



OFFICIAL REMARKS
WORKNEH GEBEYEHU, IGAD EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

**IGAD MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON EMPLOYMENT, LABOUR
AND LABOUR MIGRATION**
21st October 2021
Djibouti

- Our Gracious host, Your Excellency **Abdoulkader Kamil Mohamed**, Prime Minister of the Republic of Djibouti;
- Your Excellency **Isman Ibrahim Roble**, Minister for Labour in charge of formalization and social protection, Republic of Djibouti;
- Your Excellency, **Tayseer Al-Nourani Mohamed**, Representative of the Republic of Sudan and Chair of IGAD;
- Excellencies Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers of Labour Representing IGAD Member States;
- Your Excellency **Amira El Fadil**, AU Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development;
- **Alexio Musindo**, Director ILO Office for Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, S. Sudan and Special Representative AU/EAC;
- Your Excellency **Amb. Aidan O'Hara**, Head of the EU Delegation in Djibouti;
- My **Esteemed Colleagues** at the IGAD Secretariat, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen all protocols observed;



It is indeed an honour and privilege for me to welcome you all to this the first IGAD Ministerial Conference on Labour, Employment and Labour Migration.

First, I sincerely want to **thank the Government and the people of Djibouti for hosting the IGAD Secretariat and the dozens of IGAD staff, including myself who are labour migrants here.**

It has been said that "***the first thing that a migrant sends back home is not money; it is a story***". If this is true, then I can assure you that for those of us who have come to work here in Djibouti, we have sent back stories of not just how hot it is here, but also how peaceful and beautiful Djibouti is.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Labour Migration is aspiration in motion; it is an expression of the desire of greater economic opportunities, improved social security and more secure livelihoods. History has been on the side of the countries that receive migrants; they have proven to be **invaluable assets that have made an incalculable contribution to the building of some of the greatest nations on earth.**

Here in the IGAD region, **our greatest asset is in our people.** According to the latest AU migration statistics report, **over half of our population (53.6%) is of working age between 18 and 60 years.** This means that we have over 150 million people in our region capable of being economically productive.

However, **the functional economic opportunities in the region do not match the labour assets we have in hand.** The review of labour participation data in the region showed that only 38.8% of our people were actively engaged in the labour force.



This means that 6 out of 10 of IGAD citizens are not fully participating in the labour force. The limited ability of the regional labour market to accommodate existing workers and absorb the new entrants is one of the principal drivers of labour migration from our region.

At the same time, the IGAD region is also home to an influx of labour migrants, **between 2008 and 2017, the number of migrants coming to seek work in the IGAD region increased by 196%**. According to the African Union, **this makes IGAD and the East African region the 2nd most popular destination for labour migrants after Southern Africa.**

This exponential growth in the number of migrant workers is in stark contrast with the modest growth of the population and labour force in the IGAD region. **The statistics revealed that three times more international migrant workers are entering Africa's labour market compared to the indigenous labour force.** This is creating increased competition for jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities.

This notwithstanding, the IGAD region is also endowed with significant natural and human resources including potentially arable land, hydro and marine assets, mineral deposits, oil & gas reserves, alternative energy sources, transport & communications infrastructure and **most importantly, a vibrant youth base that accounts for over 65% of the regional population.**

However, a vast majority of these constitute a dormant capital base which if properly activated and tapped into, hold significant potential to unlock and create vast employment and livelihood opportunities.



From a realist's perspective, **a number of important pre-conditions must be met and structural obstacles overcome in order to effectively unlock these opportunities, but also exploit them with any measurable degree of sustainability.**

First and foremost, it goes without saying that **peace, security and stability are the bedrock upon which a solid economic, social and regulatory base is laid upon.**

As long as fragility persists in IGAD at regional, national and sub-national levels, progress in creating employment, grooming an effective workforce and regularizing labour migration will remain limited. We all therefore have **a collective duty to lend our support in resolving disputes and preventing conflict at regional, national and inter-communal levels.**

Secondly, we need to **diversify the economic base of the IGAD region in order to reduce reliance on the agricultural and public sectors for employment creation.** This requires us to consciously broaden the scope of the private sector to expand opportunities and trigger innovations across all production and service sectors.

We must also **deliberately address the mismatch between the skills that are available and the demands of the labour market.** This calls for simultaneously analysing future employment trends and re-calibrating our national education systems accordingly to generate the required skill-sets.

Third and lastly, we must **pay attention to the regulatory and protection environment for workers and migrant labourers.** Whilst my first 2 observations above are broad-based proposals that require a whole-of-society approach, **this third suggestion falls squarely within the ambit of IGAD and our partners at this meeting.**

Already between IGAD and our Member States, the AU and the UN system represented today by the ILO, exists a wide-ranging regulatory framework that seeks to advance and protect the rights of labourers and migrant workers. **In this rich regulatory environment, the challenge lies in translating our well-intentioned policies into tangible actions.**

For instance, **we are all well aware of the disheartening accounts of the systematic abuse and exploitation of migrant workers** especially from the IGAD region who continue to make a significant contribution to economies abroad.

This is an **opportunity for this platform to put in place a regional mechanism that is sufficiently empowered to engage at the bilateral and multilateral level with regional bodies and nations** that are implementing legal frameworks that discriminate against migrant workers in labour law and promote normative systems which grant employers excessive control over migrant workers.

The **endorsement of the IGAD Regional Guidelines on the Rights Based Bilateral Labour Agreements (BLAs)** at this meeting will go a long way in formulating agreements that improve decent working conditions and enhance legal protections for migrant workers.

Moreover, the success of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) relies squarely upon the free movement of people, capital and services within our continent.

In this regard, **IGAD has made significant strides towards realizing free movement region through the universal adoption of the IGAD Protocol on Free Movement and its implementation roadmap by the Council of Ministers in June of this year.**



Whereas we are encouraged that 32 out of the 55 AU Member States have signed the AU Protocol on Free Movement, **IGAD is nevertheless concerned that only 4 have ratified it.** I call upon this meeting to take up the responsibility on behalf of IGAD, to **encourage the AU to fast track the adoption of the continental protocol on free movement by the remaining 13 Member states and the ratification of it by at least 11 more member states in order for it to come into force** and make a positive contribution to the labour, employment and migration situation on the continent.

Finally, I will conclude my remarks by noting that *we cannot improve what we have not measured.* **It is vital that all our activities, interventions and innovations are based on solid evidence, credible data and insightful analysis.**

During my preparations for this meeting, **it concerned me greatly that some of the labour data we are relying upon is almost 5 years out of date.** I call upon this meeting to **come up with ways and means through which we will have a clearer and more up-to date picture of the IGAD labour market.**

In this regard, I **propose the establishment of a regional observatory that will closely monitor labour market trends** and make projections that will inform policy direction and implementation for both national and regional actors.

I further urge this meeting to **consider formulating mechanisms to redress the limited capacity of our labour market institutions to collect and disseminate sector-disaggregated employment data** that can be collated within a regional Labour Market Information System.

Thank you very much.