



PEACE, PROSPERITY AND
REGIONAL INTEGRATION

OPENING STATEMENT

Workneh Gebeyehu, IGAD Executive Secretary,

3rd IGAD Ministerial Conference on Labour, Employment and Labour Migration Nairobi, Kenya | 22nd October 2025

- Your Excellency, **Dr. Alfred Mutua**, Cabinet Secretary for Labour and Skills Development, Republic of Kenya and our Gracious Host.
- Your Excellency, **Omar Abdi Saïd**, Minister of Labour, Republic of Djibouti representing the IGAD Chair.
- Your Excellency, **Solomon Soka Gignarta**, State Minister of Labour, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.
- Your Excellency, **Yusuf Mohamed Adan**, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Federal Republic of Somalia.
- Your Excellency, **James Hoth Mai**, Minister of Labour, Republic of South Sudan.
- Your Excellency, **Mangar Buong Acok**, Acting Minister, Ministry of Interior, Republic of South Sudan.
- Your Excellency, **Dr. Mutuuzo Peace Regis**, State Minister of Gender and Cultural Affairs, Republic of Uganda.
- Your Excellency, **David Muhoozi**, State Minister of Internal Affairs, Republic of Uganda.
- Your Excellency, **Denisa Elena Ionete**, EU Ambassador to Djibouti

Good Morning,

1. At the outset of this Assembly, allow me to express, on behalf of IGAD, the Secretariat and my own personal conviction, our deepest condolences to the Government and people of the Republic of Kenya, to the family of the late Right Honourable Raila Odinga, former Prime Minister of the Republic of Kenya, and indeed to all those across the IGAD region who mourn his passing. His distinguished life, which was one of sustained commitment to democracy, unity and the dignity of all, has left an indelible imprint on Kenya, our region and the African continent.

2. I further express profound gratitude to the Government and people of Kenya for hosting this critical conference. Kenya's leadership in labour migration governance. Alongside your contemporaries, our esteemed IGAD Member States, you collectively are working towards safe, orderly, legal and rights-based migration through comprehensive bilateral labour agreements with Gulf states, robust pre-departure programmes, and pioneering diaspora engagement, setting benchmarks for our region.
3. We are privileged to convene with you, the policymakers, who are charged with the responsibility of setting policy and translating it into practice.
4. I also wish to acknowledge with gratitude the invaluable technical and financial support provided by our partners, specifically the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the European Union (EU), whose steadfast collaboration continues to strengthen our collective efforts.
5. It would be remiss if we did not recognise the IGAD Secretariat team for their professionalism and tireless dedication in preparing for this Conference, which stands as a testament to our shared resolve to promote decent work, safe migration, and inclusive development across our region.
6. Four years ago in Djibouti, we made a promise through the Djibouti Declaration to transform how our region governs labour, employment, and migration. Today, that promise faces its greatest test.

7. Across our region, 62 million people face acute food insecurity while 25 million have been forcibly displaced. These are mothers, fathers, and young people searching for dignity through work, safety through movement, and opportunity wherever it can be found.
8. Our region of 280 million people, 60% under age 25, should have its youthful energy as our greatest asset. Instead, with unemployment at 16 % and youth joblessness reaching 28%, we are witnessing a demographic dividend turn into demographic risk.
9. Every year, 1.5 million of our citizens migrate to the Middle East and Gulf countries seeking work. While many travel through regular channels, too many driven only by desperation, take the Red Sea route. In 2024 alone, 60,000 migrants arrived in Yemen irregularly. Over the past decade, this route has claimed 3,400 lives. Behind each number is a family waiting, a future extinguished.
10. Workers who reach their destinations often find conditions that strip them of dignity. Domestic workers endure contract substitution and wage theft. Construction workers face unsafe conditions without recourse. The kafala system continues to enable exploitation and deny basic freedoms. We know these realities. The question is simple: what will we do about them?
11. The Djibouti Declaration charted a clear course across seven pillars. We established the IGAD Ministerial Committee, developed a ten-year Plan of Action, and launched our five-year Programme for Implementation.
12. Progress has been real but uneven. Some Member States have advanced bilateral labour agreements and strengthened pre-departure programs. Our 2022 labour attaché training improved consular support.

13. Yet the gaps remain wide. ILO convention ratification lags. Social protection coverage barely reaches 10%. Fair recruitment remains more aspiration than reality.
14. This conference must be different. The lives being lost in the Red Sea, the abuse faced by workers abroad, and youth unemployment pushing people toward irregular migration demand urgent, coordinated action.
15. We need concrete commitments. On these migratory challenges related to this Red Sea route, we need a whole-of-route approach addressing root causes, providing humanitarian support in transit, dismantling trafficking networks, and ensuring decent work in destination countries through equal partnership with Gulf Cooperation Council states.
16. On labour migration governance, the time for baseline assessments has passed. We have done enough and have the information in our hands. We need functioning bilateral labour agreements that protect workers' rights, not just manage flows. We need portable social protection so a worker from Somalia can access healthcare in Saudi Arabia. We need regional coordination on fair recruitment that eliminates exploitative fees.
17. The IGAD Single Visa Initiative represents a transformative opportunity to facilitate legitimate movement while reducing incentives for irregular migration.
18. But technology alone will not solve these challenges. We need political will to harmonize labour laws, recognize qualifications across borders, and ensure economic integration serves working people, not just capital.

19. Our upcoming IGAD 2026-2030 Strategic Plan positions labour and livelihoods at the heart of regional integration, recognizing that sustainable peace and climate resilience depend on people having decent work and pathways to prosperity.
20. The Doha Dialogue launched in May 2024 provides a platform we must leverage strategically. But dialogue without implementation is merely ceremony. We need binding commitments, joint monitoring mechanisms, and consequences for non-compliance.
21. Excellencies, the young woman in Obock deciding whether to board a smuggler's boat tonight will not be swayed by our declarations. She will be swayed by opportunity at home or safe pathways abroad. The migrant worker facing abuse will find protection only when we establish functioning systems for redress and ensure bilateral agreements have teeth.
22. This is our moment to move from policy to practice, from statements to systems, from aspiration to action. Let this conference produce a covenant with measurable commitments, clear timelines, designated resources, and accountability mechanisms.
23. The 25 million displaced persons in our region, the millions trapped in unemployment, and young people contemplating dangerous journeys are watching. History will judge us not by the elegance of our resolutions, but by whether lives change after we leave this room.

Thank you.