



# Eerste Kamer *der Staten-Generaal*

## **Welkomstwoord ontvangst van de President van Burundi Zijne Excellentie de heer Pierre Nkurunziza, maandag 31 maart 2014**

Your Excellency,

May I wholeheartedly welcome you to the parliament, the States General, of the Netherlands. Both on behalf of the Senate of the Netherlands and on behalf of my colleague of the House of Representatives, Mrs Van Miltenburg. Also I would like to introduce professor Hans Franken, vice president of the Senate, and Mr Raymond de Roon, member of the House of Representatives.

The sad reason your visit in December was postponed, was the passing away of Mr Nelson Mandela, a person who still lives on in our hearts today. Mr Mandela was and will always remain a symbol of strength, goodness and hope. He lives on in the thoughts and memories of the world community.

Your Excellency, I would like to express my condolences in relation to the casualties that Burundi suffered due to the heavy rainfall in February. I wish you, your delegation and your country all the best in overcoming this tragedy.

Since that sad day in December and the problems in February, we are now finally given the opportunity to meet in person. Your Excellency, I am honoured to meet you, the first democratically elected president of Burundi. Your visit demonstrates the mutual interest we have in each other's countries.

Today you are at the States General of the Netherlands. The States General are celebrating their 550th anniversary this year. Our country has a bicameral parliamentary system, with 150 members in the House of Representatives and 75 members in the Senate. Our current system dates back to 1815. We are proud to mention that our plenary hall is the oldest of its kind in the world in which debates are still being held. It dates back to 1650.

Your Excellency, your country has experienced major progress in the past decade and I am grateful the Netherlands has had a chance to be a partner in the developments. Burundi holds a special place in the foreign policy of the Netherlands since it is one of the fifteen partner countries in our national development policy. The focus of the cooperation between our countries lies mainly in the areas of security and justice, food security and



sexual and reproductive health rights. Well-functioning democratic institutions, free and fair elections and freedom of speech and press are key elements of a state rooted in security and justice.

International peace, security and justice are of key importance to the city where the States-General are situated: The Hague. The Nuclear Security Summit, the largest conference in the history of the Netherlands, held in the city of The Hague last week, underlines this.

With regard to international peace and security in Burundi, the Netherlands contributes to the improvement of the military capacity of your country. I would like to mention a recent example. At the end of last year and at the beginning of this year, in the context of the exercise African Support, the Royal Netherlands Army deployed engineers and medics to, amongst others, build a kitchen and construct a water supply facility at the military base of Rukaramu and to improve trauma care, hygiene and physiotherapy in the military hospital of Kamenge. The next round of the exercise 'African Support' is scheduled to start in October.

Since 2007 Burundi has been a large troop supplier to the missions AMISOM in Somalia, MINUSMA in Mali and now MISCA in the Central African Republic. In doing so, Burundi is fulfilling a meaningful role in securing the region in which it lies.

Your Excellency, your country is part of the East African Community. In 2010, the community launched its own common market for goods, labour and capital within the region. In 2013 a protocol was signed outlining plans for launching a monetary union within 10 years. I must say, this process looks oddly familiar! The Netherlands is one of the founding fathers of the European Union. Our country experienced the development of the European Economic Community into the political and economic European Union it is today.

In 2016, the Netherlands will hold the parliamentary presidency of the EU for six months. The Netherlands, and the States General, strive to make a worthy contribution to the EU during this period.

That said, I would like to suggest we start our exchange since I suspect we have a lot to share and discuss.

From our perspective as States General, we are very interested to hear from you how the parliamentary system in Burundi is set-up. Also, we are



very keen to speak to you about the current situation in Burundi, the prospects for economic growth and Burundi's role in the region.

Your Excellency, we look forward to having an open discussion with you.

I would like to give the floor to you.

Thank you.