



## **NGOs and Conflict Prevention in Burundi: A Case Study**

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### **Abstract**

Since the abortive coup in October 1993, Burundi has been in a severe crisis, however, lately reaching a more hopeful situation. The international community has made substantial efforts at preventing the escalation of the conflict and at contributing to a process for sustainable peace in the country. This includes the UN system, bilateral countries and in particular the neighbouring states. A number of NGOs have been among the actors. Here the efforts of some major NGOs lending their support to Burundi's peace process are discussed both as regards their support for peace building and for support to peace mediation. The aim has been to assess their performance based on their aims and objectives in relation to respective NGO's overall reasons for coming to Burundi in the first place, as well as their wider aims. Efforts are made to find common denominators and possible conclusions and recommendations useful for others involved in similar activities in Burundi and elsewhere.

### **Résumé**

Depuis le coup d'état avorté d'octobre 1993, le Burundi est empêtré dans une sévère crise, mais tente toutefois d'améliorer sa situation difficile. La communauté internationale a fourni d'importants efforts pour empêcher l'escalade de ce conflit, et contribuer à la mise en place d'un processus de paix durable dans ce pays. Parmi les membres de cette communauté internationale figurent les NU, les pays bilatéraux, particulièrement les pays voisins, ainsi qu'un certain nombre d'ongs. Ce texte décrit les efforts de certaines grandes ongs, soutenant le processus de paix au Burundi et participant aux opérations de médiation vers la paix. L'objectif est d'évaluer leurs

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réalisations, sur la base des objectifs que celles-ci s'étaient fixées en s'implantant au Burundi, mais également sur la base de visées plus larges. L'on tente de trouver des dénominateurs communs, ainsi que d'éventuelles conclusions et recommandations, qui serviraient à d'autres éléments impliqués dans les mêmes activités au Burundi et ailleurs.

## **Introduction**

Since the abortive coup in October 1993, in which the first democratically elected president was assassinated, Burundi has been in a severe crisis – the latest in a cycle of conflicts over the past forty years. The international community has aimed at preventing the escalation of the conflict and at contributing to a process for sustainable peace in the country. A number of NGOs have been among the actors.

Undoubtedly and unfortunately, the war will continue in Burundi, though, ultimately, a more inclusive peace process should lead to a more durable negotiated compromise and a more solid peace. The partial political agreement signed in Arusha on 28 August 2000 did not automatically bring peace but cleared the way for a sharper focus on essential negotiations between the real armed belligerents.

In this case study,<sup>1</sup> I will discuss the activities and efforts of some major NGOs lending their support to Burundi's peace process under two headings: a) support for peace building and b) support to peace mediation. The first refers to efforts in building an infrastructure of attitudes and institutions as a basis for a sustainable peace; the second refers to support to the peace mediation and negotiation process. Although closely interrelated, a major difference can be found in their time perspectives. While there are very few restrictions in presenting work under the first heading, it is only possible to give an overall presentation of the work under the second heading due to its confidential nature in the midst of a formal peace negotiation process.

My aim is to assess the performance of some NGOs in Burundi based on their aims and objectives. It is not sufficient to simply study whether the objective of each separate activity has been fulfilled or not according to short-term goals. It is also necessary to study the respective NGO's overall reasons for coming to Burundi in the first place, as well as their wider aims. By doing

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1. This case study, which was finalised in November 2000, was prepared as part of the Reflection On Peace Practice Project (RPP), a collaborative learning project of over 50 agencies worldwide that work to address violent conflict. RPP was jointly directed by the Collaborative for Development Action in Cambridge, Massachusetts and the Life and Peace Institute in Uppsala, Sweden.

this, my hope is to find common denominators and possible conclusions and recommendations useful for others involved in similar activities in Burundi and elsewhere.

### **Background: 1993–2000**

The countries in the Great Lakes Region have in recent years met with an increasing amount of conflict and violence – the genocide in Rwanda, the two wars in DRC and the continuous conflict in Burundi. All conflicts in the region are interrelated and none of them can be solved without major improvements in the rest of the region. Although this text mainly concentrates on Burundi, the regional perspective must always be kept in mind.

There is no doubt that Burundi has been in a state of severe political crisis for a considerable period. There is an abundance of written material on the distant and more contemporary history (Abdallah, Evans, Reyntjens, UNHCR, van Eck). An analysis of this documentation does not provide any easy explanations for the present situation. On the contrary, one of the few safe conclusions is that the present crisis results from an accumulation of past events, with one factor forming a building block for the next.

Burundi, together with Rwanda, is perhaps the most illustrative case of manipulation of a pre-colonial society, built up over centuries. Both countries were historically well developed political entities with a special background of co-habitation between different groups. The small size of the countries, the fertile soils and plentiful rainfall created a basis for population increase and nation building. However, from the latter part of the 19th century, i.e. the end of the pre-colonial era, over the two periods of colonial occupation by Germany (1899–1916) and Belgium (1916–1962), and particularly, in the post colonial period, the elite manipulated the relationships between the different groups, creating the deadly ‘ethnic’ divide which still prevails.

The causes of politicised ethnicity, between Hutu and Tutsi, are thus not easily defined. A crisis has been built up over time, leading to a severely divided nation on the brink of self-destruction.

Although Burundi went through a number of problems in the 1980s, it was seen as one of the best examples of democratic development in Africa. Elections took place in June 1993 and were declared fair and successful by the international community. However, to the surprise of many – including President Buyoya – the electorate voted in accordance with its ethnic allegiance. For the first time in modern history, the Hutus received recognition and gained responsibility for the country. The Hutus' self respect grew enormously – a very important fact to grasp in order to understand what is happening today.

Democracy was never allowed to get a foothold. Some Tutsi leaders, particularly within the army and the legal profession, did not accept the situation. As the number of Hutus introduced to government jobs grew, Tutsis felt ever more threatened, which ultimately, in October 1993, led to the assassination of President Ndadaye and a number of prominent Frodebu leaders. The following three years, the country experienced 'a creeping coup', as Professor Filip Reyntjens puts it, eroding the power of the elected government and increasing the power of mainly Tutsi extremists. The coup itself and the counter reactions are estimated to have led to the death of approximately 50,000 and, in the years after, about 150,000.

