**Creating an environment conducive to the conduct of**

**peaceful elections in 2015 and beyond**

**Overarching Purpose**

1. The purpose of this initiative is to build on national efforts in reviewing and drawing lessons from the 2010 electoral process and assist stakeholders in developing a roadmap towards the organization of free, fair and transparent 2015 elections through forums of discussions.

**Context**

1. Burundi organized its second post-conflict multi-party elections between May and September 2010. The third such elections are due in 2015.
2. Following the communal elections in May 2010, a group of 12 opposition political parties – including FNL, *Sahwanya*-FRODEBU, CNDD, MSD and UPD – rejected the results, alleging massive fraud and irregularities. The group questioned the neutrality of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) and called for the communal polls to be re-held. National and international observers, however, declared that the elections had been conducted in conformity with international standards and noted that any irregularities observed had not been significant enough to bring into question the credibility of the results. On 7 June, the 12 parties formed a platform as the *Alliance démocratique pour le changement-Ikibiri* (ADC-Ikibiri) and boycotted the remaining rounds of elections. Subsequently, the leaders of a number of the parties left Burundi, maintaining that they no longer felt secure. They remain outside Burundi today, to the detriment of Burundi’s still fragile political landscape, and rendering critical political institutions less broadly representative than they were in 2005.
3. With the midpoint between the 2010 elections and those anticipated for 2015, the moment is fast approaching for all national stakeholders with the support of their international partners participationto take stock of the experience of both the 2005 and 2010 elections and use the wisdom gained to inform preparations for 2015 and beyond.

5. While the electoral body, the CENI, was credited with organizing the 2010 elections according to international norms, it was faulted for some shortcomings and encountered some organizational problems. The term of office of CENI commissioners in general has been extended from three to five years in order to bring their tenure more into line with Burundi’s rolling electoral calendar. The new Commission was sworn in on 17 December 2012.

1. The electoral code of 18 September 2009, the legal framework governing the 2010 elections, was broadly considered adequate, including by the European Union election observation mission. However, a number of issues arose from the code that led to disagreements among political parties and impacted the conduct of the polls. These included the use of multiple versus single ballot papers, how to dispose of unused ballot papers, the number of tally records per polling station, the management of disputes, the financing of political parties and so on. There is thus a need to learn lessons and reflect on possible revisions to the electoral code. CENI conducted consultations with local authorities, political parties, civil society, media and religious groups. Topics of discussion cover the electoral framework, citizens’ responsibilities, codes of conduct, and the various roles of the different actors during the electoral process. Other organizations have conducted similar activities and the proposed workshop would therefore be a good opportunity for all stakeholders to come together and synchronize the various recommendations.
2. The international community provided over 85% of the funding for the 2010 elections and followed the entire process very closely. Given the global financial downturn and depleted donor budgets, as well as longer-term goals of sustainability of electoral processes, lessons can also be learned for 2015 in terms of financing and budgeting.
3. Finally, and most broadly, moving towards 2015, as in any electoral process it will be vital to ensure a fully “level playing field” in the pre-electoral period for all political actors. Lessons can be learned from 2005 and 2010 on how best to ensure that the pre-electoral and campaign periods are free and fair, and what additional measures may be needed.

**Contact Group Request and UN involvement**

1. It is against this backdrop that the meeting of the Great Lakes Contact Group of 9-10 February 2012 recommended that the United Nations in Burundi organize an exercise to reflect on Burundi’s 2010 elections and identify lessons learned to prepare for elections in 2015 and beyond.

**Orientations**

1. Including the widest possible range of perspectives on the 2010 elections will be vital to ensure that the lessons learned from 2010 are empirically valid, and to assist in building a broad national consensus in moving forwards towards 2015.
2. Particularly important, in this regard, will be to ensure that the voices of all stakeholders from the 2010 elections are heard. There is broad agreement across stakeholders that discussion on how best to prepare for the 2015 elections is timely, building on the on-going CENI consultations and drawing from national and international electoral observer reports. Participation should, therefore, be on the basis that the underlying logic for the exercise is clearly understood by all: to learn lessons in order to move forwards on a strengthened basis towards 2015.
3. The exercise is being organized in Burundi, to maximise national ownership. It should take place in an environment where all participants feel at liberty to contribute substantially to the proceedings. Some political actors important to the 2010 elections continue to have concerns about returning to Burundi. Their opinions are amongst those needing to be heard for completeness. It is therefore reassuring that the government has unambiguously and repeatedly invited all political leaders in exile to return, including to actively participate in the seminar.

