

IGAD secretariat in conjunction with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa sub regional office for Eastern Africa Kigali-UNECA/SRO organized and hosted the 15th Intergovernmental Committee of Experts (ICE) and Ad Hoc Experts Group Meeting (AEGM) meetings at Kempinski hotel Djibouti from 21st to 24th February 2011.

The theme of the meeting was “Towards a sustainable Tourism industry development in the IGAD region.” This is the first step in the protracted process that the IGAD secretariat has embarked on of designing an IGAD tourism master plan in line with the Minimum Integration Plan (MIP) and the AU/NEPAD tourism action plan.

Speaking on behalf of the Executive Secretary (ES) of IGAD at the opening, the Program Manager Trade, Industry and Tourism Mr. Joseph Rwanshote noted that tourism creates employment and therefore can generate wealth and uplift the standard of living of the people in the region, stimulate environment protection and enhance cultural resources.

Mr. Rwanshote added that Trans-boundary tourism initiatives promote regional economic cooperation and integration. He indicated that the IGAD region like most regions in Africa, offers considerable but largely untapped potential for tourism in heritage/cultural tourism, sports, conference, beach/holiday resorts, rural, nature-based/adventure safari and eco-tourism.

The Honourable Ali Farah Assoweh, Minister of Economy, Finance and Planning in charge of privatization in the Republic of Djibouti presided at the opening ceremony of the meeting and made the opening statement. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Communication and Tourism of the Republic of Djibouti as well as representatives of the Diplomatic Corps and international organizations accredited to Djibouti graced the ceremony.

Delegations from the following IGAD countries attended the meeting: Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda. In addition the following countries which are members of the Sub-regional organization of Eastern Africa that have multi-year programs with UNECA/SRO attended: Burundi, Comoros, Democratic republic of Congo, Madagascar, Rwanda and Seychelles. The following sub-regional, regional and international organizations also attended: African Telecommunication Union (ATU), COMESA, EAC, Eastern African Sub-regional support initiative (EASSI), GESTARSE, International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), Kenya Ecotourism, Lake Victoria Research Initiative, NEPAD, Open Learning Exchange Rwanda, Port Management Association of Eastern and Southern Africa (PMAESA), PROMOTIC, Songa Africa, South Africa Institute for international affairs (SAIIA), United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), and United Nations Educational

Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

As the four-day meeting came to a climax it became clearer that the tourism industry in the IGAD region operates below competitive standards. The industry provides typically seasonal, low wage employment, inadequate services and there is significant leakage of tourism-generated revenues that do not trickle down to the lower communities which are in close proximity to the tourist attractions. As a destination, the IGAD region suffers from insecurity and poor image, these being only a few of the many constraints currently impinging on the realization of the full potential of the tourism sector in the region. Therefore innovative interventions are required to optimize tourism's potential to contribute to achieving economic development.

It is envisaged that the IGAD tourism master plan will help to foster a conducive business climate in which tourism operators will thrive. It is foreseen that the plan will guide efforts to enhance institutional capacities in the IGAD member states, improve the regulatory environment, enhance marketing of the region as a single tourism destination, train and upgrade the skills of the human resources/quality assurance, increase investment in the sector, scale up research and development, contribute to the gains of regional integration and the reduction of poverty.