In July 1996, after the death of another Frodebu president and the killing of tens of thousands on both sides, Buyoya returned to power through a military coup. The international community had problems on how to handle the nullifying of a democratic government elected only a few years earlier. At the same time, most international actors saw the political chaos just before the military coup and thought that an alternative to Buyoya might result in increased oppression of the majority.

While most big powers gave Buyoya 'the benefit of the doubt' neighbouring states took clear positions against the military coup. With OAU's support, they imposed sanctions against Burundi and demanded the reestablishment of the pre-coup parliament, free political activities and negotiations between the different parties. Former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere was appointed mediator between the combating groups within and outside Burundi. After almost two years of very slow progress, the Arusha peace talks started in the summer of 1998.

Internal negotiations between the Frodebu-dominated parliament and Buyoya's government resulted in the internal partnership government in 1998. The Agreement was not a return to the democratic framework established in 1993, but was probably the only possible compromise at that time.

The negotiations in Arusha brought together 19 internal and external political and military groups; first under the leadership of Julius Nyerere and, after his death in October 1999, under Nelson Mandela. The greatest hurdle was how to get the different military groups to agree on and keep to an armistice. The main rebel groups, operating from Tanzania and DRC, were the most difficult to get on board, and since mid-1999 their fighting even increased. The violence travelled from one region to another. During 1999, the government felt so threatened that they moved large groups of people to guarded camps, which in turn increased the protests and counterattacks. This was the reason why most work, both openly and behind closed doors, had been concentrated on negotiations between the armed groups and the army.

Under the leadership of Mandela, the peace discussions at Arusha finally, on 28 August 2000, led to a partial agreement. After this study was concluded in September 2000 the peace process continued. On first November 2001 an important part of the Arusha Agreement was implemented as the new Transitional Government was installed. Parallel with this, the fighting between the National Army and the more and more split-up armed opposition continued. It was only late 2003 that all but one armed opposition group had laid down arms and joined the process. Peace agreements have been signed, members of the former armed opposition groups have joined the Transitional Government and integration of former rebel fighters into the National Army is under way. It is thus likely that the efforts discussed in this study have actually led to positive results even if the situation remains tense with great risks of setbacks and new conflicts.

### **International interest in the peace efforts**

After the coup in October 1993, the international community followed the development in Burundi with great concern. The self-criticism among international organisations and major powers after the genocide in Rwanda 1994, led to an increased number of initiatives which all aimed at preventing the escalation of the conflict in Burundi. The United Nations and the OAU appointed special representatives to Burundi and a number of international organisations, bilateral donors and NGOs sent missions and observers to assess the situation and give suggestions to actions in order to alleviate the crisis. International awareness was clearly established and there is no doubt a willingness to contribute to de-escalate the crisis existed.

During an initial period of political confusion, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Burundi (SRSG), Mr. Ould Abdallah, made a unique and important contribution. As far as his mandate allowed, he assisted in the co-ordination of outside interventions and in the assignment of specific roles to the different actors on the scene.

With reference to the neighbouring countries' interventions through the Arusha negotiations and the sanctions after the 1996 coup, it must be concluded that there are few other national conflicts in Africa where that many states have been so insistently involved in promoting peace and democracy in a neighbouring state.

Many of the major powers, such as the United States, France and Belgium (the latter, because of history) have intervened and been active on the international scene, but done surprisingly little in Burundi itself. In fact, most of them withdrew their aid and military assistance as a consequence of the abortive coup in October 1993. Belgium, France and Germany (closed in December 1999) retained embassies in Bujumbura. The United States and

Europe (EU) appointed Special envoys for Burundi, Howard Wolpe and Aldo Ajello respectively. Interestingly, while most European countries slowed down or completely halted their direct assistance to Burundi, the Netherlands, Sweden and Norway became more active.

### **NGO support to peace efforts**

A number of NGOs wanted to contribute to the peace process. I will mainly cover two of them, International Alert and Search for Common Ground, both invited by the SRSG to engage in Burundi. In addition to these two, I will shortly discuss the Sant'Egidio Community and the South African Centre for Conflict Resolution.

Search for Common Ground in Washington, DC, and its sister organization, the European Center for Common Ground in Brussels, are independent, non-profit organizations dedicated to transforming conflict into cooperative action. Established respectively in 1982 and 1995, they apply innovative techniques of conflict prevention and resolution, negotiation, facilitation, and collaborative problem-solving to a broad range of conflicts. At core, all their programs engage conflicting parties to identify where they share common problems and concerns since shared interests is the best way to develop mutual trust.

International Alert (Alert) was founded in 1985 by a group of human rights advocates in response to growing concerns over ethnic conflict and genocide. They recognised that the denial of human rights often led to internal armed conflicts, inevitably undermining efforts to protect individual and collective human rights and to promote sustainable social and economic development.

Alert's experience of conflict situations is that there can be no quick fixes. Its philosophy is therefore process-oriented, demanding time, patience and extended engagement in constructive efforts leading to medium and long-term change. Alert recognises the capacity of people to resolve their own conflicts and believes that they must be the primary actors in building sustainable peace, which is time demanding.

The Community of Sant'Egidio (or Saint Giles) was established in Rome in 1968. Members try to live by the light of the Gospel, and in direct relationship with the poor. Since 1986, the Community has been recognised as a 'public association of lay people within the Church', approved by the Holy See. At the same time, Sant'Egidio is broadly ecumenical, welcoming all Christians (and anyone who would like to participate) to its prayers and work.

Recently, the Community has become more involved in peace reconciliation. After their involvement in the peace agreement in Mozambique,

contacts with and requests from countries that have experienced similar armed catastrophes, have led to continued involvement.

The South African Centre for Conflict Resolution seeks to contribute towards a just peace in South Africa and elsewhere in Africa by promoting constructive, creative and co-operative approaches to the resolution of conflict and the reduction of violence. It's associated with the University of Cape Town. Mediation facilitation, training, education and research comprise the Centre's main activities with an emphasis on capacity building. The goals of the Centre are to:

- provide third party assistance;
- equip and empower individuals and groups;
- participate in national and regional peace initiatives;
- promote public awareness around conflict resolution;
- contribute towards an understanding of conflict and violence; and
- contribute to the transformation of the South African society and its institutions by promoting democratic values.

