



OFFICIAL REMARKS

WORKNEH GEBEYEHU, IGAD EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

13th IGAD HEALTH MINISTERIAL MEETING

Friday, 25th MARCH 2022

- Your Excellency and our distinguished host, **Senator Mutahi Kagwe**, Cabinet Secretary for Health Republic of Kenya;
- Honourable **Abdilleh Ahmed Robleh**, Minister of Health, Republic of Djibouti;
- Dr. **Lia Tedese**, Minister of Health, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (**Joining us Virtually**);
- Dr. **Fowzia Abikar**, Minister of Health, Federal Republic of Somalia (**Joining us virtually**);
- **Victoria Anib**, Permanent Secretary, Republic of South Sudan;
- Amb. **Magdi Ahmed Mofadal El-Nour**, Representative of the Minister of Health, Republic of Sudan;
- Honourable **Hanifa Kawooya Bangirana** State Minister for Health, Republic of Uganda;
- Dr. **Ayele Teshome Gonche** State Minister of Health, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia;
- Dr. **Abdinasir Mukhutar Ibrahim**, Director-General, Federal Ministry of Health, Somalia;
- **Saadia Salim**, Kenyan Ambassador in Djibouti;
- **Dr. Ahmed Ogwell**, deputy director of Africa Centre for Disease Control;
- **Dear IGAD Colleagues;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**



Allow me to begin by **thanking you for making time to attend this, the 13th session of the IGAD Health Ministerial Meeting on regional health initiatives in our region.**

As I was travelling here to join you in this meeting, **I had time to reflect on the importance of health, not only from a personal perspective, but also from where we all sit as custodians of public policy.**

And in my reflections, it occurred to me that ***healthy citizens are the greatest asset any of our countries can have.*** Indeed, when I cast my eyes around the world, it was evident ***that the wealthiest countries are also the healthiest countries.***

I am therefore honoured and grateful to host you all in this meeting where we can deliberate on **how to collectively grow the health capital of our states and people.**

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Our discussion comes at a time when **we are coming to terms with a post-pandemic world.** It also comes at a time when we are also **grappling with the effects of many other “political and ecological diseases” in the shape of conflict and insecurity here in the horn of Africa as well as Europe, drought & flooding and also pest invasions.**

Today we shall be **laying a firm foundation for the future of health policy in our region by endorsing a number of Regional Policies and Strategies, as well as the program recommendations that**

were approved in the 2021 Health Steering Committee Meetings held here in Mombasa.

We know that **when our people are on the move, diseases also move with them.** This meeting is in recognition that **our regional integration agenda also has implications on the health of our region** and we need to put in place measures that respond to the concerns arising.

Excellencies Ladies and gentlemen;

As IGAD we have always maintained that “**Borderlands are the theatre in which the future of our region will be decided**”. But at the same time our borderlands have some of the lowest levels of health, economic and social infrastructure.

Our **cross-border mobile population faces significant challenges in accessing to basic healthcare needs** and this has a negative effect on the regional economy and undermines the health security for millions of our citizens in the region.

However, **I am also encouraged by the spirit of brotherhood that our countries share** and the informal health integration that is already in place.

In July of last year, **I was privileged to visit the confluence of 3 of our Member States; Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia in Mandera** where I saw that the **communities in that region share the same healthcare facility in Mandera town.**

However, **I also noticed that they are facing a significant infrastructural challenge** in getting across the border, because there is no bridge spanning the River Dawo.

I want to **take this opportunity to once again appeal to the authorities to assist in facilitating the resolution of this challenge**, and I put my IGAD heads of mission in all the countries at your disposal to conclude this matter for the benefit of our people.

Your Excellencies;

The Covid-19 pandemic showed us how vulnerable we are not only health-wise but also politically and economically. **In January of this year, I was very concerned by the pile up of trucks that stretched over 140 kilometers on the northern corridor between Kenya and Uganda**, because we had to contain the spread of covid-19 through mandatory testing.

In protecting our people, we unfortunately had to hurt our economy. Similarly, **we are yet to harmonize our pandemic policy in the region.** Our mobile population still has to be tested for Covid-19 before they depart and when they arrive at their destination in the region.

While this level diligence is admirable in protecting us all from infection, **it is also a vote of no confidence in each other's health systems.** We need to demonstrate that we trust each other in health matters.

In this regard, **I urge us all to come together and have common and regionally recognized health standards** that will ease the movement of our people and remove non-tariff barriers to their economic growth and prosperity.

Excellencies Ladies and gentlemen;

As we now transition into a post-pandemic world, I want us to look back and ask ourselves 2 fundamental questions;

1. Have we **sufficiently capitalized on this crisis to seize the opportunity to strengthen our national and regional healthcare systems?**
2. **Are we ready for the next health challenge that will affect our region?**

I am gratified to note that the expert discussions which preceded this meeting, and **the declaration we are going to issue on cross border health initiatives in IGAD region will go a long way answering these questions and contribute to our shared objective to attain Universal Health Coverage.**

As IGAD **we shall continue to support our Member States to address the health needs of the under-served rural cross-border populations, refugees and host communities** and commit to work closely with existing cross border health systems.



From a policy standpoint, we have **a number of regulatory instruments already at our disposal to improve the health security of our most vulnerable populations** and I will draw your attention to 4 of them;

1. **IGAD Regional Health Data Sharing and Protection Policy,**
2. **IGAD Cross Border Health Policy (2021-2030)**
3. **IGAD Regional Maternal Infant and Young Child Nutrition Advocacy Strategy**
4. **IGAD Regional Knowledge Management Strategy for Health (2022-2026)**

I call upon all our Member States to **join hands in implementing and delivering on the noble intentions of these policy instruments** so that we can unlock, catalyze and capitalize on the latent health assets that are already inherent in our populations.

Excellencies Ladies and gentlemen;

As I come to the conclusion of my remarks, allow me to express **my sincere gratitude to all the experts from the ministries of health in all our Member States,** our development partners at the European Union, UNHCR and Refugee Commissions for the **continued technical and financial support the over the last 3 years** which has been vital for the formulation, validation and endorsement of the policy documents that are going to be presented to this 13th ministerial meeting.



I also take this opportunity to **sincerely thank our partners at the EU, AfDB, Sweden and Turkey** for supporting the IGAD COVID-19 regional response strategy that complemented our Member State's response to the pandemic.

Finally, I extend my sincere gratitude to Government of Germany through the GIZ, the Global Fund and the EU and the for the **financial and technical support that made the High-Level Expert meeting and this Ministerial gathering possible.**

Last but not least, ladies and gentlemen, **join me in appreciating the Government of the Republic of Kenya**, for accepting to host this meeting and also for all the support they have given us to collectively improve the health status of our people.

I thank you all for your attention.