

DETERIORO

BURUNDI: The Government refuses a dialogue with the political opposition and the deployment of an AU mission

The spiral of violence continues, with almost daily terrorist attacks killing and injuring dozens of people during the month. According to the facilitator of the meeting, Tanzanian Foreign Minister Augustine Mahiga, the Government has refused to participate in a second meeting with the political opposition to be held in Arusha on January 6 under the mediation of Ugandan Defence Minister Crispus Kiyonga. Mahiga emphasized that the availability of the Burundian Foreign Minister, the agenda, composition and venue for the Ugandan-led mediation were issues that had yet to be resolved. The Government continues to reject intervention by an AU mission, since it considers that the country is 99% secure. The deadline passed for the deployment of a 5000-strong AU force, proposed in mid-December, and no further action had been taken. In this regard, Mahiga indicated that the mission may still be deployed, but always with the consent of the Government of Burundi. On January 22, 15 ambassadors from UN Security Council member countries visited Burundi. This was the second visit in less than a year to meet with the country's political leaders in an attempt to promote peace by fostering a political dialogue between the Government and the political and social opposition. The UN envoys were greeted by pro-government demonstrations demanding they stop interfering. (RFI, 07/01/16, AFP in Daily Nation, 22/01/16 SABC News, 28/01/16, UN, 29/01/16)

TURKEY (SOUTHEAST): The government rules out any chance of dialogue with the PKK

Amidst a scenario of serious deterioration in southeastern Turkey in recent months, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that there would be no further dialogue with the PKK or its leader, Abdullah Öcalan. Erdogan also made statements denying that there was a Kurdish issue in Turkey, asserting that there is only a problem with terrorism. Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said that they had managed to isolate the PKK and prevent an uprising in the entire southeastern region. Deputy Prime Minister Yalçın Akdoğan also said that any chance of talks with the group was off the table and that they would defeat the PKK through security policies. The pro-Kurdish party HDP and other parts of the Kurdish movement called for a resumption of the peace process. The party also called for an end to the isolation of Öcalan, who has been unable to visit his lawyers since July 2011. The last visits by the Kurdish political delegation involved in the failed Imrali peace process took place in April 2015, with no subsequent authorisations. (Hürriyet, Fırat, 1-31/01/16)

YEMEN: The ceasefire is broken, while persisting disagreements among the parties force the postponement of peace talks sponsored by the UN

Hostilities began to intensify in Yemen in early January after the announced end of the ceasefire agreed to during the talks held in the town of Macolin, near Biel (Switzerland) from 20 to 25 December, in the first direct meetings between the parties. While these gatherings culminated in a positive atmosphere, in practice the security situation continued to deteriorate and according to various reports, the ceasefire was not respected by any of the parties to the conflict. The escalation of violence led the UN's special envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, to postpone the next round of peace talks, initially planned for 14 January. Disagreements persisted between the Houthi forces allied with former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and the government forces backed by the international coalition led by Saudi Arabia regarding the conditions for dialogue related to the ceasefire, the release of prisoners and access to humanitarian assistance. After meeting with representatives of the deposed Yemeni government in the United Arab Emirates, UN

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on the parties to commit to a comprehensive ceasefire and to resume the UN-facilitated talks. (UN News, 18/01/16; ICG, 31/01/16)

ALERTA

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC: Postponed the legislative elections and the second round of the presidential race

The Constitutional Court announces the cancelation of the legislative elections held on 30 December due to numerous irregularities, and decided that the National Transitional Council (NTC, the Legislative Assembly) would continue until new elections were held. The NTC announced that the second round of the presidential elections would be held on February 14, coinciding with the first legislative elections. The December 30 legislative race was cancelled because of numerous irregularities, which in some cases involved of candidates. These elections aim to bring to an end the period of political transition and the serious crisis affecting the country. The date was set by the National Elections Authority. Former prime ministers Anicet Georges Dologuélé and Faustin Archange Touadéra reached the second round of presidential elections after passing the first round. (JeuneAfrique, 11, 25 and 28/01/16)

ISRAEL-PALESTINE: France promotes an international conference to revive the peace process and warns that it will recognise a Palestinian state if it fails