A number of other organizations have acted as catalysts for the peace process in Burundi. The Carter Center arranged two meetings at a crucial point in the process of conflict prevention in Burundi, opening the way for coordinated action by the neighbouring states. The two conferences, Cairo (November 1995) and Tunis (February 1996), were important for the Nyerere initiative to develop.

The Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation was established in June 1996, as a permanent tribute to Julius Nyerere's contribution to improving the sustainability and quality of human relations. The Foundation's work is based on Nyerere's philosophy and belief that all people are equal, deserve respect by virtue of their humanity and are the purpose and justification of all human activity in any society. Their work should reflect the values, principles and character of the Founder and first chairman Nyerere. The practical tasks for institutional capacity building and programme development are organically linked, requiring different but complementary methods for goal achievement.

The Burundi Peace Negotiations is a project of the Foundation. It is recognised that the Arusha negotiations are only one aspect of the Peace process. Monitoring the implementation of agreements and participating in creating the environment for its sustainability through acceptance and ownership by the people of Burundi are other critical aspects to be developed and is supported by the Foundation. Subsequent to the death of Nyerere, former President Nelson Mandela assumed the role of Facilitator of the Burundi Peace Process under the Foundation.

Action Aid, Christian Aid and Oxfam have also recently been active in Burundi, working with long-term support at the grassroots level. Although not discussed here, their work on the grassroots level is an important basis for peace building and long-term development. One celebrated example is the Action Aid program in the Ruyigi region.

### **Peace building**

The general objective of peace building activities is to create an attitude conducive to sustainable peace. It is a long-term project and invariably requires major attitudinal and societal changes towards democracy, respect for human rights, the rule of law, and protection of minority rights. It is difficult and probably not that valuable to assess every small intervention in the light of this overall objective. My purpose is to assess the different activities and interventions by Search for Common Ground and International Alert to draw some joint conclusions in order to find the common denominators which might be useful for others working in Burundi or elsewhere.

#### ***Search for Common Ground (SEARCH)***

In Burundi, Search's programs have taken the form of a Women's Peace Center, a radio production house, and a youth project. In addition, Search, in 1996, partnered with former ANC parliamentarian Jan van Eck to launch a Political Dialogue project centring around Van Eck's experience and expertise in negotiation and reconciliation.

Search for Common Ground's engagement in a conflict situation is guided by the following principles:

- 1) After making a commitment to long-term engagement in the country or region, they strive to maintain maximum flexibility to create and adjust specific programs aimed at reconciliation and peace-building. Analysis and evaluations are done at the outset of projects, but are also continuously used to identify areas of maximum impact.
- 2) 'Understand the differences, act on the commonalities'. In each Search project, the organization seeks to engage locally-based partners who represent the different stakeholders to the conflict, work with them to identify possible areas of mutual concern, and facilitate a process to pursue those shared interests. As a result, each project is completely different. The long-term goal is to develop relationships of mutual trust as the basis for addressing the conflict at hand more directly.
- 3) Seek high-impact 'leverage points'. Search works with local partners to seek those that may have the maximum impact on the conflict.
- 4) Focus on long-term reconciliation and peace-building. While Search sometimes engages in crisis-prevention as situations present



themselves, the main approaches involve long-term relationship-building efforts across traditional barriers. By working with local actors to identify and apply multiple strategies, the organization hopes to maximize breakthroughs at different levels of the conflict.

### *Studio Ijambo*

When Search for Common Ground decided to incorporate a media component, radio was the natural choice. Radio is productive and cost effective means for delivering information. In fact, radio is such a powerful tool in the Great Lakes region as a whole, that it has often been exploited to manipulate listeners and to promote fear, mistrust and violence. With the goal of using radio as a tool to achieve the opposite results, Search established Studio Ijambo, Burundi's first independent radio studio.

#### ■ Objectives

The Studio's objectives were to:

1. provide balanced coverage within and outside Burundi, allow access to accurate information, foster debate and discussion, and keep Burundi linked to the outside world;
2. build a regional network to increase Burundi's profile, allow for a regionally integrated approach and increase and integrate understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the media;
3. aid the peace process by broadcasting speeches from Arusha in a language that everyone can understand, and support discussions within the country as well as at the negotiating table;
4. emphasize Burundi's common cultural base by making and broadcasting cultural-based programmes, and help strengthen groups (such as women) who have played little part in the violence; and
5. bear witness and keep alive a sense of hope by demonstrating that not everyone behaves violently in a crisis situation, that other countries have gone through and come out of similar nightmares, and that there are always people of good faith.

#### ■ Project content

How many listeners Studio Ijambo's programmes reach varies greatly due to the changing availability of radio stations in the region. Nonetheless, Studio Ijambo has consistently aimed at producing relevant, accurate and entertaining radio programmes aired throughout Burundi and the larger Great Lakes region.

To start with, the Studio's main objective was to provide the country and region with balanced, reliable news on the quickly changing events. They hired journalists of varied ethnic backgrounds and assigned them to report on stories together, each journalist gathering information from communities

to which he or she had better access. The Studio then combined these reports into news programmes, aired over multiple radio stations.

Studio Ijambo's early news programming became one of the only reliable sources of accurate and unbiased information in Burundi. To date, most indigenous sources of news for international wire services including the Associated Press (AP), Reuters, Agence France Press and Voice of America (VOA) originate from former or current Studio Ijambo journalists.

Next, they introduced Social and Cultural Magazine Programmes, emphasising social and cultural programming encouraging reconciliation and highlighting areas of mutual concern. These include programmes on:

- a variety of social issues that touch Hutus and Tutsis alike, ranging from issues of healthcare to agriculture to the economy
- international examples of conflict situations and analyses of how they have progressed toward a peaceful resolution
- human rights, environment, peace and tolerance
- cross-ethnic solidarity and bravery, both during the crisis of 1993-1996, and more recently.

Most of the programmes are in Kirundi – spoken by all Burundians – and some in French.

