

2023 IRSK

ANNUAL CONFERENCE REPORT

International Relations and Diplomacy in an Era of Polycrisis
and Geo-Strategic Competition in the COMESA Region.



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The 2023 IRSK Conference Report is a compilation of policy and scholarly contributions, insights, and discussions presented during the International Relations Society of Kenya (IRSK) Conference held in Nairobi, Kenya between 25th – 27th October 2023.

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2023 IRSK ANNUAL CONFERENCE

International Relations and Diplomacy in an Era of Polycrisis and Geo-Strategic Competition in the COMESA Region.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

On behalf of the International Relations Society of Kenya (IRSK) and the Conference Organizing Committee, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all participants, organizers, and contributors who made the 2023 Annual IRSK Conference a resounding success. Themed “International Relations and Diplomacy in an Era of Poly-crisis and Geostrategic Competition within the COMESA Region,” this inaugural forum, organized collaboratively by COMESA and ACCORD, has enriched our understanding of the complex geopolitical challenges facing the region as well as the opportunities therein.

Special thanks to the conference co-organizers, COMESA and ACCORD, for their tireless efforts in orchestrating a seamless and impactful event. We also acknowledge the invaluable support from sponsors, partners, and all those who contributed to the success of this conference. Your commitment to advancing discourse on international relations and diplomacy in the COMESA region has left an indelible mark on our collective understanding.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to the distinguished speakers and panelists who shared their expertise, fostering engaging discussions on topics critical to the current era of poly-crisis and geoeconomic competition. Their dedication to sharing knowledge and fostering meaningful dialogue has significantly enriched our understanding of the complex geopolitical challenges facing the COMESA region.

A special commendation goes to the organizing committee, whose dedication and meticulous planning ensured the seamless execution of this significant event. Their tireless efforts in coordinating logistics, securing speakers, and curating relevant topics have not gone unnoticed. Their commitment to excellence has truly set the stage for impactful conversations on the pressing challenges within the COMESA region.

Finally, I express my gratitude to the close to 150 participants whose active involvement and thoughtful contributions have been the driving force behind the success of the 2023 IRSK Conference. Together, we made the 2023 IRSK Conference a platform for meaningful dialogue, collaboration and understanding in the face of multifaceted challenges.

Once again, thank you all for being part of this enriching experience.

Sincerely,
Dr. Kizito Sabala (Ph.D.)
2023 IRSK Annual Conference Chairman





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International Relations Society of Kenya (IRSK)

IRSK is the professional body for the international affairs and diplomacy fields in Kenya. The Society serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas, networking, and programmatic initiatives among those involved in the study, teaching, and practice of international relations and diplomacy. IRSK works to promote policy dialogues on international affairs and diplomacy between various parties, carry out pertinent and substantial research, and engage in conversation and collaboration with various actors at national, regional, and international levels.

www.irskkenya.or.ke



The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)

COMESA was established in 1994 to replace the former Preferential Trade Area (PTA). It is the largest Regional Economic Community with a total of 21 Member States. COMESA's main focus is to promote economic prosperity through regional integration. Its objective also includes the promotion of peace and security in the region as espoused in Article 3(d) of the COMESA Treaty. The program on peace and security specifically focuses on governance, conflict prevention, conflict management and post-conflict reconstruction.

www.comesa.int



African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD)

ACCORD is a civil society organisation working throughout Africa since 1992, to bring creative African solutions to the challenges posed by conflict on the continent. We impact political developments by bringing conflict resolution, dialogue, and development to the forefront as an alternative to protracted conflict. As part of its strategic objectives, ACCORD aims to generate, document, and share knowledge that positively impacts conflict prevention, management, resolution and transformation.

www.accord.org.za





CONCEPT NOTE

INTRODUCTION

The International Relations Society of Kenya (IRSK) in partnership with the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) jointly organized the Inaugural 2023 Annual IRSK Conference. This pioneering event sought to bridge theory and practice in international relations and diplomacy by bringing together a variety of state and non-state actors to engage, deliberate, and offer perspectives on the various crises, challenges and geopolitical dynamics currently playing out in the COMESA region. Over 100 participants attended the conference, including key government officials, parliamentarians, diplomats, scholars, policymakers, business leaders, media, and civil society representatives amongst others. The conference, which was marked by wide geographic representation and the participation of women drawn from various backgrounds, was held in Nairobi, Kenya from October 25 to October 27, 2023.

The theme for the 3-day conference was 'International Relations and Diplomacy in an Era of Polycrisis and Geo-Strategic Competition in the COMESA Region.' This theme encapsulated the pressing contemporary issues that demand our collective attention and served as a clarion call for actors in the international relations and diplomacy field to convene and dissect the nuances of polycrisis — the confluence of simultaneous crises — pervading the COMESA region. The conference took place against the backdrop of geo-strategic competition within the COMESA region, where international actors are vying for influence and resources. The combined impact of the two phenomena continues to cause unpredictable shocks and has far-reaching implications on the future growth and development for countries within the sub-region.