In late January, the French foreign minister said that Paris will promote an international conference to revive peace talks between Palestinians and Israelis for a two-state solution. In addition to these two sides, the initiative brings together the United States, European and Arab League countries to accompany the process. In what was interpreted as an ultimatum to Israel, Fabius warned that if this new effort to reach a negotiated solution founders, France will recognise a Palestinian state. The French diplomat underlined that as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, his country has the responsibility to keep the two-state solution alive. Through its top negotiator, Saeb Erekat, the Palestinian Authority (PA) welcomed the French initiative, whereas the Israeli government met it with hostility. Israeli officials said France's threat to recognise a Palestinian state if the process fails would encourage the Palestinians not to negotiate. Efforts to revive the Palestinian-Israeli peace process have been blocked since April 2014. In December of that year, France tried to promote a UN Security Council resolution to define a new framework for resolving the conflict, but the initiative did not prosper due to opposition from the United States and Israel and reservations from the AP about the draft. In 2015, France suggested the creation of an international support group for peace negotiations, which brought together representatives of the Quartet and around 30 Arab and Western countries as part of the UN General Assembly in September, though without the presence of Palestinian and Israeli delegates. Fabius later unsuccessfully promoted a UN Security Council resolution condemning Israel's construction of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. (Le Monde, The Guardian, AFP and Reuters, 30/01/16; Haaretz, 29/01/16)

MALI: Insufficient progress in implementation of the peace agreement

Due to the enormous challenges posed by the implementation of the peace agreements in the country, an emergency meeting was organized on January 17 and 18 by Algeria, the country leading the international mediation, to address the delays and the tension between the armed groups. Following the meeting, the Malian Government appointed on January 19 the governors of the newly created northern regions of the country, Menaka and Taoudeni, which is a move towards decentralization and the re-establishment of the northern state administration, as laid down in the agreement. Earlier this month, members of the United Nations Security Council had called on the parties to the peace agreement (the

Government, the CMA and the Platform) to give priority to the fundamental provisions of the accord. In addition, they were urged to take the necessary steps to deploy the joint security patrols in northern Mali and implement the DDR program, as well as the decentralization process. The UN Security Council also expressed its thanks to Mongi Hamdi, who had recently stepped down as Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Mali and as head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). It also expressed its full support for Mahamat Saleh Annadif, who replaced him halfway through the month in both positions. (UN SC Press, 12/01/2016; ORTM TV, 16/01/2016)

SERBIA – KOSOVO: Pressure builds against the agreement between Serbia and Kosovo on the Serb-majority association of municipalities in Kosovo

Political and social pressure mounted against the agreement reached in 2015 between Serbia and Kosovo to establish a Serb-majority association of municipalities in Kosovo. Political opposition to the deal, expressed in recent months by opposition parties in Parliament, was joined in January by street demonstrations, including one involving 60,000 people (the largest against the agreement to date) in order to reject the agreement and demand the resignation of the government of Isa Mustafa and new elections. Various episodes of violence took place as part of the demonstration. The pressure followed the Constitutional Court's ruling in December that found various articles of the agreement unconstitutional and said that they must be modified. Meanwhile, talks resumed between Serbia and Kosovo, with a new round facilitated by the European Union in Brussels on 27 January, despite Kosovo's threats in December that it would boycott the round if the EU did not issue a recommendation in favour of unblocking visas. At the meeting in January, the parties introduced no new themes, but reviewed the status of implementation of the agreements. (Balkan Insight, B92, BBC, 9-31/01/16)

SYRIA: A new round of indirect talks on the conflict in Syria begins in Geneva amidst a climate of scepticism

