

Opening Speech H.E. Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu Executive Secretary, IGAD Mediation Reflection Conference Reimagining Mediation in a Fragmented World: The Challenge to African Multilateral Leadership

Excellencies,
Honorable Cabinet Secretary,
Distinguished participants,
Colleagues and friends,

We gather today at a moment of profound consequence—
not only for our region,
but for the very idea of peace mediation itself.

This is not an ordinary moment.
And this is not an ordinary gathering.

We meet at a time when the foundations that once sustained
mediation are under visible—and growing—strain.

The world that made mediation possible—anchored in shared norms,
functioning multilateralism, and a minimum level of trust among
states—is fragmenting before our eyes.

We are not simply living through a period of crisis.
We are living through a transformation.

An era in which mediation is no longer insulated from geopolitics—but
shaped by it.

An era of competing initiatives, fragmented authority, and diminishing
coherence.

An era in which legitimacy is no longer assumed—but must be
earned, patiently and politically.

At the same time, mediation is unfolding in an increasingly transactional environment.

The space for principled, consensus-based engagement is narrowing, while short-term deal-making is gaining ground.

And yet—precisely because of this—mediation has never been more necessary.

Before I proceed further, allow me to express our profound appreciation to our host country.

We are honored to convene this important gathering here in Nairobi.

I wish to extend our deepest gratitude to His Excellency President William Ruto, to his government, and to the people of Kenya for their unflinching and consistent commitment to peace and stability in the Horn of Africa.

Kenya's role in advancing mediation and peaceful resolution in this region is both distinguished and enduring.

Its leadership—political and material—has been indispensable to IGAD's work.

We are equally blessed by the presence of our Guest of Honour, the Cabinet Secretary for Foreign and Diaspora Affairs, the Honourable Musalia Mudavadi.

Your Excellency, your diplomatic skill, your generosity toward IGAD, and your consistent service to peace are deeply valued.

It is therefore most fitting that we are holding this reflection here in Nairobi—in recognition of Kenya's leadership and commitment to peaceful solutions.

May I respectfully request that you convey to His Excellency the President and to the people of Kenya the collective gratitude of all those gathered here and of IGAD.

For IGAD, mediation is not optional.

It is our most visible political responsibility.

Our people do not measure us by what we promise—they measure us by what we prevent.

By the wars that do not happen.

By the conflicts that do not escalate.

And by the peace that becomes possible.

Mediation is where the credibility of multilateralism is tested.

And in our region, it is where history will judge us.

The Horn of Africa stands at a dangerous crossroads.

What we are witnessing is not a series of isolated crises—but the emergence of a system.

A system of conflict that is interconnected, regionalized, and deeply entangled with external dynamics.

The boundaries between internal and external have blurred.

The lines between political conflict and geopolitical competition have all but disappeared.

Wars today are fragmented, prolonged, and sustained by war economies.

There is no longer a single center to negotiate with.

What does mediation look like in a world without a center?

We are not starting from zero.

IGAD carries a proud legacy of mediation.

These efforts succeeded because they were anchored in legitimacy, guided by political clarity, and supported by real coordination.

But if our past gives us confidence—our present demands honesty.

Mediation today is under strain.

Too often, it risks becoming crisis management rather than conflict resolution.

Because mediation is not technical.

It is political.

It is about power.

It is about legitimacy.

And ultimately—it is about building a shared future.

We must confront a growing tension.

Between principled mediation and transactional deal-making.

How do we end violence quickly—without undermining sustainable peace?

This is the central dilemma of our time.

This is why this conference matters.

We must reclaim mediation as a political strategy.

Restore multilateral coherence.

And place people—not processes—at the center.

Distinguished participants,

We must also speak plainly about Sudan.

Three years into a devastating war, mediation has not stopped the carnage.

Despite sustained efforts, the latest being the Berlin Conference—including by multilateral institutions—we have neither halted the fighting nor secured a credible political process.

This is failure.

And it must be acknowledged.

Sudan is fast becoming the epicenter of a deeper crisis—the erosion of mediation itself.

If mediation cannot make a difference in Sudan, its credibility everywhere is at risk.

What must change is clear: mediation must become unified, politically anchored, and strategically coherent—or it will continue to be outpaced by the wars it seeks to resolve.

The cost of failure is not abstract.

We cannot normalize permanent war.

We cannot accept fragmentation as destiny.

What the Horn of Africa requires is not management, but resolution.

It requires political courage.

And strategic clarity.

Let this be a moment of decision.

A decision to restore mediation.

A decision to act with urgency and purpose.

Mediation is what we can do.

Mediation is what we must do better.

Let this conference mark the beginning of that commitment.

I thank you.