

Burundi Government, Opposition Begin Dialogue
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The Burundian government and opposition yesterday, March 11, 2013 began holding talks aimed at seeking ways and means of avoiding a repeat of the controversy over the 2010 elections that almost plunged the country into another civil war. The three-day discussions are the first since the 2000 Arusha Peace Agreement between the two sides, Radio France Internationale, RFI, reported.

Referred to as 'workshop,' the discussions have been organised by the United Nations in the capital, Bujumbura to prepare for the 2015 elections in a bid to keep the fragile peace in the country from collapsing. During the talks, participants will among other things, revisit the 2010 elections that were boycotted by the opposition in order to come up with what the UN described as a credible road map for the holding of all-inclusive, transparent, free and fair elections.

Since the 2010 boycotted elections, Burundi has been steadily drifting away from what was initially regarded as a peacemaking model, and violence from both the ruling party and the opposition is threatening stability, the International Crisis Group warned in its October 2012 report. Entitled "Burundi: Bye-bye Arusha?" the report analyses how control of the institutions by the ruling party and the boycott of the 2010 elections by the main opposition parties has made the power-sharing system defined by the 2000 Arusha Agreement irrelevant. The deal, it noted, was instrumental in ending a decade-long ethnic conflict that ravaged the country and established the foundations of a democratic system.

According to Thierry Vircoulon, Crisis Group's Central Africa Project Director, the Arusha power-sharing agreement has been replaced by a de facto one-party system characterised by the end of dialogue between the opposition and the ruling party, the government's authoritarian drift and the resumption of political violence. It warns that respect for political minorities and the rule of law has been largely ignored since 2010.

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