The conference featured a dynamic blend of elements, ensuring a rich and immersive experience for all participants. Participants experienced captivating keynote addresses, engaging roundtable discussions, and workshops aimed at propelling these vital discussions, paving the way for informed action as well as impactful solutions. Beyond the intellectual discourse, the conference also encompassed vibrant social events, networking sessions and cultural activities. The fusion of these components created an all-round event that nurtured knowledge, dialogue and collaboration amongst participants, making the conference an exceptional and memorable event.

CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES

- Knowledge exchange and research dissemination.
- Policy dialogue and intellectual discourse.
- Professional development and skill enhancement.
- Networking and collaborative engagement.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The dialogue, discussions, and debates that took place at the Inaugural 2023 Annual IRSK Conference fostered a reservoir of insights that will help to illuminate pathways to sustainable resolutions of the intricate and multifaceted challenges facing the COMESA region in addition to the opportunities embedded therein. The conference therefore served as an important platform for sharing ideas, perspectives and experiences, forming partnerships, as well as exploring innovative approaches and strategies aimed at addressing these intersecting issues. By so doing, the conference provided the perfect opportunity to advance pragmatic solutions that could recast the trajectory of international relations and diplomacy in the COMESA region and beyond.

THEMATIC OVERVIEW

For decades, the COMESA region has continued to experience a myriad of crises and challenges that have had far-reaching implications on the growth and development of the sub-region. The simultaneous occurrence of several catastrophic and disastrous events in the region relates to among others, conflicts, natural and man-made disasters, economic meltdowns, environment, migrations, globalization, and humanitarian emergencies. In addition, extra-regional interests (geo-strategic) and competition have contributed significantly (either negative or positive) to the complex and fragile nature of the political, economic, and security architecture in the region. A combination of these factors has led to the development of fluid inter-state and diplomatic relations among and between the regional states with far-reaching consequences on the present and future of peace, security, regional integration and development in the sub-region.

A plethora of theoretical, conceptual and practical perspectives underlay the implications of the different developments on international and diplomatic relations within COMESA. Given that the nature and form of inter-state and diplomatic relations has implications on the peace, security, stability and development of the region, it was therefore important to critically analyse and

succinctly capture the implications of the complexity brought about by these factors influencing interstate and diplomatic relations in the subregion. The central theoretical assumption that guided the conference theme was that through a combination of a variety of theories, frameworks and methodological instruments, we would be able to understand, explain and analyse the causes and consequences of the complex relations that exist among and between states and non-state actors in the COMESA region. It thus meant that eclectic and multidisciplinary approaches were important to analyzing these factors and their implications for regional peace, security, stability, integration and development.

In addition, plausible policy suggestions were made on how to promote peace, security, stability, integration and development in the sub-region. Effective and sustainable solutions to these crises and challenges will require a deep understanding of the issues, approaches, mechanisms, and methodologies.

CONFERENCE THEMES

The conference was organized around two distinct tracks with various thematic areas. For each theme, there were keynote presentations, voluntary papers highlighting specific issues, including case studies, and facilitated discussions.

Theme 1: International Relations

- i. Foreign Policy and Statecraft*
- ii. Peace and Security*
- iii. International Law*
- iv. International Political Economy*

Theme 2: Diplomacy

- i. Economic Diplomacy*
- ii. Diaspora Diplomacy*
- iii. Cultural Diplomacy*
- iv. Environmental Diplomacy*

In line with the thematic areas indicated above, the conference critically interrogated theoretical, conceptual and methodological approaches as well as instruments adopted to deal with the intricate and multifaceted challenges that define the region. It was recognized that the innovative strategies and proposals derived out of these deliberations need to be subjected to empirical examination in order to spur both academic and policy discourse. The conference also emphasized the importance of broad-based interdisciplinary approaches that support access to resources, participatory decision-making and equity as a means to achieve lasting solutions and advancements in the region.

OUTCOMES OF THE CONFERENCE

The conference outcomes were as follows:

- i. Enhanced Professional Networks and Connections*
- ii. Innovative Solutions to Regional Challenges*
- iii. Impactful Research Dissemination*
- iv. Expanded Knowledge and Insights in IR and Diplomacy*
- v. Experiential Learning*
- vi. Informed Policy Formulation*
- vii. Deeper Understanding of Regional Dynamics*
- viii. Research Advancement*

The launch of the ACCORD publication during the conference, media work and other outreach activities also contributed to raising the international visibility of the conference and greatly contributed to increased awareness of the objectives of the conference.

DATE AND VENUE

Date: 25th October – 27th October

Venue: Trademark Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya

REGISTRATION FEES

The conference registration fees were as follows:

International Participants	USD 100
Non-Members	KES 10,000
IRSK Members	KES 8,000
Students	KES 4,000



2023 IRSK ANNUAL CONFERENCE

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As we gather here today, I want to commend the dedication and efforts of everyone who has contributed to the growth and success of IRSK. It is through your passion, commitment, and sheer determination that we stand on this threshold of possibilities.

