



OFFICIAL REMARKS

WORKNEH GEBEYEHU, IGAD EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE IGAD CLIMATE APPLICATIONS CENTRE

Wednesday 27th October 2021

- Your Excellency, my dear brother **Uhuru Kenyatta**, President of the Republic of Kenya and Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Forces;
- Hon. **Raychelle Omamo**, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Hon. **Keriako Tobiko**, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forestry;
- Distinguished **representatives of the IGAD Committee of Ambassadors**;
- Representatives of our **Mother Organisation the African Union** and our **Sister REC, the East African Community**;
- Representatives of the **African Development Bank**;
- **Members of the Diplomatic Corps** and **representatives of IGAD bilateral & multilateral partners**;
- **Dear IGAD Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen**;
- All Protocols Observed;

I begin my remarks this morning by sincerely thanking **His Excellency Uhuru Muigai Kenyatta, a great leader of our continent and champion of our regional integration agenda for his unwavering support to IGAD and strong commitment to tackling climate change.** Your Excellency's cautionary note issued yesterday that Africa's GDP may reduce by 30 percent in 2050 due to climate change is sobering news indeed for us all.

I would also like to **thank the Government and people of Kenya for their generous donation of the 10 acres of land that this facility sits upon. Our gratitude also extends to you for supporting and hosting the IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC) for the last 32 years** since its inception as the Drought Monitoring Centre (DMC) in 1989 and thereafter, its subsequent evolution into ICPAC in 2007.

Excellency, Honourable Cabinet Secretaries, distinguished guests' ladies and gentlemen,

Climate change has emerged as one of the most topical and simultaneously, the most divisive issues of our time. And similar to the uneven response to the Coronavirus pandemic, discourse regarding climate change has been **overshadowed by partisan perspectives, interests and preferences at the expense of undeniable facts and irrefutable evidence.**

We have seen how doubt and denial of the existence of the Coronavirus has cost countless lives and taken a drastic toll on entire societies.

Similarly, rejection of the existence and impact of climate change will cost us not just our health, but our home as the human race; And I would like to emphasize that **we do not have a spare planet** in which we will seek refuge once we have succeeded in destroying this one.

Climate change is a problem because as a global village, we have been unable to agree on how to collectively address it. In other words, **the weather is changing faster than the policies and actions we can formulate to respond to it.** But perhaps **the biggest obstacle we face in tackling climate change lies within ourselves;** this is because **it requires each one of us to make deliberate far-reaching changes in attitude, lifestyles and perhaps even aspirations.**

What most regrettable in the current climate change discourse is that the focus is on either **shifting blame to whoever is considered to be the most responsible** for degrading our planet, **or engaging in 'Disaster Olympics' competing for whom has been most affected.** What is being ignored is that climate change is **impassive, indiscriminate and universally disempowering,** it will neither recognize nor respect the status, size, wealth or even military power of any given country.

At the same time, it is undeniable that the African Continent is on the front lines of climate change. **The 6th scientific assessment report released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in August 2021** confirms that Africa is warming much faster than the global average but is also the lowest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. **In fact, projections show that the IGAD Region is set to heat up twice as fast as the rest of the world.**

But **this does not in any way minimize or negate the vulnerability of the other parts of the world** to the effects of climate change including; desertification, rising sea levels, coastal erosion, wildfires, shrinking icecaps and flooding.

For us here in the IGAD region, **our economies and livelihoods are highly sensitive to climate variability and change.** This is because as a people, we are highly dependent on rain-fed agriculture, pastoralism and other forms of eco-dependency. **Allow me to also point out that Hydro-meteorological hazards account for about 90% of naturally induced disasters in IGAD region.** These disasters are getting more frequent and intense affecting millions of people in the region.

As we speak, **intense flooding has displaced over 700,000 people in South Sudan this year alone, and affected over 6 million of us in this region last year.** Remarkably, at the same time, **severe drought is affecting Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia threatening the food security situation for millions of our brothers and sisters** in the region.

This is on top of the challenges we have been facing with regard to desertification, the recent desert locust invasion and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on our ecology and economies. **It truly feels like we are facing a situation of death by a thousand cuts; but in this case, Climate Disasters are a self-inflicted wound.**

If we are to take our region as a model for the rest of the world, **it becomes evident that climate change and extreme weather are a global security concern because they act as a threat multiplier** and contributing factor to the degradation of already fragile economies, thereby **further exerting pressure on the security and stability of any given region.**

Other parts of the world are also facing climate extremes, which in turn have led to forced migration and increased risk of conflict over limited natural and state resources. Furthermore, the impact of extreme climate conditions on livelihoods **pushes people and States to resort to detrimental coping mechanisms to maintain their livelihoods** which in turn lead to further environmental damage.

Your Excellency, Distinguished Cabinet Secretaries, Ladies and Gentlemen;

We now have the **opportunity of a lifetime to turn around the greatest threat to our existence, into our greatest opportunity for endurance and survival.** We still have the chance to adopt appropriate and innovative approaches for climate change mitigation and adaptation. **For IGAD in particular, this begins with early warning for early action.** IGAD further advocates for the enhancement of climate services to support policy formulation and decision making as well as adaptation strategies and mechanisms.

In this regard, climate information must be at the forefront of policy and decision-making processes to build the resilience of communities and ecosystems. **ICPAC, as a Centre of excellence of the World Meteorological Organization, is well placed to provide impact-based climate forecasts** to enable users at all levels to make informed decisions. **IGAD is also drafting a climate change strategy** that aims to promote a climate resilient and green economy in the region.

As a consequence, **IGAD looks forward to supporting our Member States to close the gap between Climate Information and Climate Action.** ICPAC needs to be strengthened towards discharging this role.

The 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) which will be held next month, **also presents a unique opportunity for us here in the IGAD region to highlight the significant impact of climate change on our region to a global audience.** It is an opportunity to advocate for the **fulfilment of long overdue climate-financing pledges by developed nations and implementing our common climate agreements.**

However, let me note at this juncture **that we need more than Climate Financing to mitigate and reverse climate change;** it requires all of us to begin making a climate-conscious attitude change.

Financial transfers to developing countries on the frontlines of Climate Change are most welcome in the short-term, **but the gains we expect from adaptation and mitigation measures will be quickly eroded if we do not adapt and change the attitudes, practices and root causes that are driving climate change and environmental degradation over the long-term.**



I am therefore pleased to report to your Excellency and this distinguished gathering, **that ICPAC is one of the IGAD agencies, alongside the Conflict Early Warning Mechanism (CEWARN)** that is collaborating closely to **provide the Republic of Kenya with the necessary technical and statistical information on climate change, conflict and displacement** which **will be put towards reshaping global attitudes during Kenya's tenure as the president of the UN security council.**

Your Excellency, Distinguished Cabinet Secretaries, Ladies and Gentlemen;

In conclusion, I would like to thank our development partners including USAID, World Bank, AfDB, the European Union, NORCAP, UNDP and World Metrological Organization among others for the support extended to ICPAC and the construction and equipping these new offices and laboratories.

Our gratitude also goes to the UK Government for providing the supercomputing capacity that is driving climate modeling in the region. This support has enabled ICPAC to facilitate access for National Meteorological Services of countries in the region to have reliable national climate forecasts.

Thank you very much.