

BURUNDI Update

Search for Common Ground

Situation Update

On July 4, Burundi went to the polls for the Parliamentary elections in which the former main rebel group FDD won 58% of the vote. As leader of the FDD, Pierre Nkurunziza was elected President on 19 August by the combined Upper and Lower House by two-thirds majority. A new Government was formed on August 26, comprising of 20 ministers, including 7 women. In accordance with the new constitution, both the government and parliament are composed of 60% Hutus and 40% Tutsis.

The peaceful completion of the first Burundian elections in over a decade was a major milestone in the peace process.

Studio Ijambo and the Media Synergy Watched over the Elections

At the start of the election process in February Burundian media professionals channelled their energies into the creation of a national network to ensure accurate and professional coverage of the elections. This Media Synergy was initiated by Search for Common Ground's (SFCG's) *Studio Ijambo* and comprises 11 media outlets, including radio stations Bonesha, Culture, Isanganiro, Nderagakura and Renaissance, as well as the Agence Burundaise de Presse and Studio Ijambo.

During each poll, 100 journalists would be stationed throughout Burundi enabling far more comprehensive coverage than any single radio station could offer. The Synergy's bulletins (in French and Kirundi) were prepared by a special joint news team that also coordinated the network of correspondents. To prepare the 100 Burundian journalists, Studio Ijambo had trained them in comprehensive, accurate and balanced reporting on elections.

During the elections, journalists reported on the preparations, voting and counting of the votes from every province. The joint editorial team used dispatches from colleagues as well as real-time responses from the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) to produce the 16 to 30-minute news specials.



Even youths too young to vote turned out in large numbers to experience the elections

A recent survey conducted in Bujumbura shows that the presence of journalists during the elections was important in ensuring a fair and transparent process. Radio Isanganiro's webstreams even allowed Burundians from around the globe to follow the elections. Burundians living in Siberia, New Zealand, North America and Europe called and emailed the editorial team to express appreciation for the excellent coverage. With the elections concluded, SFCG will continue to support the Media Synergy to enhance professional and non-inflammatory reporting in Burundi.

These democratic elections in Burundi mark a crucial step in the peace process and signal the end of the decade-long transition period. In forming the Media Synergy, Burundian media have demonstrated professionalism and commitment to play a positive and constructive role in the country's future.

Inside this Issue:

- Great Lakes University Peace Forum
- Youth creates Code of Conduct
- Women & Governance Project increases women's participation in the elections
- Victims of Torture Project addresses needs of rape survivors

University Peace Forum Promotes Regional Peacebuilding

In March of this year, students from Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) gathered in Bujumbura for the first Great Lakes University Peace Forum, an initiative aimed at developing a framework for a constructive and peaceful youth dialogue in the Great Lakes Region. Launched by a group of 75 students at the Ngozi University in September 2004, this project seeks to build the capacity of young people to contribute to a peaceful future in the region by promoting tolerance and understanding among youth of the three countries. In line with its Burundi programme objectives to foster peace leadership through community dialogue and reconciliation, Search for Common Ground's (SFCG's) Youth Project supported the students' initiative. Drawing participants from the United Nations agencies, the Burundian government, NGOs and academics from the region, this 'Peace Forum' focused on youth concerns and aspirations for free, fair and transparent elections.

Addressing the participants, the SFCG representative expressed hope that youth would seize this unique opportunity to foster mutual understanding and serve their communities to ensure a peaceful future for all. Subsequent forums will take place in DRC and Rwanda in 2005. Delegates from Rwanda and DRC have pledged to help organise similar events in their countries and offer an opportunity for high school and university students to share experiences, views and hopes for their futures as well.

Strengthening Community Dialogue and Participation

In May, Search for Common Ground's Women Peace Centre in collaboration with ONUB, facilitated a series of activities to foster dialogue and promote tolerance in the context of the general elections. A total of 1,225 women and men took part in roundtables and workshops in Ngozi, Ruyigi, Makamba, Musinga, Gitega and Bujumbura, aiming to raise public awareness on the electoral process, as well as the Elections Act and the Communal Law. The workshops were designed to provide as much information as possible to participants and encourage women's full involvement in the upcoming elections. Participants left with messages of peace, non-violence and civic participation to share with their neighbours, and had learned how to prevent violence linked to the diversity of political opinions as well as how to increase women's participation in political life.