Mr. Leonard Wanyama,
CEO, International Relations Society of Kenya (IRSK)

SESSION 1

SESSION 1: OPENING SPEECHES AND REMARKS

Welcome Remarks

Mr. Leonard Wanyama

CEO, International Relations Society of Kenya (IRSK)

STATEMENT BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF IRSK MR. LEONARD WANYAMA AT THE OPENING OF THE COMESA, IRSK, AND ACCORD ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests, and esteemed members of the International Relations Society of Kenya (IRSK), it is my privilege to address you today at the inauguration of the COMESA, IRSK, and ACCORD Annual Conference. As the CEO of IRSK, I am bubbling with joy as I extend a heartfelt welcome to all participants who have gathered here, representing a rich tapestry of expertise in international relations.

This momentous gathering marks a pivotal juncture in our shared pursuit of understanding and shaping the intricate dynamics of global affairs. The IRSK stands at the intersection of being a professional society and a think tank, driven by a mission to establish a vibrant diplomatic community focusing on Kenya's international relations. Our aim is to create a constructive space of engagement, uniting students, academics, practitioners, and enthusiasts, fostering dialogue, innovation, and collaboration.

The IRSK has traversed a remarkable journey, sustained by the unwavering dedication and voluntarism of its members. IRSK has grown from its humble beginning and continues to thrive, adapting, and persevering to hold this momentous first conference following our official registration as an organization. Today's conference is not merely an event; it is a testament to the resilience, adaptability, and unwavering spirit of our members. It signifies our commitment to creating a space where ideas flourish, conversations are sparked, and alliances are formed in the pursuit of a deeper understanding of Kenya's role in global affairs.

As we gather here today, I want to commend the dedication and efforts of everyone who has contributed to the growth and success of IRSK. It is through your passion, commitment, and sheer determination that we stand on this threshold of possibilities. Our focus on establishing a constructive space of engagement signifies our collective ambition to foster a vibrant diplomatic community dedicated to the intricacies of Kenyan international relations. We aim to create an environment that encourages dialogue, innovation, and collaboration among a diverse array of individuals.

The core of IRSK's mission is not only to be a professional society but to serve as a think tank, contributing to the understanding and advancement of Kenya's role in the global arena. It is our vision to bridge the gap between academia, practitioners, and enthusiasts, creating a platform where insights are shared, knowledge is cultivated, and strategies are formulated.

Our journey has been one of adaptation and evolution, and today's conference stands as a testament to our growth and determination. It signifies our commitment to shaping a more informed and engaged society regarding Kenya's position in global relations.

I am honoured and humbled to extend our deepest gratitude to our esteemed partners, COMESA and ACCORD, as well as the EU and Irish Aid, whose support and collaboration have made this event possible. The generous contribution, shared vision, and unwavering support have been instrumental in bringing together this assembly of minds.

In closing, I welcome you all once again to this gathering, replete with opportunity, innovation, and collaboration. Let us seize this moment to exchange ideas, build partnerships, and pave the way for a future where IRSK remains at the forefront of shaping Kenya's global engagement.

I wish you fruitful deliberations. Thank you.



The inaugural IRSK Annual Conference is a testament to our collective commitment to advancing the field of international relations and diplomacy. As we gather here, I am confident that the diverse perspectives and wealth of knowledge among the presenters and participants will foster meaningful discussions.

Dr. Kizito Sabala (Ph.D.),
Chair, 2023 IRSK Annual Conference

SESSION 1

Welcome Remarks

Dr. Kizito Sabala (Ph.D.)

Chair, 2023 IRSK Annual Conference

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by acknowledging the key speakers, Hon. Nelson Koech, Amb. Erstus Mwencha, Amb. Anthony Okar, Dr. Vasu Goundan, Ms. Elizabeth Mutunga, and Mr. Leonard Wanyama, and the esteemed participants present here today. I would also like to express my gratitude to the conference organizing committee and the various sub-committees for their excellent work. The committees had representation from our partners, and their collaborative efforts have contributed significantly to the success of this event.

I am excited by the energy and enthusiasm that fills this room. The inaugural IRSK Annual Conference is a testament to our collective commitment to advancing the field of international relations and diplomacy. As we gather here, I am confident that the diverse perspectives and wealth of knowledge among the presenters and participants will foster meaningful discussions.

I extend a warm welcome to all presenters and participants, urging you to actively engage in the dialogue that will undoubtedly shape the discourse in our field. This annual event provides a valuable platform for the exchange of knowledge, perspectives, and insights among various stakeholders. I am particularly delighted by the participation of the "Young Turks" at this conference. I welcome you to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the conference to get involved in the IRSK and take up space in shaping the future of international relations.

Ladies and gentlemen, the theme of the conference, "International Relations and Diplomacy in an Era of Polycrisis and Geo-Strategic Competition in the COMESA region," provides us with the opportunity to interrogate the confluence of various international relations and diplomatic issues and how they affect peace and security in the COMESA region. I am, therefore, looking forward to robust discussions regarding these pertinent issues.

The conference has four objectives: Knowledge exchange and research dissemination, policy dialogue and intellectual discourse, professional development and skills enhancement, and fostering collaboration among practitioners, scholars, and policymakers.

