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FROM PEACEKEEPING TO PEACE CONSOLIDATION IN BURUNDI

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At the end of December, the United Nations Mission in Burundi (ONUB) will close, ending a successful two-and-a-half year chapter in peacekeeping history.

I had the privilege of working in Burundi from June 2004 to April 2006, and bearing witness to the country's completing the process of transition out of a protracted period of conflict.

ONUB was mandated by the United Nations Security Council to support Burundi at the end of its lengthy efforts towards restoring sustainable and lasting peace.

As the mission now completes its withdrawal from Burundi, to be replaced by the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB), it is an appropriate time to reflect on progress to appreciate how far the country has come, before looking ahead to the next important steps.

The main objective of the Peacekeeping Mission was to enable Burundi to complete the process launched in the mid nineties, culminating in the 2000 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement.

This included a critical mediation and support role in organizing and conducting the country's first democratic elections in 13 years. Thanks to collaboration between the United Nations and its partners, the transitional period was successfully concluded and power was peacefully transferred to an elected Government in August 2005.

The mission contributed to the disarmament and demobilization of over 20,000 former combatants leading to the creation of a new national army and police, based on the integration of the armed rebel groups and the former Government army.

It made a significant contribution towards strengthening the protection of human rights and its robust military presence secured the environment allowing for the provision of humanitarian assistance.

If the Burundi Peace Process has been a success so far it is based on two pillars. The first and most important is the effort of the people of Burundi, who over a difficult decade have learned to dialogue and put violent conflict behind them.

The second pillar is the notable coherence of all the players, starting with Burundi's neighbors who shepherded the peace process, the African Union, bilateral and multilateral donors along with the United Nations, all of whom worked tirelessly together in support of the peoples of Burundi.

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