Speech by Dr. Vincent Biruta, President of the Senate at the opening ceremony of the Conference

Vincent Biruta

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Presentations made during the two days conference focused on the following issues:
Electoral process in the Democratic republic of Congo (DRC).
Electoral process in Tanzania,
Military integration in Rwanda,
Demobilization process in Burundi,
Reconciliation process in Rwanda,
International Conference on the GLR.
The question of expulsion of Banyarwanda in Tanzania
Gacaca: origin and philosophy,
The transitional justice and Gacaca in post-genocide Rwanda.

A part from the presentations, six CCM PhD students at PADRIGU\(^1\) presented also partial findings of their work.

After all presentations, the closing ceremony was presided over by the Minister of Education, Dr Jeanne d'Arc Mujawamariya. In this regard, she thanked all participants and speakers with a specific emphasis on the hardworking for peace and development in the GLR and the active role universities should play in that process.

The following part of this report provides the integral speech by the President of the Senate, Dr Vincent Biruta, the summary of all presentations and conclusions and recommendations that were made by participants during the conference.

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Your Excellencies Ministers,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Ladies and Gentlemen the Representatives of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,
University Rectors,
Dear Participants from Burundi, DRC, Uganda, Sweden,
Dear Professors,
Dear Students,
Representatives of the Civil Society,
Dear Representatives.

It is a great privilege for me to join in today to open this conference on such an extremely important theme « Transitions and Peace Building in Africa ».

I would like here to thank the « Center for Conflict Management » of the National University of Rwanda and the Peace and Development Research Institute (PADRIGU) of the Goteborg University (Sweden) for having
organized this conference. I am also grateful to CCM for having thought of inviting speakers from various horizons. This reminds us that the search for peace is a collective endeavor and its consolidation requires effort from each of us.

I believe this conference will constitute a framework for academicians and political actors from our respective countries to exchange experiences, to learn from one another with the purpose of promoting peace through adequate management of transitions.

Your Excellencies Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear participants,

The countries of the Great Lakes Region have experienced at various times very violent conflicts which have forced populations into exile, internal displacements within countries. It is evident that the end of a conflict can not coincide with a situation which is as normal as that preceding the conflict. It is exactly during this intermediate stage qualified as transition that it is necessary to try to put things back in order to iron out problems left by these conflicts.

David Bloomfield describes this period so well:

"In the first years following a transition, post-conflict societies have generally to function in an unstable environment by trying desperately to face the problems which ensue from violence and their settlement, while giving the new frail democratic structures sufficient time to fit into normality. It is a critical period for developing coexistence habits, building the legitimacy of the new regime on measures and obtained results and responding to the general expectations of the new situation."

When Rwanda experienced the genocide in 1994, it was a new situation for the country. There was no recipe either in Africa or elsewhere, which we could copy and apply in our own transition. It was therefore imperative to innovate and often break off from the classic models of transition, be it in the area of justice, reconciliation and the political management of society.

The South African Archbishop, Desmond Tutu addressing the reconciliation aspect emphasizes the creative character of the solutions which must be implemented to manage transitions: "There is no practical route of reconciliation. There is no shortcut or simple prescription to heal wounds and divisions of a society after protracted violence." This is to underscore that there is no ready-made formula to manage and succeed the transition. Every country has to make itself ideal mechanisms taking into account the context, the challenges to take up and the potential opportunities to seize.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear participants,

Conflicts result in a lot of humanitarian and political challenges which absolutely need managing in a specific way. I would mention the repatriation of refugees and displaced persons, the disarmament and the demobilization of combatants as well as their reintegration in the regular army, the restoring of a reassuring social climate.

Rwanda was full of innovations to manage the post-genocide period. As an example, Gacaca Jurisdictions which constitute a justice with multiple objectives including the reconciliation, the truth, and getting around the slowness of
the conventional justice. Other innovations comprise the Committee of Mediators "Abunzi", the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, the sensitization sessions "Ingando" which were initially intended for the former combatants, but were finally extended to the various categories of the population.

I would not however fail to point out that some of these mechanisms have often been misunderstood by some of our foreign partners, as a result, I think, of their originality nature.

It is therefore imperative and useful for us that the partners who assist us in our transition and peace building processes, invest more effort to understand the complexities and peculiarities of the situations which we are brought to administer, the challenges we are to face, the limits of the classic schemas and the opportunities which are created by these innovative mechanisms.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear participants,

I hope that these two days will allow you to exchange on the various themes of the conference which address such issues as the post electoral process, military reintegration, citizenship, identity and the question of refugees, and the various mechanisms for managing transitions. Debates will be all the more enriching as this conference gathers speakers from the Great Lakes countries which have each its own experience which will benefit the other participants.

I would not end without thanking once again the organizers of this conference as well as the speakers who have accepted to come and share their experiences with the other participants. I also thank all those who have contributed in one way or another to the success of this conference.

To you all, I wish fruitful debates.

It is on this remark that I officially open the International Conference on "Transitions and Peace Processes in the Great Lakes Region".

Thank you

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THEME I: TRANSITION AND PEACE BUILDING: THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Transitions and Peace Building in Africa's Great Lakes Region,

By Prof. Anastase SHYAKA

This presentation focuses on the following points:

Understanding / defining the concept of transition and its linkage to peace building.

Overview of transitions which occurred in the Region since late 50's, emphasizing the impact