One of the most important innovations in the Studio's programming was the addition of a soap opera to address sensitive topics and common daily problems – both entertaining and supportive of reconciliation. As news programmes, particularly those aired over the national radio station, are susceptible to censorship, the soap opera provides an alternative means through which some of the most sensitive matters may be addressed to the broadest possible Burundian audience. When the 275th such programme was broadcasted, a majority of the population listened to it, according to available statistics.

The Studio also produced four different educational programmes designed to inform and stimulate discussion. As well as having programmes that touch directly on reconciliation and information, the Studio works to provide a much needed entertaining, inter-community contact. While these comprise only a small portion of the Studio's output, they serve the essential function of reviving Burundi's cultural heritage and pride by celebrating local artists and culture.

One of the Studio's main functions is to develop the local capacity for responsible media. Several of the Studio journalists have been trained both inside and outside of Burundi on topics ranging from technical skills to responsible journalism.

The Studio also aims to build a regional network to facilitate reporting by expanding the number of outlets for its programming, participating in several training initiatives and developing partnerships. One of the main constraints on the Studio's effectiveness is the difficulty to secure a variety of broadcasting outlets, an issue being investigated and worked on.

### *Women's Peace Center*

#### ■ Background

Burundian women must be included as key players in the process of ethnic reconciliation and have access to the tools necessary to fulfil that role. Sustained conflict has resulted in a disproportionate number of women being forced to play non-traditional roles as head of households and other positions of responsibility for which many are ill-prepared and unsupported. The Women's Center was founded to offer a safe space for women of all ethnicities to come and talk about their problems and provide technical skills. The Women's center is staffed by an ethnically diverse team.

#### ■ Objectives

The Center's main objectives are to:

- empower female peacemakers by facilitating their capacity to network and cooperate, boosting their access to funding and resources, attracting publicity to their activities as appropriate and providing training;
- incorporate local administrations and partners to create environments where women can work in stability and peace with the understanding and support of local administrations;
- promote women's economic development;
- develop structures/platforms for women to voice their needs, issues and opinions, and support effective representation through appropriate government institutions, with training provided accordingly; and
- undertake regional initiatives and partnerships to promote understanding of the conflict and its causes and to share tools to manage and prevent further violence.

#### ■ Project content

Search for Common Ground established the first Women's Center in Burundi in January 1996. The Center provides a neutral ground for nascent women's associations to meet, plan activities and receive training. In addition to providing space for such gatherings, the Center also schedules weekly roundtable sessions on topics that concern women from all ethnic groups. These discussions initially attracted about 30 women, and have since increased to as many

as 150 women. Roundtables have proven to be an effective tool, as they allow tracking of changing needs.

Throughout its existence, the Center has been used equally by women from the highest levels of civil society to the grassroots level. By the end of 1999, between 100 and 200 women visited the Center weekly.

As the women's associative movement in Burundi evolved, the Center's role developed from being a simple forum for exchange and training to a link between increasingly independent and self-sufficient local associations and funders. Initially brought together by immediate needs, women can now find longer-term benefits from their associations, including friendship, solidarity and understanding. The Center promotes coalitions for effective action and activities in the larger community, instead of their immediate constituencies.

The Center works with the main local network of women's associations, CAFOB, and groups associated with Oxfam, World Food Programme and other international NGOs in a wide variety of fields including agriculture, law, human rights and the media. By collaborating, they avoid costly and inefficient overlapping.

The Center also continues to provide support for newer associations, but this is now more need-driven and targeted towards information on how to access local funding, build small income generation programmes, access legal assistance and work with local authorities and communities.

In addition, the Center seeks to organise events and projects around developments likely to affect all Burundian women. These become natural points of common ground and they have resulted in numerous benefits, including a network of conflict resolution practitioners, a platform for Burundian women to voice their needs, as well as forging much-needed co-operative relationships between civil society actors and relevant government institutions. The Center's Legal Rights programme is a successful example.

In addition to the Legal Rights activities, which have targeted every commune in Bujumbura, Gitega and Ngozi provinces, the Women's Center regularly holds workshops, training sessions and roundtables in the interior of the country. It has struggled with how to reincorporate the internally displaced populations to their original communities, an essential task for a lasting peace.

In 1997–98, it joined with Ligue Iteka and the Center for Conflict Resolution in South Africa to organise a Burundi Conflict Resolution Train the Trainers Programme that would complement the network of trainers developed through the International Alert/Unifem/Search. The programme's goal is to foster the growth of skilled conflict resolution trainers and facilitators.

### *Youth project*

Search is also working with the local Burundian youth association, JAMAA, to bring together young men throughout the city of Bujumbura and its surrounding areas for a series of recreational and communal activities designed to build relationships of trust and help them work together for positive social change. Search and JAMAA have targeted disadvantaged youth from each of the most divided districts in and around Bujumbura; those who are without an education or jobs as well as those who have suffered particularly from or actively participated in the ethnically charged violence. Most of the youth are leaders in their communities and all are aged between 18 and 29. Search and JAMAA have organized soccer tournaments, published a Kirundi cartoon book entitled 'A Better Choice' and organized a series of exchanges and weekend camps during which the youth have come to know each other as friends. In 2000, the project was hoping to raise the funding necessary to develop work camps, where ethnically mixed groups would work together to clean and rebuild their schools, churches, and hospitals. Search and JAMAA hope that by engaging youth, they can address one of the main sources of past instability and future hope.

### *International Alert (Alert)*

#### *Objectives*

After deciding to work in Burundi, Alert, together with the UN SRSG arranged a major conference in London in early 1995 where they defined relevant activities to be distributed between interested parties. A small team spending a great deal of time in Burundi started activities centred around three study tours to South Africa, leading to a number of follow-up activities. Based on guidance from the UN SRSG, and other analyses, the aim of Alert was defined as 'helping to prevent escalation of the conflict and contributing effectively to a process of achieving a just and peaceful resolution to the crisis in Burundi'.

Within that aim, Alert each year reviews and redefines its objectives, as in its 1999 annual report:

- *Learning and Analysis* – to continue to learn, analyse and share information about the causes of the conflict, and about forces and events affecting Burundi's progress to peace;
- *Dialogue* – to support and facilitate dialogue and confidence-building between political and ethnic antagonists;
- *Capacity-building* – to strengthen the knowledge and skills of individuals, and the capacities of groups and organisations to work for a just and sustainable peace;

- *Catalyst action* – to act as a catalyst in support of changes favourable to peace;
- *Advocacy* – to contribute to policy-making by international actors and advocate appropriate measures on the basis of analysed information.