**Convenor**

1. The United Nations would play the role of convenor, in view of the central role it played in the 2010 elections and in view of its recognized political neutrality, in consultation with the Government of Burundi, the CENI, and international partners.
2. In view of the sensitivity of the topics to be addressed, a number of different kinds of resource persons would be identified, in cooperation with the Electoral Assistance Division and Mediation Support Division of the UN’s Department of Political Affairs (DPA), and with UNDP. These could include a Senior dignitary who would provide a key-note speech during the opening ceremony; members of other electoral management bodies in the region or significant personalities that have been involved in successful electoral processes to provide lessons learned from their countries; an EAD Senior Expert who would present on the universal declarations and standards of holding free and fair elections and; support staff with electoral background.

**Proposed agenda**

1. The following clusters of topics is proposed:

**Cluster I – Technical aspects of the electoral process**

*What are technical lessons learned from the elections in 2010?*

* + Electoral code: how suitable was the electoral code for the 2010 elections? Should there be any alterations for the next elections?
	+ Polling process: what can be learned from the actual polling process? How can the process be ameliorated (voting cards, electoral lists, etc.)? How can the technical capacities of the independent national electoral commission staff (CENI) be ameliorated? Distribution and functioning of polling stations? Security at polling stations?
	+ Public outreach: What can be learned from the 2005 and 2010 electoral public outreach strategy? Did civic and voter education reach out to all citizens? Were political parties and electoral observers adequately briefed on the process? Were parties able to access media prior to the elections (allotted airtime per party, etc.)?

**Cluster II - Political aspects of the electoral process**

*What lessons can be drawn from the political dimension of the 2010 elections?*

* + The pre-electoral period: what lessons can be learned on how best to ensure a level playing field in the run-up to 2015?
	+ Inclusive elections: what led to the boycott of the elections by some political parties? How can an environment be created that is conducive to inclusive elections in 2015? How can the legitimacy of CENI be increased?
	+ Dialogue: how can consultations between political parties best be ensured prior to the next elections, and in what form?
	+ Electoral context: how is the success of elections linked to contextual factors such as DDR, SSR and Transitional Justice?

*What experiences can be drawn on from other post conflict countries?*

* + What can be learned from similar examples outside of Burundi? How have extra-parliamentary opposition parties been included in political/electoral processes?

**Cluster III – A roadmap for the 2015 elections**

* + Conclusions from Clusters I and II: reaching consensus on how to best apply lessons learned from 2010.
	+ Funding the 2015 elections: Based on existing resources from 2010, what is the estimated budget for 2015? What does the government foresee in its budget? How can the international community or/and regional partners/organisations help to mobilize funds for the 2015 election?
	+ Security: What must be done before 2015 to ensure free and fair elections (Police training, etc.)?
	+ Developing a detailed roadmap to help ensure a conducive environment for the holding of the 2015 elections.

**Participants**

1. Representatives of all stakeholders should participate in the meeting, including relevant ministries, the CENI, political parties, civil society, media, the international community and stakeholders from the 2010 elections.

**Format**

1. The exercise would be held under the Chatham House Rule.

**Timing**

1. To provide adequate time for preparations and to better build upon the findings of the CENI consultations and other activities, the seminar could be held in February/March 2013.

**Outcome**

1. The seminar aims to help advance democratic debate in Burundi and create a more conducive environment for the holding of the 2015 elections. The outcome would include a Final Report containing:
* Overall lessons learned from 2010;
* Specific recommendations for the different stakeholders (government, Parliament, CENI, opposition parties, civil societies, NGOs, international community, UN, etc.), and;
* Detailed elements for a road map towards the 2015 elections, for consideration by key decision-making institutions involved in the electoral process.