After days of uncertainty and amidst some confusion, the dialogue process that sought a political solution to the war in Syria began in Geneva, Switzerland on 29 January, four days after the initially scheduled date. The special envoy of the UN and of the Arab League for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, issued invitations reserved for the various parties involved in the fighting amidst speculation about vetoes, threats of a boycott and pressure to include or exclude certain stakeholders in the process. In fact, Salih Muslim, the leader of the Syrian Kurdish party PYD, a branch of the PKK that is proscribed by Turkey, left Geneva without having received an invitation to participate in the round of meetings. The dialogue process took place in a format of indirect talks, with meetings of diplomats with the different delegations of the Syrian government and opposition. De Mistura held the first meeting with the Syrian government delegation and with the representatives of the High Negotiations Committee (HNC), which put its participation in the process in doubt until the last moment, demanding as a condition an end to the government's bombardments in civilian areas and guarantees about the delivery of humanitarian aid. The delegation reached Geneva on Saturday, 30 January after coming under intense diplomatic pressure, according to reports. De Mistura stressed that even before sending out the invitations and beginning the new round of dialogue, he had asked the parties to implement humanitarian initiatives to alleviate the plight of the hard-hit Syrian population. The talks are expected to go on for a period of six months for the immediate purpose of declaring a ceasefire and, over the long term, of setting up a transitional government, approving a new Constitution and holding elections within 18 months. (The Guardian, 29/01/16; El País, 31/01/16, 01/01/16)

SOUTH SUDAN: The parties that signed the peace agreement fail to create a transitional government

In accordance with what was established in the peace agreement, 22 January had been the date scheduled for the creation of the unity and transitional government provided under the new road map presented by the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC). However, this government was not formed, since the SPLM-IO refused to send the list of the names of the ministers corresponding to it due to the fact that they continue to accuse Salva Kiir's government of violating the deal with its unilateral creation of 28 federal states. Festus Mogae, the former president of Botswana and current president of the JMEC, has said that Kiir's order to create 28 states is a serious violation of the peace agreement. On 24 January, SPLM-IO leader Riek Machar travelled to Uganda to meet with President Yoweri Museveni. Machar has asked Museveni to mediate with Salva Kiir's government to enable the implementation of the peace agreements and remove the administrative division decreed by the government. Alongside the deadlock on the peacebuilding agenda, UNICEF released a report warning that over half the children in South Sudan have no access to school, the highest proportion in the world: 1.8 million children between the ages of 6 and 15, which accounts for 51%, are not enrolled in school. Another report presented on 4 January by the Human Rights Division (HRD) of the UN mission in the country, UNMISS, denounced how government forces have continued to displace the civilian population in the northern part of Unity State, which is rich in oil. (UNMISS, 04/01/2016; Al Jazeera, 12/01/2016; Radio Tamazuj, 18/01/2016; VOA, 23/01/2016; Sudan Tribune, 24-25/01/2016).

THAILAND (SOUTH): Insurgent groups operating in the south of the country oppose the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation facilitating peace talks with the government

A spokesperson for Mara Patani, an organisation representing six insurgent groups in the south of the country, rejects the possibility of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) acting as facilitator in talks between the government and Mara Patani, deeming that Malaysia is already acting as an effective facilitator and also that it would not be beneficial for current peace talks for two third parties to act as facilitators. Mara Patani also re-emphasised the importance of the OIC supporting current peace talks, which according to the group are currently at an informal, exploratory stage, and indicated that the participation of the OIC or any other third party could only be contemplated with the authorisation of the Thai government and once peace talks enter a formal, official stage. These statements were made shortly after OIC Secretary General Iyad Ameen Madani completed an official visit to Malaysia and Thailand and announced the willingness of his organisation to participate in the peace process. It should be noted that Iyad Ameen Madani met with the leaders of Mara Patani in Kuala Lumpur, although according to the latter organisation the issue of an ultimate role for the OIC in peace talks was not approached. During the aforementioned official visits, the OIC Secretary General thanked Bangkok for its efforts in managing the conflict in the south of the country and at the same time urged the government to guarantee greater acknowledgement for the Muslim community in Thailand. (Bernama, 17/07/16; Channel News Asia, 14/01/16; Bangkok Post, 13/01/16)

AVANCE

AFGHANISTAN: The United States, China, Pakistan and Afghanistan resume the peace process without the Taliban, which attend an unofficial conference in Doha

