

AGLI - Report form Kenya - June 3, 2010
First Burundi Election

Dear All,

I arrived in Burundi on May 26, two days after the first of five scheduled elections in Burundi. This first election for community leaders was supposed to occur on May 19, but was postponed twice due to the difficulty of getting the materials to all the voting stations.

While I was there the election results were announced. There was an amazingly high turnout of registered voters - 92%. The ruling party obtained 64% of the vote even though they lost in the city of Bujumbura and the area surrounding the city. To make up for this they obtained an extremely high 90% plus of the votes in up-country areas. The voting, by the way, was not for a candidate, but for one of the forty-three parties. I have not yet analyzed the implications of voting for a party rather than a candidate, but in an area where parties come and go and have little to distinguish them from each other, I find this "strange." The second highest party received 14% of the vote.

The most poignant comment that I heard was when I went late in the morning to visit the Friends' Women's Association's Kamenge Clinic. There were no patients. When we asked why, we were told that people were afraid of what would happen in the elections. They were hoarding their money and came to the clinic early in the morning only if they were very sick. In other words, the level of fear of the possibility of renewed violence was uppermost on people's minds.

The HROC office was a buzz of activity. In addition to the Burundi Election Violence Prevention Program that HROC is conducting in nine communities, HROC also became the lead organization for the Quaker Peace Network (QPN)observers. Nine organizations, eight Burundian Quaker and one Mennonite, had banded together to do election observing in Burundi. They had a total of 235 observers of which 72 were participants in the HROC program. While I was in the office, people continually brought in the five page forms that they had filled detailing their observations. Jess Brown, an intern from Canada, was busy entering all the yes/no/blank data on a spreadsheet. The comments in Kirundi needed to be read and analyzed by the Burundian staff.

The HROC staff participated in the training of all 235 election observers, plus the citizen reporters and the Democracy and Peace groups from each of the nine communities. Adrien Niyongabo, HROC coordinator, mentioned to me that the information that they were receiving from the nine communities where the program had been working for more than a year was far superior to the information received from the other QPN observers who had taken only the basic election observer training. Since they were still processing the considerable

amount of information collected, I was unable to get specific conclusions from the QPN observations and in particular the HROC observers. Adrien had been asked to make a public statement for QPN on the election (see the report below in for other observations), but he felt that this was premature and declined.

The next election is the presidential election scheduled for June 28. Below is a brief report from Andrew Peterson, AGLI's resident analyst for the elections. You can read his on-going blog, All Quiet on the Quaker Front, at <http://www.quakerfront.com/>.

Peace,
Dave

New webpage: www.aglifpt.org
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Was there an Election?

Comments by Andrew Peterson

Since my last post, there's been a fair amount of news surrounding the communal elections. When the preliminary results were announced, a group of eight, and then 13 opposition political parties dismissed the election as a fraud, called for new elections, and for a new independent electoral commission. The basis of their complaint was a series of claims about irregularities in the election process, ranging from the misuse of government property for campaigning by the ruling party in the pre-election period, to the lack of voting cards for certain political parties, to a claim that the electricity outage in 7 of 17 provinces during the time the votes were being counted was part of a deliberate plan to stuff ballot boxes. The list goes on, and ranges, in my opinion, from rather speculative circumstantial claims to some that were clearly confirmed by the press and other observers.

The major groups involved in election monitoring, such as the Catholic Church, the European Union, and COSOME (an organization of civil society groups) have stated that, despite some irregularities here and there, overall the elections were free and fair. To me, it is unfortunate that this message gets reduced to saying simply that things went well, either as a result of the way they present their observations or the way the media represents them. While it is true that many

things passed more peacefully than some imagined, to the extent that the ruling party and opposition parties used violence, intimidation, and other unfair tactics to influence the outcome needs to be highlighted and addressed, not marginalized under the mantle of all too rosy picture.

Then yesterday it was reported that five of the seven candidates that were expected to participate in the presidential election have dropped out in protest, claiming that the vote would be rigged in favor of the ruling party. This includes Agathon Rwasa of the FNL, the rebel group that ended their insurgency in 2008 and recently became a political party, and was the largest opposition group. Earlier, when asked how he thought the election went, Rwasa responded that there hadn't been any election. Then yesterday, when asked if pulling out of the race would harm democracy in Burundi his response was that there hadn't been any democracy in the first place.

Call it what you will, it puts Burundi in an awkward situation. If things go forward as planned, the incumbent President will run against only two other candidates who have miniscule chances of winning, and it will look like a rather thin version of democracy. Yet the ruling party is unlikely to make significant concessions such as the creation of a new electoral commission since that would admit guilt. It's hard to know where things will go from here.