#### *Learning, analysis, advocacy*

Alert's Burundi staff has constantly widened their network inside the country, and expanded their dialogue with dissident armed groups and with Burundian political exiles. As a matter of routine, Alert consults with the South African Centre for Conflict Resolution, the Sant'Egidio Community, International Crisis Group, and Search for Common Ground, as well as with leading academic figures who monitor and analyse events in the Great Lakes region. They also have regular meetings and exchanges with interested UN, North American and European foreign affairs officials and diplomats.

Information, perceptions and views come primarily from these direct contacts and are supplemented by continuous monitoring of events. Alert continues to produce and circulate short political analyses and updates. During 1999, Alert made a specific study of the Justice system and later a major study of education in Burundi and its significance for peace in the future.

#### *Dialogue and confidence-building*

Over the years, Alert has facilitated dialogue between different groups within the country as well as between groups in the country and those in exile. The partnership with the Compagnie des Apôtres de la Paix (CAP) is one such group.

CAP emerged from one of the study tours of 25 influential Burundians to South Africa in 1995. Today CAP is made up of Burundians from the two main ethnic groups holding positions of influence in political parties, the army, parliament and administration. Both moderate and more extreme tendencies of the conflicting political positions are represented and their objective is to develop dialogue and peace building among themselves and their peers. A number of CAP members also hold important positions in the negotiating groups at Arusha and in the government and National Assembly.

After their common experience in South Africa on what can be done for peace, they decided to stay together and form an NGO. Alert assisted CAP by providing institutional support and training and acting as a discussion partner. Their list of activities from 1995 to 2000 is impressive, though some planned activities never materialized, partly due to excessive ambitions and deteriorating security situations.

Given the events between June and November 1996, especially following the July army coup, into consideration, the fact that CAP survived is in itself

an achievement. For several years, this group was the only forum where grievances with someone from the other side could be discussed. Their mere existence was an extremely important example for other Burundians.

Political events in 1999 put again great strain on the trust between group members, but CAP came out strengthened by the crisis and has since been very active, for example arranging 'mini conferences', to broaden the debate, and meetings between parliamentarians and army officers and also arranging meetings abroad between internal groups and groups of Burundians in exile.

The Observatoire is a newly created NGO and a close cousin of the well-respected Burundian Human Rights organisation, Ligue ITEKA, envisaged as a partnership between three sectors – NGOs, journalists and parliamentarians to monitor government performance and publish occasional reports. This function will be critical for independent Burundian analysis of the provisions of a Peace Agreement, and of subsequent progress (or not) in the peace process. Though embryonic, Observatoire received a grant earlier in 2004 from Alert to carry out studies on government performance on justice and education; this work is due to be completed shortly.

Alert's goals in supporting the development of the Observatoire are two-fold. First, to ensure that politically independent analysis are produced by a Burundian organisation on a sustained basis. Second, to strengthen Burundian civil society by establishing a centre of expertise and excellence which can pass on analytical skills to other groups.

### *Justice*

Alert early signalled that the justice sector was a key factor in the peace equation and should receive more attention and support from the international community. In 1999 Alert carried out an initial study of the justice system with full collaboration of the authorities, NGOs and other interested parties. Alert has since been lobbying for well-targeted aid to correct weaknesses and distortions in the administration of justice.

Alert supported the new Prosecutor General's first meeting with all the provincial prosecutors to brief them on the new Penal Code enacted by the National Assembly in July 1999. A session was added to the meeting to enable an unprecedented face-to-face exchange between the Assembly's Select Committee on Justice and the assembled prosecutors.

In the latter months of 1999, the Minister and the General Prosecutor put forward a proposal aimed at reducing the numbers of prisoners held in preventive detention without proper charges by deploying supplementary magistrates from Bujumbura to several provincial centres to accelerate the examination of cases. Alert supported the scheme to be piloted in Ngozi and Bururi.

### *Education and youth*

In the past, Alert has funded peace education in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, but when a new Minister took over in 1998, with intentions to review the secondary schools curriculum, Alert decided to delay its support to peace education, but sought and gained his approval to carry out a study of the current state of education in Burundi. The report confirmed Alert's contention that the exclusion, which is a primary cause of conflict in Burundi, is rooted in the unequal access to education at all levels. The report will be used to mobilise large-scale international aid for education in Burundi as a *sine qua non* for the consolidation of peace.

### *Human rights*

Alert engaged in discussions with the Minister for Human Rights about his strategy, including the involvement of a wide range of groups like youth, women and church organisations. At the request of the Minister, Alert in 1999 arranged for an external consultant to carry out a review of existing Human Rights promotion institutions and to make recommendations. The consultants review was incomplete why Alert placed a Project Officer to work with the Ministry, the Centre for Human Rights Promotion, and Human Rights NGOs in Bujumbura for a period of several months. The outcome was a three part package (essential office and communications equipment; Human Rights promotion training; and production of home-grown Burundian Human Rights promotion materials), which Alert agreed to fund. Concurrently, Alert's project officer has been researching groups and organisations that potentially could carry out Human Rights promotion with these materials.

### *Women's Peace Programme*

The Women's Peace Programme (WPP) started in 1996, as a direct response to needs identified by women and women's organisations working for peace in Burundi, Rwanda and the wider Great Lakes region. Since 1996, WPP has facilitated dialogues between women from different ethnic groups in both Burundi and Rwanda as well as in the Diaspora. Alert also provides support for individuals, structures and organisations that support women's roles in the politics of sustainable peace. Alert's capacity-building work targets women working in local NGOs and associations, women community workers, and women operating at senior decision-making levels.

The specific objectives of the WPP in Burundi were:

- to strengthen the engagement of women in the politics of peace-making at all levels of society;
- to encourage and enable contacts and dialogue between ethnic and political adversaries;



- to strengthen capacities for peace-making and peaceful reform;
- to continue to learn and analyse issues, interests and forces that impact on conflict and/or peace processes in Burundi; and
- to contribute to international information, understanding and policy-making, and advocate appropriate policies and action.