The dialogue, discussion, and debates will foster a reservoir of insights that will help to illuminate pathways to sustainable solutions to the intricate and multifaceted challenges facing the COMESA region. In this way, the IRSK conference serves as a unique platform for sharing ideas, experiences, and perspectives, forming partnerships, as well as exploring innovative approaches and strategies to address these intersecting issues. It also provides us with an opportunity to advance pragmatic solutions that could recast the trajectory of international relations and diplomacy in the COMESA region and beyond.

The outcomes of this conference are anticipated to include enhanced professional networks and connections, innovative solutions to regional challenges, impactful research dissemination, and expanded knowledge and insights in IR and diplomacy. Additionally, we aim for experiential learning and informed policy formulation, a deeper understanding of regional dynamics, and advancements in research.

I wish you very fruitful discussions on these matters. Let us seize this opportunity to collectively contribute to the advancement of our field and the betterment of the COMESA region. Thank you.



This conference is of great importance to COMESA because, as some of you might be aware, the COMESA Programme on Peace and Security is a product of policy research, which has been central to our programme since its inception.

Ms. Elizabeth Mutunga,
Head, Governance, Peace & Security,
Common Markets for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA).

SESSION 1

Opening Remarks

Ms. Elizabeth Mutunga,

Head, Governance, Peace & Security, Common Markets for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA).

I bring you greetings from the Secretary General of COMESA, H. E Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe who has not been able to join us due to other pressing engagements. My name is Elizabeth Mutunga, Head of Governance, Peace, and Security.

As part of the organisers, it is with great pleasure that I join the International Relations Society of Kenya and the African Center for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes to welcome you all to this First Annual Conference that has been organised to enhance understanding about ongoing geopolitical dynamics and to therefore, hopefully identify modalities to bridge theory to practice in governance, peace, and security. But before I get to the main business of the day, I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Government and People of Kenya for hosting this conference and for the warm reception granted to all of us since we got here. I also wish to appreciate all the scholars that have taken time to research and develop background documents for discussion. It is our hope that such discussions will spur, particularly the policy makers towards bridging theory and practice in Governance peace and security, international relations, and diplomacy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The importance and urgency of holding this conference now cannot be overstated, especially coming at a time that the whole world is gripped with the events in the Middle East that broke out a few weeks ago following a terrorist attack on Israel. This decade started with a global pandemic that became a defining moment for most people in very many ways. People lost jobs, businesses shut down and generally the economies of most countries faced very severe blows. Before countries could start to recover, the war in Ukraine, a small part of Europe started with immediate adverse economic effects manifested by sharp raises of fuel and food prices. Super-imposed on all these events are the effects of climate change, such as the long periods of drought in certain parts of our region, while heavier than normal rains with flooding sweep other parts of our region and thus adding to the complexity of the already complex situations. These global events have effectively exposed the vulnerability and resilience of our respective states, and they have also highlighted our inter-connectedness, which shows that what happens in one part of the globe can very quickly have serious effects on the other side of the globe. In addition, the effects of these events touch a wide range of sectors and disciplines, some of which have informed the themes and sub-themes of this conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This conference is of great importance to COMESA because, as some of you might be aware, the COMESA Programme on Peace and Security is a product of policy research, which has been central to our programme since its inception. Whether its conflict prevention, conflict management or post conflict reconstruction, our programmes have mostly been guided by research. In addition, upon the assessment of the interventions of other Regional Economic Communities of Eastern and Southern Africa, COMESA has carved its niche around the economic dimensions of conflict.

We believe that given the current global environment which, for our continent and region, has manifested in an increase of terrorism and violent extremism, a rise in unconstitutional changes of government and other expressions of competition, it is time again to reassess our interventions. To ask ourselves whether our programmes are fit to purpose. It is therefore with these same perspectives that we, COMESA looks forward to the papers, debates and discussions that will be held around the different thematic areas over the next three days.

And with those few remarks, ladies, and gentlemen, I wish in conclusion to thank the partners, International Relations Society of Kenya, and the African Center for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes for their invaluable partnership in convening this inaugural conference. I believe we have collectively and effectively exploited the comparative advantage of the different partners to put together what, I believe, will result in a very successful conference. I thank all you dear participants that have made time to join us and I look forward to fruitful deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.



Against this backdrop, two major developments have brought the continent to a tipping point. One of the developments is the staggering population growth witnessed on the continent in the last 40 years.

Dr. Vasu Gounden (Ph.D.),
Executive Director, African Centre
for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD)

SESSION 1

Opening Remarks

Dr. Vasu Gounden (Ph.D.),

Executive Director, African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD)

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, it is truly an honor to speak to you today on this inaugural IRSK Annual Conference. Let me start by first acknowledging Mr. Leonard Wanyama, the IRSK CEO, and Dr. Kizito Sabala, the 2023 IRSK Annual Conference Chair, for inviting ACCORD to partner with you on this very important initiative. Allow me also to express my sincere gratitude to Ms. Elizabeth Mutunga for her remarkable contributions. Last but not least, I'd like to give my warm regards to our outstanding diplomat on the continent, Amb. Erastus Mwencha, who I was hoping that I would be able to see personally in Kenya.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me now to share my thoughts on this very interesting topic chosen for the conference, namely "International Relations and Diplomacy in an Era of Polycrisis and Geostrategic Competition in the COMESA region." This is one of the most decisive times for Africa as time is running out for us as a continent and a region to turn around our fortunes. We find ourselves at a crossroads, a pivotal moment demanding urgent attention and action for the collective fate of Africa and the COMESA region. The dreams we have collectively nurtured for unity and prosperity are hanging in the balance, emphasizing the critical need for swift and strategic interventions.