Youth Project Creates Code of Conduct for Elections

Youth have been a target for political manipulation and propaganda since the beginning of the democratisation process in Burundi. In the 1993 elections, unscrupulous politicians exacerbated youth militancy and ethnic divisions so adolescents would carry out intimidation and violence to ensure their victory at the polls. In order to encourage youth dialogue and promote youth's positive participation in political life, Search for Common Ground's (SFCG's) Youth Project brought together school and college students from different ethnicities to reflect on their role during election times in November 2004 in Bujumbura. The event was an eye opener for the participants who agreed to combat all forms of violence and behave responsibly during the elections. The students also emphasized the need to improve communication between youth and the leadership and encouraged a permanent framework for dialogue so youth could be more positively involved in public affairs. The meeting successfully concluded with the adoption of a Code of Conduct,

A campaign to promote the Code of Conduct was launched with a concert -*Twizere* ('Let's keep hope')- broadcasted live on Radio Isanganiro. For more information on Radio Isanganiro or to listen to its programmes, please visit: <http://www.isanganiro.org/>

which youth will observe during the elections to avoid the aggravation of ethnic tension and unnecessary discord. SFCG arranged for wide distribution of the Code at community outreach events, reaching out to thousands of youth and their communities. Politicians in particular welcomed the Code and used it as a template for their own Party Code of Conduct.

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SFCG in Burundi is grateful for the support of these donors:



Search For Common Ground Launches 'Femmes et Gouvernance'

Women account for about 52% of Burundi's population and play a pivotal role in the country's economy. However, most are excluded from political life. Women's lack of involvement in political life in Burundi is perpetuated by poverty, and because few women are aware of their civic, social, and economic rights.

Such gender-based disparities justify increasing women and girls' access to governance processes and enhancing the quality of their participation at all levels of the decision making process. With support from the Belgian government, Search for Common Ground's (SFCG's) new project, 'Femmes et Gouvernance', seeks to build the capacity of women to take constructive leadership positions in Burundi's government, from the local to the national level. The project draws directly upon SFCG's Women Peace Centre and Youth Project experience in reaching out to and supporting women's groups to foster community reconciliation.



Eager to vote, many women were waiting in line early in the morning

Through leadership, skills trainings, and sensitisation campaigns, 'Women and Governance' intends to equip women from all walks of life with the practical knowledge needed to become active participants in politics. Since the project launch in January 2005, SFCG has conducted a broad array of capacity-building activities with women's associations in Bujumbura, Ngozi, Makamba and Ruyigi. In collaboration with CAFOB and IFES, SFCG organised roundtable debates and training and sensitisation sessions, explaining their rights and civic responsibilities and providing voter education. These and other activities enable women to assert their own interests and generate solutions to the problems they face.

Media programmes developed by Studio Ijambo for women inform about the challenges and opportunities for political participation. The programmes alternate educational series with success stories of ordinary women and girls coping with day-to-day worries in post-war Burundi. A major activity for the remainder of the project will be the creation of 4 youth/school parliaments in Bujumbura, Ngozi, Ruyigi and Makamba.

Addressing the Needs of Rape Survivors

The Burundian conflict has left many women and children destitute, increasing their vulnerability to sexual attacks. Because they are often socially excluded and stigmatised, women and children who have been victims of violent acts such as rape or torture, are in dire need of psychosocial support as well as legal and medical assistance. In Bujumbura, a team from Search for Common Ground's (SFCG's) Victims of Torture (VOT) Project, brought together 25 rape survivors with the children they had had as a result of rape, to assess progress in their healing process and address their current needs. Listening to the women, the team found that a major concern was the importance of observing the 'Gukhekera Umwana' and 'Gukeza Umuvyeyu', cultural ceremonies traditionally held after a woman gives birth. Because most of these women are marginalized, they are refused this 'honour' in their communities. To respond to this situation, the VOT team helped the women prepare a traditional ceremony to honour the rape victims and their children. The women were overwhelmed by the event as it gave them the feeling to belong to a community again and feel 'more human'.

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