The WPP provided CAFOB (a collective of at present 40 women's organisations working for peace and development) with institutional support to reinforce the operational capacities of its member associations. CAFOB has organised a wide range of activities including anti-poverty advocacy, promotion of women's rights and gender equality, advice on legal matters affecting women, and training in project management and reproductive health. In the area of peace-building, it has organised seminars, days of reflection, visits to displaced persons camps and has participated in regional and international conferences. The collective is also publishing a quarterly newsletter. CAFOB was requested to organise the 'Marche Mondiale des Femmes' for the eradication of poverty amongst women in collaboration with the Canadian NGO, CECI (Le centre canadien d'étude et de coopération internationale).

CAFOB has been instrumental in gaining acceptance of women at the Arusha negotiations. As a result, there is now a delegation of six women with 'permanent observer' status representing women civil society, in addition to four women who are members of the political parties delegations and the National Assembly.

An interesting example of a collaborative rather than a competitive way of working has been the informal partnership between International Alert, Search for Common Ground and the UN Women's Organisation, UNIFEM. Alert's contribution to the programme was the training and support provided to women peacemakers. The aim was to build awareness and increase women's participation, to promote dialogue at the community level. A group of 45 women (social and community workers, teachers and religious leaders among the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa) was trained in a series of six workshops, held since June 1996.

One major outcome was the creation of a network of community trainers called 'Dushirehamwe', which means, 'let's reconcile' in Kirundi. The network is very active in eight provinces, working with women from all ethnic groups and different sectors and has implemented local conflict resolution workshops and has trained local leaders. The network is also working with teenage girls, especially those living in displaced peoples camps or who have dropped out of school, with questions such as prostitution, HIV/AIDS and early marriage. The Dushirehamwe network receives direct support and technical assistance from two permanent local consultants contracted by Alert.

With Alert's support, a dialogue between six Burundian women in the country and six in exile took place in Kenya in July 1999. This meeting provided opportunities for women from both sides to engage in substantial discussions on the judiciary system, the role of the army and guerrilla factions as well as women's participation in the internal peace process and the Arusha negotiations.

The Committee of Women for Peace is a coalition of seven ethnically mixed women's organisations, including Dushirehamwe and the 'Association Femmes pour la Paix'. The coalition seeks to unite women around a common agenda for reconciliation and reconstruction in Burundi. The Committee, along with the Dishirehamwe network, CAFOB, SOFEPA and other women's organizations, will have an important role to play post-Arusha, not only in explaining the peace process to women, but also in lobbying international development agencies to take into account the role and needs of women in the reconstruction phase.

#### *Support to major institutions*

The Burundian Catholic Church has significant influence in Burundi. It has been part of the problem in the past and has to be part of the solution for the future. Alert's Senior Policy Advisor, Prof. Edmundo Garcia, is a specialist on church involvement in peace-making. As a consultant, he has made a number of visits to Burundi to familiarise himself with the context of the Catholic Church in Burundi, establish good working relationships with leading figures, and identify ways of encouraging greater involvement in peace work by the church. Based on that work, Alert has reached an agreement with the Church to assist in strengthening the embryonic Justice and Peace Commissions in collaboration with Catholic Relief Services and Jesuit Refugee Service. Two groundbreaking workshops have been arranged by Alert to bring experience from other church contexts.

Alert has long-standing connections with Burundi's Parliament, which has functioned more effectively since the installation of the 'partnership' government in June 1998. In February 2000, Alert arranged for two Burundian MPs to take part in a one-week conference in the UK on 'Models of Democracy'. With a similar capacity-building purpose, Alert arranged for the National Assembly Press and Information Officer to attend an appropriate training course in the UK for four weeks.

Alert also supports the Great Lakes Regional Parliamentarians Forum, AMANI. A Burundian branch of the Regional Forum was formally established in September 1999 with the public backing of the First Vice-President and of the President of the National Assembly.

### *Conclusions*

- Alert tries to put into practice its belief in the importance of local 'ownership' of peace-related processes.
- Alert emphasises qualities and significance of specific individuals. It explicitly recognises the importance of seeking out individuals on all sides of the conflict, and taking the time to build relationships on a basis of mutual confidence. It is prepared to maintain its moral and practical support over long periods.
- Alert emphasises updated analysis and action plans in the light of twists and turns in the overall peace process and of changes in attitudes and mindsets, and of course the impact of major events.

### *Assessment of the peace building programmes*

As stated above, peace building refers to the efforts in building an infrastructure of attitudes and institutions as a basis for a sustainable peace. The ongoing programmes of Alert and Search have undergone major evaluations in the past few years (Sörbö, et al. 1997; Abdallah et al. 1999). These evaluations note that for each activity, Alert and Search define their goal, strategy and detailed objectives/action plans. They further note that objectives are being fulfilled with the flexibility of making necessary changes. Thus Studio Ijambo produces the planned number of radio programs of the right quality, and the women's programs are training the planned number of women, establishing the use of the training in follow-up activities. Cost effectiveness is difficult to assess but it seems that cost consciousness has been adhered to.

The impact of the supported programs is more difficult to measure, though the organisations try to carry out listener's surveys and follow-up activities. The evaluations referred to above are quite positive about the impacts of the programs and interviews carried out as a follow-up are also on the positive side. Most people interviewed perceived that women have become considerably more active and influential in the peace dialogue. People also thought that the radio is now more involved in peace building activities and that seminars of the type that CAP is implementing are important.

The extent to which particular activities contribute to Alert's and/or Search's wider aim of peace in Burundi can only be assessed in relation to changes in other variables and the progress (or not) of the peace process over a longer time period.

Let's take a closer look at their relations to overall development, as far as that is possible.

1. Motives for engaging in Burundi. Both organisations have extensive experience from support to peace building in different parts of the

world. The violent collapse of the democratisation process in Burundi 1993 and the genocide in Rwanda, as well as the UN SRSG's plea for them to engage in Burundi made them want to explore what they could do.

