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IGAD's EVOLUTION: *Furthering regional stability and integration*

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It is with great pleasure that I come before you today at **Chatham House, an institution renowned for its commitment to independent and innovative thinking**, as well as fostering dialogue towards solutions for international problems and challenges.

As the Executive Secretary of the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), **I am here to share with you the remarkable journey of our organization**, in spite of numerous challenges and **from our discussion here today and harvest in return, vital insights and ideas on the outside perspective of the critical role of IGAD** as a responsible global citizen and international agency of cooperation that is contributing to our collective peace, security and development.

Let me **begin with the path that has brought us to the city of London** and Chatham House today, before we **tackle in our discussions later this afternoon, the path that lies ahead of us.**

It is now 40 years since the worst famine in living memory began in the Horn of Africa. At the time, **a young man in his 20's from Shashemene in the Oromia region of Ethiopia, the period between 1983 and 1985, felt like the end of the world;** it was very challenging for him.



This youth saw suffering beyond imagination in his native country and in those days of limited communications, it was difficult to fully grasp the scale of the disaster in our country and across the region.

The **scale of the drought in the 1980's disaster was so big, that it was enough to move the needle and trigger a paradigm shift in global humanitarian response** not just for Africa but the rest of the world as well.

For example, here in Britain, the **Royal Airforce played a pivotal role in delivering food aid** to the most affected communities in our region and further the famine **significantly transformed the UK's enduring culture of charity** with organisations such as **Save the Children once again stepping into the breach to rescue young lives.**

But **most importantly for our discussion here today, these events motivated and triggered the establishment of IGAD in 1986.** From the ashes of drought and conflict that acted in concert to bring about these famine conditions, the leaders of our region came together in the spirit of solidarity and self-reliance **to create IGAD** so that we would **speak in one voice and act with one body.**

In the 37 years since its inception, IGAD has undergone a remarkable evolution. Originally established to respond to drought and desertification, **IGAD has grown to become a formidable force in peace-building and stabilisation, as well as an influential actor in regional development and integration;** and that is what we will be talking about today.



Within the first few months of its existence, **the infant organisation was already facing its first test with the 1986 desert locust invasion** in Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan. Sadly, **conflict conditions in the affected countries combined to prevent the implementation of adequate control measures** and as a result, the locust swarms spread further afield across to the neighbouring Sahel region to cause even more devastation for our brothers and sisters there.

This is one of the reasons why I strongly believe that conflict is the greatest root cause, trigger and driver of disaster; and I am convinced by the **message that it is peace and not conflict that is the greatest driver of human development.**

Our region in the Greater Horn of Africa has had a long history of turmoil and has been a crucible of conflict for over 100 years. We have been **subject to conflicts at both the state and societal levels** some of which were products of external forces such as imperialism and the cold war.

Even then, the end of imperialism or the cold-war brought no relief as some of our **Member States in the region underwent state collapse and disintegration.** Indeed, the wounds inflicted by conflicts between and within our member states during the post-independence period still linger, and we must be mindful of the fragile nature of political transitions in our region.

It is **with this particular consideration that the leaders of the Horn of Africa once again came together in 1996 to sign a new agreement for IGAD** that significantly expanded the mandate of this organisation.



The leaders charged IGAD with the additional responsibilities of promoting peace, prosperity, and regional integration. This new agreement marked a turning point for IGAD, as **it recognized the need to address not only immediate crises but also the underlying causes of instability in the Greater Horn of Africa.**

However, **the delivery of our aspiration for peace, prosperity and regional integration set out in the 1996 agreement encountered a range of challenges** that hampered our efforts in conflict resolution, economic integration, institutional coordination, stakeholder engagement, and resource mobilization.

Therefore, in spite of the expanded mandate of IGAD, **the Horn of Africa remains a crucible of change;** with ongoing processes of state formation, de-formation and re-formation. The consequences of these transitions have been far-reaching, including leading us to become **home to some of the of the youngest republics in the world with both Eritrea and South Sudan.**

The IGAD region has also been the **theatre of some of the most intense and protracted of conflicts since the end of the cold war in 1991** with 5 out of 8 of our Member States affected notably; Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Sudan. Notably for international security, **factoring in the ongoing war in Sudan, 2023 has witnessed the highest level and intensity of armed conflict since the end of the cold war.**

I must confess that out of an abundance of caution, our preferred approach so far, has been to treat each conflict in the IGAD region as a separate situation that is lodged at the national level. **And to be very honest, this approach has worked to some extent in selected instances.**



However, it is important to acknowledge while still respecting our fundamental principles of sovereign equality and non-interference in the internal affairs of Member States, that **many of the situations we face as a region require a regionally coordinated effort** that affords each of our Member States the motive, means and opportunity to overcome complex challenges that they are not in positioned to resolve unaided.

Indeed, the conflicts in the IGAD region are **complex, inter-related and mutate to spill across borders and assume a regional dimension.** Right now, **this is the case with the ongoing war in the Republic of Sudan** which has taken on an ethnic dimension in Darfur and Kordofan, and **it was also the case recently in Northern Ethiopia** before we were able to successfully negotiate the cessation of hostilities.

Similarly, the security situation in Somalia has improved significantly but **terrorist activity by Al-Shabaab remains a significant threat with intensified attacks** in Mogadishu, other parts of Somalia as well as neighbouring countries.

