



## → Background

### **The UN Peacekeeping Mission in Burundi Completes its Mandate**

*20 December 2006* – The United Nations Operation in Burundi - known by its French acronym ONUB - completes its mandate on 31 December 2006, having overseen the first democratic elections in twelve years; the installation of a national Government; and the disarmament and demobilization of nearly 22,000 combatants.

Like neighbouring Rwanda, Burundi had been ravaged by an ethnic conflict between its Hutu and Tutsi population. Since gaining its independence in 1962, the small Central African country had been the victim of violent coups and political instability. The death of some 300,000 people after the first free elections took place in 1993 led to increased international involvement and the establishment of the first UN mission in Burundi three years later.

With the signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in 2000, an important step had been taken towards reaching the ceasefire brokered in 2002 by South Africa, Tanzania, Gabon, the African Union and the UN. The deployment of Blue Helmets to assume their peacekeeping duties came in 2004, replacing a year-long African Union Mission in Burundi.

The upcoming transition from peacekeeping to peace consolidation is a clear sign of both Burundi's step towards lasting peace and stability and the UN's success in making its recovery possible.

"I leave with the feeling that the national identity has been further reaffirmed and people refer to themselves more as Burundians than along ethnic lines. This is the biggest reason to hope that Burundi will make it", says Ambassador Nureldin Satti, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Burundi.

Initially comprised of some 5,600 uniformed men and women as well as several hundred civilian staff and 120 police officers, ONUB has benefited from a robust and comprehensive mandate to end hostilities in the country and guide Burundi towards a durable democratic future.

Among numerous achievements during the mission's tenure, ONUB helped disarm and demobilize nearly 22,000 ex-combatants, including more than 3,000 children and about 500 women. Close to 30,000 militia members and an additional 3,000 handicapped army officers have also been disarmed and assisted. The recently established National Commission for Civilian Disarmament charged with developing a national strategy for disarming military groups and continuing an ongoing weapons destruction initiative has so far eliminated 2,000 firearms and over 22,000 pieces of ammunition.

ONUB has supported security sector reform in Burundi, including through the integration of armed groups into the new integrated security forces, and the deployment of personnel on the ground. Important work within the human rights sector has resulted in raised public awareness, an increase in assistance to victims of human rights violations, and a significant contribution to the rule of law by bringing the criminal code in line with current human rights treaties. Despite this progress, much remains to be done to prevent such vulnerable human rights as freedom of speech from manipulation or repression.

At least 2,500 officers from Burundi's national police force have enrolled in an ONUB police training-for-trainers programme to strengthen activities in areas such as anti-corruption, anti-terrorism, penitentiary security, border and airport security. In another sign of confidence in Burundi's

police force, a contingent of 39 officers joined the African Union peacekeeping mission in Darfur, Sudan, last month as the first-ever contribution of its kind.

Burundian police were assisted by their ONUB colleagues in ensuring adequate security conditions for voters during the long-awaited free elections last year that resulted in a new democratically-elected Government under the presidency of Pierre Nkurunziza. A total of six elections, from the communal and local to the legislative and presidential, including a referendum on a new constitution, were organized over the course of an eight-month period last year. With the help of ONUB's electoral unit and a budget of US \$20 million, more than 90% of Burundi's voting population was registered, and voter turnout reached nearly the same level in some elections.

ONUB has played a critical role in supporting the negotiation process between the Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People-National Liberation Forces (Palipehutu-FNL) and the Government of Burundi. A comprehensive ceasefire agreement between the two parties was signed in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, on 7 September 2006, formally bringing an end to over a decade of violence in the country.

Experience has taught that the departure of a peacekeeping operation usually leaves residual elements of the peace settlement in need of sustained attention. In the case of Burundi, human rights continue to be threatened and the political environment remains volatile. Peace consolidation efforts must be nationally driven and appropriated by national actors. Viewed from this angle, peace consolidation is as much a political function as a development one.

During the World Summit in September 2005, world leaders decided to establish a Peacebuilding Commission of UN Member States which would ensure that international support would back up these national efforts.

The work of the Commission is complemented by a Peacebuilding Support Office and a Peacebuilding Fund to help countries emerging from conflict. The Peacebuilding Commission decided to recommend Burundi and Sierra Leone as the two first countries for assistance.

Earlier this year, Security Council resolution 1719 authorised the establishment on 1 January 2007 of a United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB), tasked with peacebuilding and coordination of the UN system's activities throughout the country for an initial period of one year. The UN will continue to stay involved with and support Burundi's progress in peacebuilding, security, and long-term development in the country.

*“With the phasing out of ONUB, Burundi's partners must now continue to deal boldly and expeditiously with the need to help Burundians to address the social and economic needs of the population to bring the fruits of peace to Burundians and to ensure that never again will they be drawn into conflict”, says Carolyn McAskie, the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support. “Burundi has come a long way from its darkest days of conflict but there is still a long way to go. It is critical that the international community support the country now as it moves past this fragile post-conflict stage towards long-term and sustainable development.”*

BINUB's proposed responsibilities include support for further demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants and reform of the security sector in the wake of the 7 September Comprehensive Ceasefire Agreement. They also include the promotion and protection of human rights and measures to end impunity through a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Special Tribunal, as well as support for poverty-reduction efforts.

The Office will be headed by the Secretary-General's Executive Representative, Youssef Mahmoud, of Tunisia. Mr. Mahmoud has served as Deputy SRSG for Burundi and United Nations Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Coordinator in Burundi.