

African Coordination Group in the Heart of Africa

On the 9th of March 2012, after a worthwhile visit in Tanzania, the ACG set foot in Burundi - the heart of Africa. Nicole Thieke from Germany joined us in Bujumbura and we were warmly received by the Burundi IofC team. Chairman of IofC Burundi, Augustine Nzojibwami, Vice Chair Colonel Leonidas Nijimbere and the team, spent considerable time briefing us about the current situation in Burundi and about the main objective of Initiatives of Change in Burundi. This is to promote peace and reconciliation through dialogue among political leaders. We also had a heart to heart conversation about the essence of IofC in Africa.



ACG with Burundian hosts. Lake Tanganyika in the background On and the mountains of Eastern DRC on the horizon

March 13th Jean-Chrys Bisetsa, Administrative Secretary for IofC Burundi, took us to meet with **Oliver Hoehne**, the Political Councilor representing the Swiss Government in Burundi. Oliver Hoehne was very appreciative of the work done by Thomas Ntambu and the IofC Burundi team in peacebuilding and reconciliation in the country, and promised to continue his support for them. Since 2007 the Swiss Department of Human Security and Foreign Affairs has also given support to the Burundi IofC in its efforts to facilitate dialogue between political leaders.

In the afternoon we met **General Evariste Ndayishimiye**, a former member of the armed movement CNDD-FDD and now head of military security in Burundi. The issues of justice and peace were raised as well as the fear by many in Burundi of the planned Truth and Reconciliation Commission after years of civil wars.

The ACG had the privilege of attending the 13th Political Café, a monthly meeting for the various role players involved in the peacebuilding and reconciliation process in the country. This was attended by representatives of various political parties, faith communities, journalists and civil society. The theme for this particular 'Political Cafe' was '50 years of Burundian Independence'. Senator Silvestre Ntibantunganya, former president of Burundi (1994-1996), gave the keynote address on the theme and a lively discussion ensued. He emphasized the need for all to face their fears. He said, "Why do we think that we need power in order to solve problems? When you are in power you become afraid of losing power."

The meeting ended with the showing of the French version of the DVD, '*An African Answer*' on the work done by Imam Ashafa and Pastor Wuye from Nigeria in the Burnt Forest area of Kenya during the election violence in 2008.

We spent a morning with **Senator Domitian Ndayizeye**, a former President of Burundi (2000-2006). He is a business man and an engineer by



Senator Domitian Ndayizeye 3rd from right

training. He was concerned that the celebration of the 50 years of independence will not happen without problems. He stressed the need for training in democratic values and the fight to alleviate poverty. "If we do not have the will for peace among us, we cannot achieve peace as a country.... There is no culture of dialogue in Burundi. ...We need to listen to each other's fears," he stated.

Senator Domitian Ndayizeye was very appreciative of the round table discussions on the peacebuilding process in Burundi in which he participated at Caux (2003-2007). He felt that they were well organized and representative of all the 'tendencies' in the country and included wise people such as Bishops, the military and former Heads of State as well as representatives of the armed movement (Palipehutu-FNL). The meetings encouraged a certain level of openness. It was a good training for the Burundian participants.



Professor Alphonse Ntumba Luaba (4th from left)

At the end of the meeting Nombulelo quoted from the book, 'Peace Pilgrim': "Peace in Africa will never be stable until enough of us find inner peace to stabilise it." She went on to say, "What is needed in Africa are people like him (Senator Ndayizeye) who could be the 'moral conscience' of the continent."

The ACG also had time with **Professor Alphonse Ntumba Luaba** who serves on the Executive Secretariat of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region in Burundi. He is keen to send two young people to the All Africa conference which will take place in Cameroon, Yaoundé.

From there we visited the Archbishop of Bujumbura **Mgr Evariste Ngoyagoye** who had been one of the three bishops attending the last Burundi Round Table in Caux 2007. Nicole mentioned the courageous open letter the Burundian bishops wrote last December calling for peace and a just governance. The day before our visit he had also been attending a good part of the Political Café.



Meeting with Mgr Evariste Ngoyagoye in Bujumbura

We wish to thank Dr. Christian Garin Al-Azhari and Nicole Thieke who not only helped with the translation from French to English but in particular for their many years of care for and involvement in the Great Lakes region of Africa, together with other friends in Europe.

Compiled by Mediatrix Masava

on behalf of the ACG