In spite of these challenges, IGAD has nevertheless **grown to become a credible and peace actors and trusted mediator in the region.** Over the years, the organisation has recorded a number of significant successes in peace and security including;

1. **The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement** that established the Republic of South Sudan;
2. The **2012 Revitalised Peace Agreement** that averted a looming civil war in the Republic of South Sudan;
3. **Main troop-contributing countries to the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS)**, and facilitating the political process in the Federal Republic of Somalia;



4. **Defusing of border tensions** between Ethiopia and Sudan;
5. **The 2022 Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA)** that brought an end to the conflict in Northern Ethiopia;
6. **The ongoing process towards peace in the Republic of Sudan** through the IGAD Quartet Group of Countries.

In addition to these challenges, **IGAD is also confronting a wide range of external and trans-national threats to its Member States including** the ongoing War in Ukraine, which has significantly inflated the 3F's Food, Fertilizer and Fuel for our people by Food prices by an average of 55.6% over the past 2 years; and consequently, contributed to the hazardous regional economic, humanitarian and food security situation.

As the IGAD region we are caught between the hammer of hardship and the anvil of adversity. Nevertheless, **these circumstances have forged in us, the remarkable resilience that we have come to be widely renown for.**

In the face of these complex challenges, **I can confidently report to this gathering that these crises are responsible for inspiring a higher level of political will in our region and we** have become more unified to address these problems.

Let me say that the dark cloud of Covid-19 came with silver lining for us at IGAD. This common threat that is blind to borders, deaf to mediation, insensitive to influence and mute to our anger, **reminded us that the problems affecting humanity are bigger than any of us individually.**



The pandemic taught us that we were either to hang together or be hung separately and IGAD rose to be greater than the sum of its parts and re-commit to the ideals of multilateralism through unified and coordinated action.

And I must add that successful regional responses in IGAD are not limited to peace and pandemics alone; in the last 4 years we have been '**infected**' with **the mindset that prevention is superior to response**. This mutation has resulted in an **evolution in our institutional capacity to issue early warnings to Member States and stakeholders** on all disaster scenarios for our region.

The early warning action taken by IGAD over this period has **significantly contributed to early action**, including the recent protracted drought, **where we recorded far fewer casualties to famine**. Similarly, responses to the desert locust invasion in 2020 **relied on the 90% accuracy of IGAD forecasting** the locations of swarms to contain and eliminate the pests.

Going forward into the coming quarter of the new millennium, **the next stage in the evolution of IGAD shall be defined by a commitment to improving stability and furthering integration** in the region.

I can now **reveal that it is I, the young man from Shashemene who before you here today that bears the weighty responsibility** of ready to **steering IGAD towards its destiny**. I am definitely a lot taller, and maybe a little bit wider, but I am **certainly just as determined as I was 40 years ago**, to make a positive difference and contribution for my region.



I assumed office of an IGAD is **very conscious of the important of the indispensable geo-strategic position that we occupy.** Our region sits astride of a major global shipping route that accounts for 20% of global maritime trade traffic and over 80% of shipping to Europe.

We are also very **aware of the humanitarian burden that conflict and climate change has paced on our region and the rest of the world.** The IGAD region hosts of one of the largest displaced populations globally, with 20% or 1 out of every 5 refugees worldwide and hosting 6 out 10 of the biggest refugee camps in the world.

This is why we have evolved as a region to have one of the most progressive refugee policies in the world. IGAD now is therefore all about being fit-for-purpose in this century and **fully capable of turning Aspiration into Action.**

The 12th of June 2023 was a watershed date for IGAD; it marks the beginning of our **third iteration** as an organization. At the 14th ordinary summit meeting that held in Djibouti, a new IGAD treaty was adopted **formulated to close 5 critical gaps** that held us back under the previous framework.

This new treaty provides a stronger **legal basis** for the establishment of IGAD, ensures greater **institutional stability, predictability** and **clarity;** cements **member state commitment,** and finally secures **full recognition and protection** for IGAD under international law, in order to deliver enhanced cooperation, coordination, and collaboration among our member states, strengthened institutional frameworks, and fosters a comprehensive approach to addressing regional challenges.



The **core message from our Heads of State and Government at the last summit meeting was that our region is better served by unity rather than fragmentation.** This is the spirit of our new treaty which among other things, strives to pull the region together to **originate and deliver local solutions to local problems** and further, **recognizes that stability is the core ingredient for prosperity** and in this regard, isolation is simply not a realistic option in today's inter-dependent world.

To this, let me add that **the timing of the return of the State of Eritrea to the bosom IGAD could not be better.** Now that **IGAD is fully re-constituted, we are also re-tooled with a new set of instruments** that encourage dialogue, compromise, and cooperation, fostering a sense of shared ownership and responsibility among our Member States.

In conclusion, **the evolution of IGAD is a tale of the power of resilience and adaptation in the face of daunting challenges.** We have weathered storms and learned from our experiences to emerge stronger and more determined to shape **a brighter future for the greater Horn of Africa** that is **defined by the desire for peace, the pursuit of shared opportunities, the respect for human rights, and the protection of our planet.**

Now, **IGAD finds itself at a critical juncture where the decisions we make under this new dispensation will determine the destiny of generations yet to come.** This is why I give you my word that IGAD is a responsible citizen shall continue to march forward hand in hand, harnessing the boundless potential of multilateralism and international solidarity as our guiding compass towards lasting peace, unwavering stability, and shared prosperity our region.



Our resilience is because we are always willing to evolve and embrace the reality of the situations that we encounter. **In the words of Charles Darwin, the father of evolution; "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change."** **IGAD is here to embrace change, respond with determination, and deliver on this positive promise of progress.**

Thank you very much.
