In 2005, the UN Operation in Burundi (ONUB) supported the country in a challenging period of transition in which it sought to ensure security during the national election process as well as support disarmament, demobilization, reintegration (DDR) efforts. The threat posed by a potential spoiler remains, and violent confrontations afflicted the western provinces of the country throughout the year. Nevertheless, the installation of a democratically-elected government created a sufficiently stable environment by the end of 2005 that discussions in the UN turned to consideration of establishing a “partners” forum to consolidate the transition to lasting peace.

After years of violent conflict, the Arusha Agreement was signed in August 2000 by seventeen political parties, the government, and the National Assembly, but not by the main rebel groups—the Conseil National pour la Defense de la Democratie–Forces pour la Defence de la Democratie (CNDD-FDD) and the Peuple Hutu–Forces Nationales de Liberation (Palipehutu-FNL). In November 2003, the CNDD-FDD signed a cease-fire agreement and joined the transitional government. The FNL agreed to a cease-fire in May 2005, but despite strenuous efforts, remained outside the peace process as of November.

The African Union sent a mission to Burundi (AMIB) in 2003—the first-ever peacekeeping operation under the auspices of the newly formed AU. Staffed by contingents from Ethiopia, Mozambique, and South Africa, and military observers from other African countries, the mission was deployed on the understanding that the UN would take over after twelve months. Widely regarded as a successful mission (though not every aspect of its ambitious mandate was fulfilled), AMIB’s forces were integrated into ONUB on 1 June 2004, in a smooth transition.

ONUB has a broad Chapter VII mandate, including the right to use “all necessary means” within its capacity and areas of deployment to achieve its objectives. Over 6,000 military, police, and civilian personnel were deployed across Burundi throughout most of the year.

ONUB was mandated to oversee the disarmament and demobilization of militias and rebel groups; monitor borders, with particular attention to the illegal arms trade; coordinate with the UN Mission in the Democratic
Republic of the Congo; create a safe environment for refugees; and assist with free and fair elections. It played a significant role in humanitarian efforts, providing security to UN agencies working in difficult areas, and through a series of quick-impact projects.

Communal elections were held in June, which were relatively peaceful in all but five communes in Rural Bujumbura and Bubanza provinces, both FNL-infiltrated areas. A South African peacekeeper was shot, and there were numerous civilian injuries and fatalities, but turnout was high and the elections were widely considered a success. They provided a major victory for candidates allied with the main Hutu political party turned rebel movement, the CNDD-FDD. Despite a steady cycle of isolated incidents of violence by FNL rebels in subsequent months, relatively peaceful elections were held for the legislature and the senate in July. On 19 August, Pierre Nkurunziza, the leader of CNDD-FDD, was elected president of Burundi by parliament. This electoral process marked the first peaceful transition in Burundi’s history as an independent state.

Meanwhile, the DDR program has continued, with almost 20,000 former combatants expected to be demobilized by the end of December 2005. Police integration and training proceeded reasonably well throughout the year. Co-deployment of ONUB officers alongside their Burundian counterparts proved particularly useful during the constitutional referendum, when ONUB police offered assistance to the local police to strengthen security measures before, during, and after the voting process.

Securing a stable cease-fire with the FNL remained a significant challenge for Burundi. The election of President Nkurunziza saw a sharp increase in FNL activity in stronghold provinces. The continuing military confrontation has had serious consequences for the civilian population. The problem of impunity is yet to be addressed, although the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1606—which requests the Secretary-General to initiate negotiations with the Burundian government on setting up a truth commission and special chamber—is a positive step in that direction.

In September 2005, on the basis of extensive consultations with other external actors, the Secretary-General recommended the establishment of an “international support mechanism” that could possibly be linked with the UN Peacebuilding Commission (once established) to support the new government as it proceeds with consolidating peace in the country. With the window of opportunity provided by the election, the central challenge in 2006 will be to lay the foundation for a more sustainable peace. This will require tackling key peacebuilding challenges while ensuring that continuing tensions with the FNL and complex regional dynamics do not undermine the currently fragile stability.
October 2005 saw the first edition of the Human Security Report, produced by the Human Security Centre at the University of British Columbia. This aims to give “a comprehensive and evidence-based portrait of global security” with specific reference to violence against individuals. Its overall message is a positive one: contrary to conventional wisdom, since the end of the Cold War, “civil wars, genocides and international crises have all declined sharply.” It notes that:

- The total number of armed conflicts has declined by over 40 percent since the early 1990s.
- In 2004 there were twenty-five ongoing secessionist conflicts—the lowest annual rate since 1976.
- Between 1988 and 2000 there was an 80 percent decline in the number of genocides and politicides.
- Wars, on average, are growing less deadly: in 2002 the average armed conflict claimed 600 lives, compared with 38,000 in 1950.

The report argues that one major factor in promoting security has been a surge in peacekeeping, by the UN in particular. The number of UN peace operations has more than doubled since 1988, when there were just seven, and there has been an even greater proliferation in preventive diplomacy and peace-making activities. The report notes a recent RAND study that found that two-thirds of UN nation-building operations can be judged a success, but that only half of US missions reached the same level.

It also demonstrates a number of long-term trends that may shape the need for, and types of, future operations:

- By the beginning of the twenty-first century, wars in sub-Saharan Africa were claiming more lives than all those in the rest of the world: battle deaths in the region were close to zero in 1950, but have now risen to an annual average of 100,000.
- There is a clear correlation between poverty and war: a state with an annual per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of $250 has a 15 percent chance of collapsing into war within a five-year period. In contrast, where per capita GDP is $2,500, the probability is two percent.
- Nonetheless, both economic and ethnic discrimination are in decline worldwide: in 1950, 45 percent of governments practiced some sort of ethnic discrimination compared to 25 percent in 2002.

While emphasizing positive themes, the report states that there is “no room for complacency” and urges a continuation in the “international activism” it identifies as the key driver for peace in the 1990s.