Drawing on a rich tapestry of experiences accumulated over three decades of working on diverse conflicts across Africa, I speak to you today with a heavy heart. This is because in my 31 years, I have not seen our continent in worse shape than it is today. The increasing frequency of coups across the continent and internal conflicts that we are seeing in countries such as Sudan and Ethiopia demands our introspection. Why is it that we missed the golden era of mediation and diplomacy? Reflecting on the significant shift in African International Relations in 1990 following the fall of the Berlin Wall, a report by Salim Ahmed Salim, then OAU chairman, outlined transformational steps that were needed over the next 30 years to turn around Africa's fortunes. Regrettably, we have not achieved much of what was laid out in that report 30 years ago.

As we fast forward to the present, we find ourselves at a new inflection point, facing existential crises that loom large. Chief among them is the formidable challenge of climate change, where Africa, despite being the least contributor to the climate crisis through carbon emissions, stands to be the most affected with potentially devastating consequences, according to a report by the UNFCCC. Further to this, the ominous specter of a major nuclear conflagration, particularly given the unfolding events in the Middle East, casts a shadow over our continent. While Africa might not be directly affected, the knock-on effect on global economies will have a devastating impact on our continent. Thirdly, the emergence of artificial intelligence is the third existential threat that could be an opportunity or a threat for the continent if not harnessed.

Against this backdrop, two major developments have brought the continent to a tipping point. One of the developments is the staggering population growth witnessed on the continent in the last 40 years. It is noteworthy that three of the top five most populous countries in Africa are in the COMESA region: Egypt, Ethiopia, and the DRC. The second development is the rapid urbanization; our major cities—Johannesburg, Nairobi, Cairo, Durban, and Lagos—are grappling with an unprecedented influx of people. Unfortunately, this urbanization is not accompanied by the industrialization seen in other parts of the world. This has led to the disenchantment of our young people, a driving force behind the coups witnessed across the continent. The potential consequences, if left unaddressed, could be dire and far-reaching.

However, within these formidable challenges lies an extraordinary opportunity. With an anticipated 1 billion young people, Africa has the potential to position itself as the world's factory, attracting industries to our shores as aging populations in China and the US. However, in the era of artificial intelligence, China has already taken the lead in humanoid production, which means they will not need to outsource production to Africa. We must institute mechanisms to absorb and harness the 1 billion young people potential of this youthful population. If not, they will fall into the arms of insurgents.

Lastly, it is important to note that the vast resources of our continent—coltan, cobalt, and other rare earth materials—are not confined to Earth alone. They exist on meteors in space, and companies are investing in technologies to mine these resources. This means that our two critical resources, natural resources and human resources, will be compromised in the next 2 decades, directly challenging the very existence of our continent. The implications for the value of our resources are profound and require careful consideration.

In conclusion, I extend my heartfelt wishes to all of you and express my anticipation for our continued partnership. Together, let us embark on the journey of finding uniquely African solutions to African challenges. Thank you very much.



From a geostrategic perspective, there has been a recurring narrative predicting the inevitable decline of the United States as a global hegemon. Simultaneously, powers like China and, at some point, Russia were anticipated to rise and supersede the U.S. as the dominant global power.

Amb. Anthony Okara,
Ambassador, African Leaders Malaria Alliance (ALMA)

SESSION 1

Opening Remarks

Amb. Anthony Okara,

Ambassador, African Leaders Malaria Alliance (ALMA)

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the leadership of IRSK, COMESA, and ACCORD for organizing this important conference. It is truly a pleasure to join you on this auspicious occasion of your inaugural annual conference, and I must commend the evident growth and transformation that IRSK has undergone since we last interacted. I also extend my regards and appreciation to my fellow speakers who have thoughtfully raised pertinent issues that demand our collective contemplation as a region, especially during this era of polycrisis.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me begin by acknowledging the presence of the young people in this gathering. I would like to encourage them to take part in such events since their active participation in events of this nature not only adds energy, credibility, and creativity, but also fosters a sense of ownership in the processes that will shape our shared future. Credibility remains one of the most significant challenges faced by many countries and governments across the continent. As we gather here, many countries on the continent are grappling with a leadership crisis due to people's lack of faith in governance institutions and processes, posing a real danger to peace and stability.

This disillusionment by the youth is starkly reflected in the growing apathy towards electoral processes. Take Kenya, for instance, where there was a staggering 40% drop in participation in the last general elections compared to the preceding one. Similarly, in the just concluded election in Nigeria, the turnout was even lower, with an estimated 27% of voters electing the current administration, signaling a significant disconnect between the populace and the current administration. This predicament poses a critical question: what happens when citizens lose confidence in the electoral process and begin exploring alternative avenues for expressing their political will? Are these means that can be contained and rallied in a particular direction? It is therefore critical that they participate in governance processes at all levels.

