



## **OFFICIAL STATEMENT**

### **WORKNEH GEBEYEHU, IGAD EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

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#### **High Level Ministerial Meeting for the adoption of the IGAD Regional Gender Strategy and IGAD Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace & Security**

**Wednesday, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

Our gracious host, Hon. **Aisha Jumwa**, Cabinet Secretary of the Republic of Kenya for Gender, Culture Arts and Heritage

Hon. **Osman Aden Mona**, Minister of the Republic of Djibouti for the Ministry of Family and representing the IGAD Chair;

Hon. **Alemitu Omut**, Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for Gender and Social Affairs

Hon. **Khadija Mohamed Diriye**, Minister of the Federal Republic of Somalia for Gender

Hon. **Aya Benjamin Lib Warille**, Minister, Minister of the Republic of South Sudan for Gender, Child and Social Welfare

Hon. **Ahmed Adam Bakhit**, Minister of Social Development, Republic of Sudan

Hon. **Peace Mutuuzo**, Minister of State of the Republic of Uganda in charge of Gender and Culture;

Your Excellencies the **Ambassadors of IGAD Member States**

Your Excellency **Hannah Tetteh**, UN Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa;

**Representative of the Canadian High Commissioner and Ambassadors of IGAD partner countries;**

Representatives of IGAD partner organizations **Sweden-SIDA UN Women** and **GiZ;**

Fellow **Members of my IGAD Family**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**, All Protocols Observed;



**Good Morning,**

I stand before you today with great honour and gratitude as we **convene for this momentous Ministerial Meeting to adopt the IGAD Gender Strategy and the 2<sup>nd</sup> iteration of the IGAD Regional Action Plan (2022 - 2026).**

**This occasion holds special significance as it coincides with the beginning of my second term** as the Executive Secretary of IGAD. It is therefore only fitting that we gather to celebrate, recognize, and support our life-giving women, when **we are redoubling our efforts to midwife the rebirth and rejuvenation of IGAD.**

Earlier this morning, **I addressed the entire cadre of IGAD staff, and we jointly reflected on the progress we have made together and surveyed our shared roadmap for the next four years.** We did so to appreciate that a clearer understanding that **increased gender participation and equity are top priorities for the Secretariat,** as it must reflect the face of our region and the makeup of our society.

I extend **heartfelt congratulations to the gender team at IGAD for their hard work and selfless dedication.** During my first term of office, we mainstreamed Gender across all our divisions and specialised institutions and appointed gender focal persons in all our programs. Today I am delighted that alongside our development partners from Sweden, GiZ, UN Women and other stakeholders, we have gathered to deliver these vital instruments for your consideration and adoption.

**If action is the distance between aspiration and reality,** then the gender team at IGAD has unquestionably taken concrete action to make IGAD's dreams come true.



The **launch of these instruments is closely linked to the increased opportunities within IGAD Member States for the representation of grassroots communities in governance and development.**

Of note are democratic transitions that facilitate enhanced public participation through representative models such as devolution, decentralization, and federalism are crucial components of our shared vision.

However, as we celebrate these milestones, we must not overlook the challenges and opportunities in women, peace, and security within our region. Women and children are the most immediate and long-term victims of conflict, violence, and climate-related disasters. **Regardless of country; Regardless of our colour; Regardless of age** women and children always constitute a significant proportion of the victims of conflict as casualties, refugees, and internally displaced persons.

Moreover, women find themselves on the frontlines of the root causes, triggers, and drivers of insecurity which are too many to single out. We must also collectively deplore the structural, policy, and legislative obstacles that impede the realization of the shared aspiration of women's empowerment and agency. I must caution that **a society that silences its women, denies itself the most powerful voice for peace and prosperity.**

However, **I am encouraged to note that we have powerful allies and loud instruments with which to amplify the voices of women in peace and security.** In this regard, I turn to UN Security Council Resolution 1325, as well as normative continental and regional instruments such as the African Union Gender Policy, the African Union Continental Results Framework for Monitoring and Reporting on the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda, the UN - AU Framework of Cooperation Concerning Prevention and Response to Conflict



Related Sexual Violence in Africa, and **most importantly for us here, the National Action Plans of IGAD Member States.**

I commend all our Member States for their bold and progressive steps in domesticating these global, continental, and regional instruments at the national level. **You are the most valuable players in this endeavour, and I appreciate that, in the spirit of subsidiarity and sovereignty, different member states operate in their individual national contexts, while ultimately sharing the same aspirations.** It is therefore essential to acknowledge and appreciate the varying paces at which Member States formulate and implement National Action Plans on Women, Peace, and Security.

**I extend my commendation to those that have made significant progress and offer encouragement, full commitment, and support of IGAD** to those still finalizing their respective plans. **IGAD champions multilateralism and international solidarity** and in this spirit, we are working closely with neighbouring sister RECs, namely the East African Community and ICGLR, on this initiative because **we recognize that that the issues, we are tackling here know no borders.**

However, **despite our shared vision, challenges persist across all Member States.** These challenges include minimal implementation of National Action Plans due to the absence of government funding and a lack of political will. Additionally, there is insufficient technical capacity and support to effectively implement the National Action Plans, as well as a lack of donor and UN support for implementation and monitoring.

Today, I call upon all stakeholders to collectively address and overcome these obstacles for the benefit of women, peace, and security, paving the way for positive transformation across our shared society.



Furthermore, **because our women do have agency, I want to make a special mention of the women of Sudan**, who are playing a pivotal role in restoring peace in our conflict-affected Member State. As we speak, **this conflict which is entering its 7<sup>th</sup> month has displaced close to 5 million people** of whom **an estimated 1.1 million are women and girls of reproductive age**, and over one hundred thousand are currently expectant and in need of access to lifesaving and essential reproductive health services.

It is precisely for reasons such as these that the IGAD Gender Strategy and Regional Action Plan are deigned to serve as concrete instruments for advancing the women, peace, and security agenda of our region.

I am happy to report that **the talks in Jeddah are yielding some positive results with an agreement on the issue of humanitarian access** especially for women and children. It is our hope that a ceasefire agreement will be reached soon and we can **resume the political process towards a civilian transition with the support and participation of the women of Sudan.**

Finally, Honourable Ministers, as you prepare to adopt the IGAD Regional Gender Strategy and IGAD Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace & Security, let me share a lesson I learned in my many years of public service, **Security is not just about protecting borders; it is also about empowering our women who are the architects and builders of the foundations and bridges that make a strong and resilient society.** As we embark on this transformative journey, let us unite in our commitment to creating a region where every woman is empowered, every voice is heard, and every life is valued.

**Thank you very much.**