



**Meeting of the Security Council on the Situation in Burundi**  
**Statement of Adama Dieng, Under Secretary-General and the Special Adviser on**  
**the Prevention of Genocide'**

9 November 2015

(check against delivery)

I would like to thank the President of the Security Council, His Excellency Matthew Rycroft, for convening this meeting and for extending the invitation to me to brief the Security Council on the situation in Burundi from the perspective of my mandate.

Mr. President, Members of the Council,

I last briefed this Council in May 2015 in relation to the situation in Burundi following my visit to Burundi. In that briefing, I observed that although the crisis in Burundi was primarily political in nature, some senior Burundian leaders were manipulating the issue of ethnicity to advance their political interests. I warned that if they continued to do so, the result could be an increase in violence in which individuals could be targeted on the basis of their political or ethnic affiliation.

Unfortunately, this is what has happened. The country appears to be on the verge of a descent into violence that could escalate into atrocity crimes.

The ongoing efforts to promote dialogue have not succeeded in bringing the Government and the opposition to find common ground.

The violence and human rights violations reported over the last period have included the assassination of senior members of the security forces and high-profile individuals affiliated with both the ruling party and the opposition, as well as targeted killings of ordinary civilians.

We are also witnessing continued militarization of opposition political parties and actors, both inside and outside Burundi. Those supporting the opposition have carried out targeted killings across the country. This violence has escalated tensions and further destabilized the country. My Office has received reports of civilians fleeing from areas perceived to be sympathetic to the opposition, for fear of attacks.

Mr. President, Members of the Council,

I was alarmed by the speech given on 29 October by Révérien Ndikuriyo, the President of the Senate, in which he used inflammatory and threatening language. Some of the language used was very similar to the language used before and during the Rwandan genocide -- in particular, the repeated use of the word *gukora*, which means “to work” in Kirundi, and was used to incite people to commit genocide in Rwanda in 1994. This speech adds to the fear that the ruling party officials may be preparing the ground for widespread violence in Burundi.

It is therefore critical that the President and senior leadership refrain from giving or uttering any statement that may be considered as inciting populations to commit crimes against their fellow citizens. To do is both dangerous and irresponsible – and is prohibited under international law.

Mr. President, Members of the Council,

If there was ever a time for President Nkurunziza and his Government to display responsible and courageous leadership, it is now. For the sake of all Burundians, we need the Government to commit to restoring peace and security through dialogue and to take a series of concrete steps to de-escalate the current crisis.

At the same time, this responsibility does not only lie with Burundi’s Government alone. The international community, in particular the East African Community, the African Union and the United Nations, have an indispensable role to play in restoring peace to Burundi.

In its October communiqué, the African Union's Peace and Security Council expressed its determination to impose sanctions against those perpetrating violence, called for the deployment of additional human-rights monitors, including by the African Union Commission, to investigate the on-going violations, and requested the African Union Commission develop contingency planning for the potential deployment of a peacekeeping mission to protect civilians. These strong commitments must be followed through with action, and supported by the international community.

To deter further violence, the Security Council should take urgent measures to prevent the situation from escalating, including by providing full support to the immediate implementation of the African Union Peace and Security Council decisions. The deployment of African Union human-rights monitors could be a key deterrent against human rights violations and abuses; the Council could urge the Government of Burundi to finalize negotiations with the African Union on the presence of these monitors so that they can be deployed, have unrestricted access and carry out their mandate without hindrance.

Mr. President, Members of the Council,

Another essential factor that would contribute to preventing the situation from escalating further is to take measures that could act as a deterrent, by putting in place measures to hold those who may commit acts of violence and incite violence accountable. The persistent accountability gap and prevailing impunity for on-going serious human rights violations and abuses, including discourse that constitutes incitement to violence, is fueling the crisis in Burundi. Such measures could include the immediate establishment of a commission of inquiry to investigate the on-going violations, as recommended by the African Union. It is also important to remind Burundi that as a State Party to the International Criminal Court, those inciting or engaging in atrocity crimes in Burundi will risk criminal prosecution.

Mr. President, Members of the Council,

Burundi is at a crossroads and the international community needs to wake up to this reality. No one should underestimate what is at stake: A civil war between 1993 and 2005 cost over 300,000 lives and displaced over one million people in Burundi. The country's history and that of its neighbour Rwanda have shown the tragic consequences of failing to act when leaders incite or fail to contain violence. Beyond the possible human toll, a return to conflict would put the Arusha Agreement at risk and have destabilising consequences for the entire region. We should act before it is too late. The United Nations has invested heavily in Burundi and cannot fail to take the appropriate action now.

I urge the Security Council to send a clear and united message to the Government in Bujumbura that it has an obligation to sit down with the opposition to address their differences peacefully. The Council should also call on all actors to renounce using violence. Only a sincere and constructive dialogue can avert the impending catastrophe in Burundi.

The Council should also urge the Government to bring to justice all perpetrators of the human rights violations and crimes being committed.

My Office and other experts and institutions have stressed that without unity in the Council on the situation in Burundi and the action that must be taken to reverse the current crisis, Burundi may slide back into a chaos that we are all too familiar with.

Given the clear information we have about the gravity of the situation, we will not be able to claim, if a full scale conflict erupts, that 'we didn't know'. The international community has a responsibility to protect Burundians and to prevent the commission of atrocity crimes.

Thank you.