Speaking of polycrisis, I'd like to provide a context by mentioning an expression that states "humanity is confronted with two catastrophic, indeed existential threats: climate change and nuclear war." While this may sound alarmist, the fact is that we have never been as close to nuclear war as we are today. While warnings and doomsday scenarios about our climate crisis and the looming threat of nuclear war may be dismissed as alarmist or frightening, we are almost at that point where it becomes irreversible. In this regard, I'd like to quote the renowned author and commentator, Prof. Thomas Friedman, who states that "one of humanity's most formidable challenges is to manage what is already unavoidable and to avoid what could be truly unmanageable." Recent events, whether extreme weather patterns or nuclear tensions, give us legitimate cause for concern. It is therefore essential for us to heed the warning by scientists that while the planet itself will endure for billions of years, the continuity of humanity on this planet is not guaranteed. Yet, we possess the capability and capacity to effect change.

From a geostrategic perspective, I'd like to speak to what has been a recurring debate regarding the inevitable decline of the United States as a global hegemon. Over the past decade, various scenarios seemed to indicate that new emerging powers like China and, at some point, Russia, would replace the United States as the dominant global power. In fact, there was a prediction that China would surpass the United States as the largest economy by 2027. However, a number of factors have conspired against this, and current realities seem to challenge this once widely accepted notion. In contrast, American foreign policy experts argue that despite the competition posed by China and Russia, the US is poised to remain the dominant force for the foreseeable future. According to this view, the leadership of the two countries has overreached by making catastrophic mistakes and underestimated the resolve of the United States. As a result, both countries are grappling with internal dynamics and challenges, thus slowing their ascent to global dominance.

While the intensifying competition between the United States versus China and Russia is bound to reshape the global order, the US is making moves that will have implications for the global order as well as the continent's political, economic, and strategic trajectory. In this context, there is an alternative view that the outcome of the global competition and realignments between the two dominant forces striving to influence would not be the replacement of the US, but instead the spread out of power as it exists today. From a military point of view, the argument is that despite China's massive investment in their military, the US will not be challenged in the next 20 to 30 years. On the economic front, while China was expected to overtake the US in 2027, various factors have seemingly conspired to prevent this from happening. On the economic front, the power will be shared out, with the US and the EU on one camp while the BRICS will be the other, with the rest being non-aligned countries. The third space of

competition, the digital space, is dominated by the West, but China is quickly catching up. Africa has become another important frontier for this competition, and the two powers would like to influence what we do or think.

Against this backdrop, our response as a continent hinge on our internal capabilities and organizational strengths, making it a critical determinant of our collective future. The question we need to ask ourselves is “Are we structured in such a manner that we can effectively confront these challenges?” Do we have the institutional to respond to these crises? As we reflect on recent developments in the COMESA region, the outbreak of violence and the ongoing conflicts in Sudan and Ethiopia are of utmost concern. Moreover, the unprecedented economic headwinds facing several East African countries including Kenya and Tanzania, coupled with the emergence of complex health challenges, typified by the dual threats of COVID-19 and malaria, further compounds the difficulties facing the region and the continent at large.

It is imperative to acknowledge that the continent cannot face these monumental challenges alone as a region or continent. Unfortunately, the global community, which would typically offer the requisite assistance, is currently grappling with a myriad of other problems, diverting their attention from our predicaments. In this context, it is my sincere hope that the deliberations at this forum will transcend mere rhetoric and translate into a platform for devising pragmatic solutions to address the pressing issues confronting our continent. We commonly refer to these as African solutions to African problems—a recognition of the need for homegrown strategies tailored to our unique circumstances.

In conclusion, let me express my gratitude once again to the organizers for convening this conference and providing a platform for robust discussions.

Thank you very much.

SESSION 1

Looking at the geopolitical landscape, we are starting to see the erosion/collapse of the unipolar hegemonic system and the evolution towards a multi-polar or non-aligned world.



Amb. Erastus Mwencha,
Chairman, Africa Capacity Building Foundation, (ACBF)

Opening Remarks

Amb. Erastus Mwencha,

Chairman, Africa Capacity Building Foundation, (ACBF)

First and foremost, I would like to sincerely thank Madam Elizabeth Mutunga for the remarkable work that COMESA Governance, Peace and Security unit has done in organizing this conference. Second, I'd also like to thank Amb. Anthony Okara for his insightful remarks. Third, I would also like to extend my warm regards to Dr. Vasu Gounden, Executive Director, ACCORD, who has been a great friend for many years and with whom we have worked together. Last but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to IRSK for putting together such an important forum. This is coming at a time when we are losing faith in the global economic system while at the same time seeing the anticipated peace dividends following the end of the cold war fading away.

Ladies and gentlemen, viewed from the perspective of the polycrisis, we are seeing an interplay of factors such as economic, social, political, military and technology that are shaping the global order, offering food for thought for international relations and diplomacy scholars and practitioners. Moreover, challenges such as pandemics, climate change, extreme poverty, terrorism, mass migration, monetary and fiscal crises also raise great concern. The question we should ask ourselves is: What is the impact of all these natural as well as human challenges? And how will they play out across the globe? Already the worrying emergence of right-wing populism and anti-migration sentiments around the world is an indicator of what is to come as we move towards a world where in 2050, probably one out of three people will be Africans.