On 11 January, representatives of the United States, China, Afghanistan and Pakistan resumed the peace process that was cut short in July 2015 in Islamabad. Attendants of the meeting included Foreign State Secretary Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhary representing Pakistan, acting Afghan Foreign Minister Hekmat Karzai and the special envoys to the region

reporting to the United States, Richard G. Olson, and to China, Deng Xijun, respectively. Sartaj Aziz, the foreign affairs advisor to the prime minister of Pakistan, proposed a four-point plan: 1) to create the right conditions to encourage the Taliban to lay down their arms and join the dialogue, 2) to take sequential steps to prepare direct contacts with the Taliban, 3) to use confidence-building measures to encourage them to resume the dialogue and 4) to use a plan that is realistic and prevents the creation of great expectations. The second round of negotiations among the four parties will take place once again in Islamabad on 6 February. Apart from this group, the political office of the Taliban in Doha, Qatar admitted that it would attend a peace conference organised by Pugwash in the city on 23 and 24 January. According to one of the Taliban representatives, the meeting was held for academic reasons to discuss the situation in Afghanistan and not to deal with the process begun in Islamabad. Following the discussion, which was attended by 55 people, Pugwash published an 18-point list, the first of which states that “peace is an urgent need”. The Taliban later announced preconditions for joining the dialogue with the Afghan government on their website, including the release of prisoners, the removal of its leaders from US and UN sanctions lists, the end of propaganda against it, the departure of foreign troops and the restoration of the name Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. They also said that they would only sit down to negotiate with “believers” and not with invaders, non-Muslims and combatants. The violence did not stop during the winter. Earlier in the month, a well-known French restaurant in Kabul was attacked, causing the deaths of two people and wounding 15. There were three attacks in two days in Kabul, two of them near the international airport. The most serious was a car bomb that killed one person and wounded 30. In Uruzgan, a policeman attacked his colleagues, killing nine of them before fleeing to join the Taliban. A suicide attack on a bus of the famous chain ToloNews killed seven of its workers in Kabul. The Taliban declared this media outlet and 1TV to be military objectives in October. The Afghan intelligence agency arrested eight men of the Haqqani network, blaming them for the attack. Furthermore, the Taliban have continued their fight against ISIS, which is especially active in Nangarhar, taking their bases in two districts (Batkot and Chaparhar). However, they were unable to take Nazyan, where ISIS is strongest. The Afghan Army also attacked ISIS, killing 15 insurgents, and the United States launched a drone strike that killed at least 20 combatants. (ToloNews, 4/01/2016; VoaNews, 5/01/2016; Dawn, 11, 18, 20/01/2016; The New York Times, 18, 22/01/2016; ABC News, 22/01/2016; Long War Journal, 24/01/2016; Pugwash webpage)

UKRAINE (EAST): The OSCE announces a new agreement between the parties to implement the ceasefire

According to OSCE Special Representative Martin Sajdik, following a meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group on 13 January, negotiators from Ukraine and the self-proclaimed republics of eastern Ukraine agreed to renew their commitment to implementing the ceasefire. However, several violent incidents took place during the month and both sides blamed each other for violating the truce. The chief Russian negotiator in the Trilateral Contact Group, Boris Gryzlov, accused battalions of Ukrainian volunteers of disobeying the orders to implement the truce, though he stressed that there were pathways for progress. During the month, high-level diplomatic efforts were redoubled to make progress in resolving the Ukrainian crisis. Among these, US Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and Russian presidential advisor Vladislav Surkov met in Pionersky, Russia on 15 January in a meeting that Surkov described as constructive. Furthermore, the US and Russian presidents held a telephone conversation on 13 January. The White House urged agreement on methods for the local elections in Donetsk and Luhansk, one of the points in the Minsk agreement. US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met in Zurich on 20 January to address the Ukrainian crisis and other international issues in order to work on speeding up implementation of the Minsk agreement. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian Parliament postponed a vote on changes to the Constitution regarding the status of the Donbas region and the Ukrainian government again insisted on the need to respect the ceasefire, the withdrawal of troops and weapons from

Donbas and recovery of control of the Russian border if elections are to be held in eastern Ukraine. (OSCE, Reuters, RFE/RL, Jamestown Foundation, Itar Tass, 1-28/01/16)

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