



OFFICIAL STATEMENT

WORKNEH GEBEYEHU, IGAD EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

THE IGAD TRAIN MISSION FOR REGIONAL INTEGRATION

A JOINT ETHIOPIA-DJIBOUTI COLLABORATION

UNDER THE OVERALL LEADERSHIP OF IGAD

Sunday 2nd July 2023

- Your Excellency, **Siraj Omar Abdulkader**, Secretary General of the Ministry of Interior of Djibouti, head of delegation and representative of our host country;
- Your Excellency Ambassador **Berhanu Tsegaye**, Ethiopian Ambassador to Djibouti;
- Distinguished **Passengers on this historic IGAD Mission Train**;
- Esteemed **IGAD Colleagues**;
- **Ladies and Gentlemen**,

Good morning and welcome to Nagad Station;

I am delighted to **officiate the launch of the IGAD Train Mission for Regional Collaboration**, a remarkable milestone in the ever-strengthening bond between the nations of our region. This historic event, under the auspices of IGAD, the Government of Djibouti and the Embassy of Ethiopia in Djibouti marks **a significant step towards promoting regional integration and further fostering enduring friendship and cooperation between Djibouti and Ethiopia**.

The ties between Djibouti and Ethiopia are deeply rooted in history, diplomacy, culture, and economics. Throughout the years, our two countries have shared common cultural values, social traditions, and languages, which have solidified their friendship.



Ethiopia is land-linked to Djibouti and has long relied on Djibouti's ports for imports and exports, with approximately 95% of its trade passing through these vital gateways. Moreover, the inter-connectedness of key infrastructure, such as transportation, telecommunications, trade and investment, security, electric power, and water resources, has further strengthened their bond.

As the saying goes, *"A good neighbour is more valuable than treasure."* The people of Ethiopia and Djibouti have demonstrated the true essence of this proverb because **they view each other's' countries as second homes and both proudly acting as lifelong ambassadors to the country of the other,** illustrating the depth of their mutual understanding and goodwill.

One remarkable testament to this inter-dependence is this Ethio-Djibouti railway, which has been connecting our two countries for 106 years. This railway has not only facilitated economic and social growth, but through positive migration and human mobility, has also brought the people of Djibouti and Ethiopia closer together.

This railway was upgraded to standard-gauge during my tenure as Minister of Transport of Ethiopia and I am gratified to see first-hand the transformative power it has had on our two countries and our region at large. I am **happy to have contributed to IGAD's core mission of regional integration as a minister.**

Now, I am **even happier as Executive Secretary to be at the helm of IGAD continuing the journey of this train,** as it facilitates free movement of people, catalyses the flow of trade and capital and fosters social and cultural exchanges that enrich both nations.



Excellencies,

It is essential to acknowledge that the migration landscape in the region is complex, with Djibouti serving as a transit hub for mixed migration. However, **through our collective efforts, we can provide a safe and humane environment for migrants and refugees.** In this pursuit, we must also prioritize mobility-sensitive healthcare systems, ensuring the well-being of our citizens during their migration journey.

In light of these realities, **the IGAD Protocols on Free Movement and Transhumance assume a crucial role as a regional legal framework to facilitate safe and orderly mobility.** These frameworks underpin our ideal of responsible and secure movement of people between Djibouti and Ethiopia, reinforcing our collective commitment to protect the rights and well-being of migrants and refugees.

For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Djibouti was the receiving nation for Ethiopian migrants deported from the Middle East. **I personally visited the transit centre in Ali Sabieh that was set up by the government of Djibouti and IOM to provide temporary shelter and screening of Covid-19.** The young men that I interacted at that time told me their dreadful experiences of suffering and gratitude to be home.

The welfare of our people is why **IGAD remains committed to wholeheartedly supporting our Member States to implement existing legal and policy frameworks** such as these protocols, fostering knowledge sharing, and promoting best practices. It is my hope that this train mission will serve as an opportunity to advance these efforts and further deepen the ties between Djibouti and Ethiopia.



Dear passengers,

You are now honorary ambassadors of regional integration, as exemplified by this IGAD Train. You have a **great responsibility to tell our story of how IGAD and Member States are playing a vital role in facilitating labour mobility** in a secure, orderly, and respectful manner. You will be **our envoys to demonstrate** how we are working to eliminate barriers to the movement of goods, services, and people across borders. You will **showcase our efforts** to create an inclusive environment that recognizes and values the skills and qualifications of labour migrants allowing them to thrive and live up to their full potential.

Indeed, **the partnership between Djibouti and Ethiopia**, characterized by trade integration and mobility, **is an important example of regional solidarity and it paves the way for greater regional collaboration** so that we can realize a future where prosperity, understanding, and collaboration flourish across borders.

Together, **let us embrace the boundless potential of migration and celebrate the enduring power of friendship and good neighbourliness** between the Republic of Djibouti and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Indeed, **the road to regional integration is paved with great opportunities for us all to harness the potential of migration** in fostering positive relationships between nations of our region and beyond, **let us seize the moment with both hands.**

I wish you Bon Voyage and a **safe and happy return** back, with equal warmth and good tidings from our brothers and sisters in Addis Ababa.

Thank you very much.