Looking at the geopolitical landscape, we are starting to see the erosion/collapse of the unipolar hegemonic system and the evolution towards a multi-polar or non-aligned world. This unsettling development is leading us closer and closer to conflict, perhaps even a third world war. In fact, we are arguably in what could be considered as a cold world war, which began in 2014 following China's launch of its Belt and Road Initiative, which unsettled a number of capitals around the world. This changed geopolitical landscape is characterized by several features, chief among which is the paralysis of the UN Security Council. With the UN Security Council unable to function, we are now left to look for regional mechanisms, which are provided under the UN Charter, to resolve conflicts. But these regional mechanisms face serious challenges, which is why we are now seeing the proliferation of efforts from various actors to solve crises across the world, including in Africa. This, therefore, brings us to the important role of COMESA's Peace and Security architecture, which is centered on prevention, early warning, and mediation, and how it will help to address the challenges the region is facing.

As I conclude, I am persuaded that we must start thinking of African solutions to African problems. Owing to its shortcomings, the prevailing capitalist system has left millions of people behind. We therefore need an inclusive and sustainable economic model that is people-centered, one that will address the myriad crises and challenges we are facing on the continent, be it economic, social, environmental or political. Such an economic system should be able to lead us away from the so-called "race to the bottom" that has negatively affected global economic growth. Against this background, it is my sincere hope and prayer that deliberations at this conference will articulate a trajectory that will help us think out-of-the-box and propose solutions that will enable us to confront the challenges we face today.

I wish you all the best. Thank you very much.



SESSION 2: HIGH-LEVEL OPENING PANEL

International Relations and Diplomacy in an Era of Polycrisis and Geo-strategic Competition in the COMESA Region

The session on "International Relations and Diplomacy in an Era of Polycrisis and Geo-strategic Competition in the COMESA Region" sought to collectively explore ways and strategies for actors to cultivate stability, bolster regional cooperation, and navigate the intricate challenges prevalent in the contemporary global environment. Amidst a backdrop of geo-strategic competition, the discussions were geared towards promoting mutual prosperity, peace and security within the COMESA region. The panelists highlighted critical concerns in the context of polycrisis, emphasizing the global and regional dimensions of multifaceted systemic risks and threats that are shaping the current international landscape. The participants identified and proposed diplomatic approaches and international relations strategies that are essential for navigating the multifaceted challenges in the COMESA region and beyond.

Moderator

Dr. Julian Rowa (PHD.), Head of Programs, IRSK

Panelists

- **Mr. Leonard Wanyama**, CEO, International Relations Society of Kenya (IRSK)
- **Ms. Elizabeth Mutunga**, Head, Governance, Peace & Security, Common Markets for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA).
- **Amb. Anthony Okara**, Ambassador, African Leaders Malaria Alliance (ALMA)

Key Interventions

According to Ambassador Okara, what is referred to as polycrisis are multifaceted systemic risks and threats and can be viewed from both a global level and regional level. At global level, these threats can spell doom for humanity if left unchecked, while at a regional level, they can affect a region's ability to respond or participate effectively in the global environment. They include events such as the recurring conflict in the Middle East, global health pandemics, the environmental crisis, as well as the threat of nuclear war. We still have a window to avert the crisis by taking action to stop the acceleration towards self-extinction. While diplomacy and international relations is absolutely critical to address the threat posed to humanity, there's need to build trust among the protagonists and players, particularly at the global and regional levels.

On his part According to Mr. Leonard Wanyama, humanity finds itself in a state of perpetual state of fear, rage and peril due to recent events that have polarized and divided humanity into camps, pitting societies and people against each other on various issues, be it the Ukraine war, Covid vaccines, or public finance. However, he was optimistic that humanity is resilient and had a enduring spirit to face whatever is coming its way. To address this challenge, African countries must invest in research and innovation so as to come up with the right strategies and interventions that will secure its rightful place in the world.

Elizabeth Mutunga, we have a number of well-thought-out governance and policy tools and instruments that are aimed at addressing the peace and security challenges we face as a continent and region. However, one of the key challenges is that Africa does not have a voice to push for its position and interest. This can be attributed to the lack of economic muscle by African countries, the majority of whom are still developing and trading in primary commodities. Another challenge facing African countries is the protracted implementation process as certain critical decisions take longer to make due to the slow process of arriving at a consensus. The prolonged decision-making is based on the need for inclusivity in every intervention, as it is extremely important not to overlook anyone.

