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African Union and IGAD Strengthen Cooperation to Implement the AU Border Governance Strategy and Promote Cross-Border Cooperation among Member States

The African Union Commission (AUC) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) united in a pivotal regional sensitization workshop on the African Union Better Integrated Border Governance Strategy from 13 to 14 May 2024 in Entebbe, Uganda. This collaborative workshop, a crucial step in the implementation of the AU Border Governance Strategy, aimed to sensitize the IGAD Secretariat and the IGAD member states on the strategy, and to establish a foundation for coordinating its implementation with existing IGAD border-related strategies.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Alhaji Sarjoh Bah, PhD, AU Director of Conflict Management, underscored the critical role of regional economic communities and mechanisms (RECs/RMs) in the design and implementation of the African Union Border Programme (AUBP). He emphasised, “New developments including changes in the adoption of border policies and legal frameworks, the launch of trade frameworks such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), regular and irregular migration, the introduction of cross border security mechanisms such as the Djibouti and Nouakchott Processes, and the Accra Initiative, as well as the proliferation of transnational organised crime, have necessitated the introduction of ‘new’ border actors or ‘new’ processes which alter our engagement. Therefore, recognising the evolution in border governance necessitates adjusting our interventions at the AU and REC/RMs.”

Mr. Camlus Omogo, IGAD Director of Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN), underscored the central role IGAD attaches to borderlands. “Borderlands serve as important spheres of shared economic and developmental cooperation, providing opportunities for bilateral and multilateral cooperation on peace, security and regional integration.” He stressed the urgency and significance of the Niamey Convention, noting that although the region lags in its signature and ratification, IGAD member states have developed policies and initiatives that work towards the realisation of the objectives of the Convention.

The participants engaged in fruitful discussions on national experiences in implementing the five pillars of AUBGS. They formulated recommendations to guide the AU Commission and the IGAD Secretariat in developing a joint action plan for implementing the AUBGS and regional border-related policies. The workshop, a testament to our collective efforts, underscored the role of borders in promoting peace, security, development, and integration across the region, particularly in fostering socio-economic development rooted in the needs of the local communities. It further emphasised the importance of signing, ratifying, and domesticating the Niamey Convention as a legal framework to promote regional cross-border initiatives. The workshop also highlighted the need to enhance the capacities of the structures responsible for borders and strengthen their coordination role.

In February 2020, the 33rd Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union adopted the African Union Strategy for Better Integrated Border Governance. This strategy is not just a document but a commitment to put in place a new form of pragmatic border governance aimed at promoting peace, security and stability to facilitate the integration process and sustainable development in Africa. It proposes developing national and regional



border policies in line with the AU's objectives, values, and principles, thereby aligning the AU's efforts with its overarching goals.

As part of these efforts, regional and national levels stakeholders have already adopted or are in the process of adopting various border strategies. IGAD adopted a "Policy Framework on Informal Cross Border Trade and Cross Border Security Governance" in 2018. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) adopted its Memorandum on "Cross Border Concept or Local Integration" in 2005, and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), in 2020, called on the ECCAS Secretariat to formulate a Regional Border Strategy, among others. These instruments contribute to the overall implementation of the AU Border Governance Strategy.

The workshop was a collaborative effort, with active participation from experts on border issues drawn from the IGAD member states: the Republic of Djibouti, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the Republic of Kenya, the Federal Republic of Somalia, the Republic of South Sudan, and the Republic of Uganda. Their valuable insights and contributions enriched the discussions. Representatives from the IGAD Secretariat, the AU Commission, the GIZ Support to the AU Border Programme (AUBP), and national experts from the other AU regions also played a crucial role in the workshop.

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