2. The importance of a comprehensive view of the situation in the country and to possible solutions to the problems. This requires analyses and a basic theory of how to support peace-building. As shown in the presentations above, both organisations have well-established procedures for this. Search talks of 'finding real leverage points' for interaction, while Alert talks about 'creating spaces for dialogue'. In each case, there is a close relationship between the analyses and the strategy. Analyses can also be used for assessing ongoing programs and strategies. A preparedness to make necessary changes can for example be seen in the CAP program after the army coup in July 1996. However, closeness to the day-to-day developments may sometimes create an almost excessive readiness for readjustments. A proper balance has to be struck between the daily information received and conclusions drawn. Therefore the importance of information gathering and exchange being built into the program as a well thought through and continues process.
3. Full-time presence in Burundi. Search has a local office in Burundi and operates its projects to begin with through international staff, while aiming to recruit local staff in important positions. Alert operates with staff based in London, making frequent visits to Burundi and works almost exclusively with and in support of local partner organisations. Both Alert and Search engage international and local consultants if necessary. The main advantage of permanent presence in Burundi is the possibility to closely monitor the situation and activities and quickly react to changes. The advantage of non-permanent presence in Burundi is to give room for local staff to take the major responsibility and thereby ensuring sustainability. Both organisations seem fully aware of these pros and cons and seem to tackle the problems involved with their choice. Interestingly enough, in spite of its long-distance approach, Alert's analysis on political developments in the country have been well accepted and at times the most reliable.
4. Choice of targets for intervention. Search assesses the situation and selects a number of 'real leverage points' on which they develop special long-term projects for peace building, such as the Studio Ijambo. After having made their choice, development of new large-scale programs is difficult, but they are very open to adjust and adapt to new

possibilities within each programme. They will look for local specialists to run the program, but when they don't find the right people, they will recruit internationally. Over time, they develop a local capacity to reach sustainability. Search opts for 'local staff with a balanced temperament and desire to make a difference' that are trained on the job in technical or professional skills necessary. This is, which Search willingly gave witness to, a long and cumbersome process. Problems with keeping expatriate staff over long time periods hurts the continuity of the programme and makes the transition to local management longer and harder. Alert, on the other hand, investigates to find areas of interaction where there are already local initiatives and, even more importantly, local individuals, which can develop with external support. If activities are in line with their over-all analyses, they will be supported. Sustainability is therefore often directly assured. Both organisations make exceptions to their general rule such as Search's support to the Youth project.

5. Training components. To prevent escalation of a conflict and to start the long-term process of peaceful resolution of the crises in Burundi, a new attitude leading to new skills and different ways of behaviour must be built up. Many seminars, workshops, briefings and also longer courses have been implemented according to schedule. Most of them are well documented and contain self-evaluations and often follow-up activities. Hardly any training activities supported by Alert or Search have been undertaken as an isolated event, but rather, as part of a clearly defined process with short and long term objectives and with local back-up and support over a long period. Results are, however, extremely difficult to assess. In the interviews I conducted, it appears that the training has made people aware of the possible means of airing grievances and solving conflicts other than through violence, without making the trainees complacent or resigned to the status quo. This balance is very delicate and the issue should be kept under close surveillance at all times. The ethnic divide and educational imbalance favouring Tutsi can easily affect this balance.
6. Peace building in both local and international partnership. Search as well as Alert has worked closely with other available actors. In a number of cases, Alert has, after having acted as a catalyst at an early stage of a project, been prepared to let other actors/funders take over. For a small NGO like Alert, acting as a catalyst, facilitator and/or fund-raiser during an implementation of a well-defined programme might be more efficient than to actually run the whole process.

7. No quick fixes in peace building. Peace building programs of this kind must be process-oriented, run for at least 5–10 years and require a great deal of humility and flexibility. Also, wisdom and experience from development work in general offers relevant principles for conflict-related work (long-term strategy, importance of institution building, ownership etc.). All of this has to a large extent been true for Alert's and Search's strategy in Burundi.
8. Peace building is best done quietly. Neither of these two organisations are putting any emphasise on parading their activities or boosting their image in Burundi. Both Alert and Search learned this important lesson during past interventions in other regions.

## **Peace mediation and its support**

### ***Background***

Talking about 'peace mediation' reference is made to the support to the peace mediation and negotiation process. A number of NGOs including the Carter Center, the Community of Sant'Egidio, International Alert, the South African Center for Conflict Resolution of Cape Town University and Search for Common Ground through its Political Dialogue Project have taken part in the Burundi process. The Nyerere Foundation, is perhaps the most important one, but it is not discussed here, as it is part of the formal mediation process.

As the negotiation process was still under way at the time of the study, I have not been able to describe each activity of the various NGOs in detail, but rather to give an overall account to indicate which types of activities are involved.

The activities of all these organisations have in one way or the other been related to the mediation efforts among the many Burundian parties, and the formal peace negotiations. What really makes the situation in Burundi different from most other places is the degree of communication and the common analyses between the organisations. Keeping each other informed and using each person's or organisation's special knowledge and comparative advantage has proved to be extremely valuable.

The objectives for the support provided by NGOs under this heading are quite simply 'to make it possible for the Burundians to reach an agreement that will lead to a durable peace'. The means used are manifold – but aiming in different ways both to support the formal mediation efforts, and to help all Burundian actors to engage in and own the process.

### ***Peace mediation activities***

#### **a) Direct or indirect support to the Arusha process**

The Political Dialogue Project (financed by Search 1996–1999) consists of efforts, made by Jan van Eck (a former South African parliamentarian), to facilitate dialogue and to build trust between all major political and military stakeholders.

Based in South Africa, van Eck spent 1996–2000 roughly 40 percent of his time in Burundi during which he met with the President and most major political leaders and role players. His meetings were normally private talks, but sometimes carried out in larger groups, and were meant to encourage co-operative solutions and steps that could aid the negotiations.

Van Eck had also given direct support to the mediation process. Together with Bill Yates of Alert and Matteo Zuppi of Sant'Egidio, he helped to establish lines of communication between parties to the Arusha talks and parties that remain outside the talks, including key rebel groups. They tried to convince these rebel groups to make contact and interact with the mediator, a very important task in helping achieving Mandela's objective of getting all parties to the negotiation table.

