



OPENING STATEMENT

H.E. Workneh Gebeyehu, IGAD Executive Secretary

IGAD Leadership Academy Alumni Conference

16th December 2025, Nairobi, Kenya.

- Your Excellency and our good friend **Uhuru Kenyatta**, Former president of the Republic of Kenya,
- Hon. **Musalia Mudavadi**, Prime Cabinet Secretary and Cabinet Secretary for Foreign and Diaspora Affairs, Republic of Kenya,
- Your Excellency **Riina-Riikka Heikka**, Ambassador of Finland to the Republic of Kenya,
- Mr. **Tomonobu Hori**, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of Japan Embassy to the Republic of Kenya,
- Hon. **Crystal Asige**, Senator, Republic of Kenya
- My Dear colleagues at the IGAD Secretariat and especially the Leadership Academy,
- And above all **you, our young men and women from the region**, our outstanding sons and daughters going where none have gone before as the first tri-cohort of our Leadership Academy,

Good evening.

1. It is a profound honour to stand before you today at this remarkable gathering: this reunion of visionaries, trailblazers, and passionate leaders from across our region.
2. Today, we do not simply celebrate the passage of time since our days at the IGAD Leadership Academy; we celebrate the enduring spirit of leadership, unity, and progress that binds us together.
3. Each of you arrived at the Academy with dreams and aspirations; some clear, some yet unformed. Through rigorous learning, shared challenges,



and the power of collaboration, you emerged not just with knowledge, but with a renewed sense of purpose. This Academy was not just a place for you to pass through, it was a crucible where your ambitions were forged into commitments, and your potential was transformed into action.

4. As alumni, you are more than the sum of your individual achievements. You are a living network; an ever-growing community of leaders who understand that the challenges facing our region are complex, but not insurmountable. You know that leadership is not about titles or positions, but about service, resilience, and the courage to act even when the path is uncertain.
5. But before I continue, I must express our deepest gratitude to Your Excellency, former President Uhuru Kenyatta, for honouring us with your presence and for accepting to be the patron of our Academy. Your extraordinary leadership has not only shaped the destiny of Kenya but has inspired hope and progress throughout our region. Your belief that young people are not just inheritors of the future, but architects of the present has guided this Academy's vision from its inception. We are truly privileged to have you here.
6. To Hon. Musalia Mudavadi and the Government and people of Kenya, your generosity in hosting this Academy has given our vision a home. To Japan, whose support demonstrates a foreign policy that sees youth as solutions to empower, and to Finland, thank you for believing in what we are building together.
7. Tonight, as we launch this Alumni Network, I want to speak plainly: This is not another ceremony. Not another certificate to collect. Not another WhatsApp group. This is the infrastructure our region needs for real and lasting transformation.



8. Today, I urge each of you to remember the promise you made to yourself and to your communities when you first chose the path of leadership. Our region needs your vision, your integrity, and your unwavering belief in a better tomorrow. The lessons you learned here, especially about empathy, innovation, and collaboration, are not just for you; they are the seeds you must plant in every organization, every initiative, and every community you touch.

9. Here is what I am asking of each and everyone of you:

Stay passionate. Channel your energy strategically. Passion with purpose changes everything.

Stay connected. Not just digitally but connected across borders. Because our challenges do not recognize frontiers. Climate change doesn't respect boundaries. Economic shocks touch everyone's pocket. Your generation understands interdependence in ways mine is still learning to grasp.

Stay ambitious. Be ambitious in your vision for justice, in your standards for governance, and in your refusal to accept limitations that others seek to place on your potential.

10. Let us continue to support one another, to lift each other up, and to open doors for those who will follow in our footsteps. Let us be the leaders who inspire hope, foster peace, and drive sustainable development. Let us be the generation that turns challenges into opportunities, and adversity into triumph.
11. You are the new young leaders from our remarkable region. United voices that can harmonize into a chorus for change, the connected minds that together can solve problems that have proven too challenging for too long.



12. We have watched you launch enterprises, reshape conversations, and bring innovative solutions to age-old problems. You don't wait for perfect conditions. You create opportunities where others see obstacles.
13. So, here's my final word: When you leave this room tonight, remember that you're not leaders-in-waiting. You are the leaders we need right now. The future doesn't begin when we hand you responsibility. The future accelerates when we work together, when your innovation joins hands with our experience, when your urgency meets our resources, when your vision rallies with our commitment to build a brighter future for our people.
14. As we celebrate your journey and look to the future, remember: the story of IGAD Leadership Academy is still being written right now, by each and everyone of you, every day, in the choices you make and the lives you touch.
15. Now go forth fearlessly. Lead. Innovate. Build. Transform what needs transforming. Preserve what's worth preserving. And when you do, and I am so certain that you will, remember this moment. Remember that we stood together and agreed: Your time isn't coming. Your time is now. And we are here with you every step of the way.
16. Thank you for your commitment, your courage, and your leadership. The future is bright, because you are brighter.

Congratulations, Alumni. We are proud of you.

Thank you.