Burundi’s Peace Process, The Road from Arusha

Africa Report N°2 20 Jul 1998

For the first time, most of the parties involved in the conflict in Burundi were present during the first round of negotiations that took place in Arusha from 15 to 21 June 1998. Their presence proved that the idea of negotiations had taken hold with them all. On 25 August 1997, the Burundian government had cancelled its planned attendance at scheduled discussions and laid down conditions for any future participation. These were mainly to do with lifting the sanctions imposed on Burundi on 31 July 1996, and moving the negotiations to a different venue. The peace process then remained blocked for six months.

While the idea of a negotiated solution has now been accepted, nobody has so far really tackled the actual substance of the discussions. After the first round each participant indicated a willingness to continue the negotiations on 20 July. However, with many ambiguities and questions remaining, there is a risk that the whole process may be scuppered if they are not dealt with swiftly in Arusha.

Burundians hold divergent views on the questions of sanctions, and this is also true of the international community, which has generally pronounced itself, explicitly or implicitly, in favour of lifting the sanctions. Among the countries of the region the consensus no longer appears to be as solid as two years ago; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kenya recently declared its support for raising the embargo.