Van Eck has actively assisted in the various rounds of the Arusha talks, often shuttling between opposing parties, helping them to find ways to smoothen potentially serious conflicts and sticking points. He has successfully helped opponents find areas of common ground while maintaining 'face', held multi-party roundtables enabling different sides to better understand their opponents' positions and assisted participants in both the official and unofficial processes see the importance of making negotiations as inclusive as possible.

Sant'Egidio has also offered its good offices for secret peace talks between the government of Burundi, representatives from the army and the major opposition groups in exile. Starting in 1996, these meetings, in Rome and in the region, have been important as safety valves, particularly when the Arusha process run into problems. Sant'Egidio has also been directly involved in the Arusha negotiations by supplying the chairman to one of the committees preparing the agreement.

Alert worked in a more indirect way by supporting local peace initiatives and organisations that were involved in the internal dialogue, such as CAP and Women's organisations. Many CAP members had participated in the Arusha talks on different sides but still kept informal contact with each other, which had been useful for the process. The mini-conferences held under the auspices of CAP was helpful for the internal dialogue during crucial periods of the Arusha talks. Another example was the visit they arranged for a former

senior British army officer to discuss security sector reforms with the Minister of Defence and senior army officers.

**b) Auxiliary activities to the mediation process**

Van Eck with his South African institute and Alert has also engaged in a number of auxiliary activities designed to support Burundi's mediation process. In June 1998, van Eck arranged conflict resolution training in South Africa for Burundian parliamentarians, followed in August by training for senior Burundian government officials. He also helped organise a conflict resolution workshop in Cape Town for a delegation of Burundian government and opposition leaders. This was followed up by a number of workshops for negotiators in the region.

These workshops gave participants tools to prevent and manage conflict both in their work and their communities. The training also exposed participants to a concept of negotiation and compromise which did not require them to 'give up everything' and which was not based on a 'win-lose' situation. Certainly, it is very difficult to measure the results, but many participants entered with the idea that compromising is akin to giving up, but left with an appreciation for the 'win-win' situation negotiations can achieve.

**c) Internal and external preparations for and conscientisation of the different constituencies**

Most efforts discussed above would be relevant to mention under this heading. It seems that from 1996 onwards we have been seeing a clear shift in attitudes towards gradual and widening acceptance of negotiations. The internal partnership as a concrete experience, the increasing emphasis on the future rather than the exclusive obsession with the past and the moderation of the political discourse are all tangible indicators of attitudes encouraged and helped by the above measures.

***Assessment of the peace mediation activities***

When the information for this paper was compiled (second half of 2000) only a partial agreement existed and it was still too early to assess the impact of the activities by all actors against the overall objectives for peace mediation. There is, however, no doubt that many of the activities discussed above have been extremely valuable in making the process of negotiations go forward. Personal interventions by people with long experience of the conflict in Burundi have definitely helped in overcoming obstacles, solving problems and getting new ideas and solutions introduced. Most important is, however, that these small NGOs have been able to act in support of the mediation team in Arusha – especially in keeping the non-participating parties in the picture.



The following factors have made these efforts useful:

1. A common deep analysis of the situation in Burundi and the needs for actions and strategies to reach a durable peace. This requires a deep knowledge of Burundi and good relations with different relevant institutions and individuals in the country.
2. Continuity and commitment. The same persons have been active and responsible for activities in this particular field ever since the NGOs began their support. The task requires full commitment and readiness to act on short notice whenever and wherever it is needed. Personalities matter!
3. Close contact with Nyerere/Mandela. Interventions have been aimed directly or indirectly at supporting the Arusha process. With the tacit understanding of Nyerere/Mandela and a maximum of discretion, they have listened to and informed the armed rebel groups about the Arusha process in which they did not participate. At the same time, efforts have been made to convince Nyerere/Mandela of the importance to include all parties in the negotiations. Considerable caution and common sense have been used in actions towards the peace mediation process. (It is of course of utmost importance that any actor in the mediation process should never counteract the appointed mediator. This can only lead to confusion and lessens everybody's influence and credibility).
4. Collaborations between NGOs. The NGOs involved have often acted in collaboration and always in contact with each other. They have been able to bring their respective know-how and experience to the joint efforts. It is a high-risk venture for any small NGO to participate in peace reconciliation and mediation. Doing it in consultation with others lowers their vulnerability and makes it possible to exchange views before entering into difficult commitments.
5. Long-term commitments. Although we are talking of ongoing negotiations, the actors have to be prepared to make long-term commitments. The present negotiation process in Burundi has almost been going on for eight years.
6. Utmost discretion. All the NGOs involved carry out their work quietly and with no or very careful reporting to the world outside its closest constituency.
7. Availability of supportive measures within the NGOs. The preparedness of the South African Centre for Conflict Resolution to give training as well as CAP's (supported by Alert) and Studio Ijambo's (Search's)

activities to make Burundians, including those in exile, aware of what is going on in Arusha are cases in point.

### **Conclusions**

In presenting and discussing the activities of the NGOs that are most active in the fields of support to peace building and peace mediation in Burundi, a number of conclusions and recommendations have been presented above. They are all of such aggregate nature that they might be useful to consider in future similar ventures, although, as the 'recommended' analyses will show, each case is unique.

On a more global level, this case study points at possible roles and comparative advantages of NGOs supporting the peace building and mediation efforts of a country. Much has been said in literature on possible risks and pitfalls for small NGOs to get involved in this very difficult field of activities. However, when done properly, NGOs can be extremely useful. Some of the reasons are their:

- openness and preparedness for flexible solutions;
- position as neutral and informal actors;
- speedy reactions to changes and opportunities;
- implementation capacity which official structures such as bilaterals or UN organizations, although desired, might not possess; and
- capacity to act as a go-between.

Burundi and its peace process have been strongly affected by major events in the country and in the region over the past decade. The Rwandan genocide; the Burundian coup in 1996; the regional sanctions; the two Congo wars; and the impact of Nelson Mandela taking on the Arusha mediation. All these have put a very high responsibility on the NGOs to be flexible and act with great care. With all necessary caveats in Burundi and pros and cons discussed above, it seems as if the NGOs discussed in this case study have been able to act in good support of the peace building and mediation.

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