamulenge community, we've insisted that the government keep a very close eye on areas in Bujumbura where the Banyamulenge are living. And we ourselves have increased patrols at key points.

HANDELMAN: But....

JENKINS: And on that slightly a difficult note I'm afraid we've run out of time.

MCASKIE: Already!

JENKINS: Yes. Carolyn McAskie thank you for being with us. Our guest has been the United Nations Special Representative to Burundi, Carolyn McAskie. She was interviewed by Stephen Handelman of the Toronto Star and Susannah Price of the BBC. I'm Tony Jenkins inviting you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

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