SESSION 3: PEACE AND MEDIATION PANEL

Mediating Peace in Africa: A Study on the Role of Mediation Support Units

The session brought together several leading scholars and established practitioners in the field of peace and security to shed light on the role of the Regional Economic Communities – Mediation Support Units (RECs/Ms) in peace mediation in Africa. It also served as the launch event for the ACCORD Monograph Series 1/2023 titled, Mediating Peace in Africa: A Study on the Role of Mediation Support Units, which published an edited collection of papers aimed at critically examining the efforts, limitations and challenges that have been experienced by RECs/Ms in operationalizing the institutions and structures created for the purpose of engaging in mediation, such as MSUs, PoEs, etc., concluding with a comparative analysis. The participants interrogated the possible roles of the RECs/Ms to mediate in complex conflicts which arise out of political transitions, coups d'état, protests etc. They also discussed how RECs/Ms operate alongside/with/against a multiplicity of other intervening actors, including organs of civil society. In this way, it sought to contribute to sustainable peace and conflict resolution in Africa.

Moderator

Dr. Andrea Prah - Senior Researcher, African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD)

Panelists:

- **Dr. Brown Odigie**, Program Officer, Capacity Building and Mediation, ECOWAS Commission
- **Prof. Kasaija Apuuli**, Professor, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Makerere University
- **Dr. Tunji Namaiko**, Programme Officer, African Union Support Programme (AUSP), AU
- **Dr. Oita Etyang**, Governance, Peace and Security Analyst, COMESA
- **Dr. Kizito Sabala**, Senior Lecturer, IDIS, University of Nairobi

Key Interventions

Institutionalisation of Mediation Support within the COMESA Peace and Security Architecture – Tunji Namaiko and Oita Etyang
Dr. Oita gave a detailed historical overview of the formation of the COMESA Governance, Peace and Security unit as well as the COMESA Committee of Elders, its mediation support unit, which has been pivotal in resolving both resource-based as well as election-related conflicts within the region. However, several factors have hampered their ability to resolve conflicts within the COMESA region. One is the emphasis on track 1 at the expense of track 2 and track 3. Second is lack of resources for the mediation support unit to effectively carry out their mandate. A third challenge is the numerous uncoordinated mediation architectures in Africa, they are not coordinated and lack the necessary resources to effectively carry out their mandate. Fourth, the lack of linkages between the MSU and the private sector and civil society poses another challenge. Dr. Oita recommended a balanced approach across tracks, synergy among MSUs, and increased resources to enhance conflict resolution. Notably, he calls for a shift towards mediation in countering terrorism, proposing a more nuanced and diplomatic approach to address this complex challenge.

Dr. Kasaija Apuuli delved into the establishment and institutionalization of the IGAD Mediation Support Unit, shedding light on its proactive role in conflict prevention and resolution within the IGAD region. Notable instances of its successful intervention, such as the Sudan Peace Process and the South Sudan situation, exemplified the unit's commitment to fostering mediation and conflict prevention in the region. Another highlight was the development of mediation guidelines, conflict mapping, and the strategic appointment of mediators. However, Dr. Kasaija pointed out the lack of a coordinated response among Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as a critical concern and underscores the need to synergize efforts amongst MSUs across the continent. On this basis, he called for unified efforts, emphasizing the necessity of a harmonized approach to mediation efforts. In his conclusion, Dr. Kasaija passionately called for a comprehensive approach involving "African Solutions to African Problems with African Money and African leadership." He also recommended the active involvement of civil society in mediation processes within the IGAD region. Furthermore, he stressed the significance of IGAD's role in mediating conflicts within the region, highlighting the need for collaborative and inclusive efforts in proactive conflict prevention and management within IGAD and the African continent.

Dr. Brown Odigie, program officer, capacity building and mediation in ECOWAS commission outlined the role of the MSS and spoke of the various interventions that the MSS has been involved in on behalf of ECOWAS such as in Gambia and recently in Sierra Leone. He reiterated the importance of mediation support units collaborating from the various states agencies and other stakeholders. While funding may not be an issue for the ECOWAS Mediation Support Structure, some of the challenges that it faces include human resources, poor planning, lack of coordination amongst others.

Dr. Kizito Sabala gave a detailed account of the political intrigues, structural challenges as well personal differences that resulted in the failure of the EAC mediation efforts in Burundi following the announcement by the late President Nkurunziza of his intention to run for a third term. This mediation in Burundi was unfamiliar territory for the EAC having never been involved in such interventions and lacking the capacity to effectively intervene. The differences between the the facilitator and the mediator also posed a challenge. In his assessment, Dr. Sabala argues that the process in Burundi was disjointed and lacked political will. He also adds that the EAC also lacked a strategic plan and leverage on the protagonists in Burundi. Moreover, the international community did not coordinate its efforts and sent conflicting political signals. On its part, the EAC seemed not to be in tune with events on the ground and focused unduly on the political process at the expense of the technical recommendations.

SESSION 4: PEACE AND SECURITY PANEL 1

Securing Peace and Stability: The Deployment of the EACRF in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

This thought-provoking session dissected the intricacies surrounding the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) deployment in the conflict-ridden eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Despite its noble aspirations to secure peace and stability, the intervention has encountered formidable challenges, prompting a critical examination of its effectiveness. Moreover, the EACRF's deployment introduces an additional layer of complexity given the presence of MONUSCO. In essence, the session navigates through the multifaceted challenges, casting a critical lens on the viability and impact of the EACRF intervention in the pursuit of lasting peace and stability in the eastern DRC.

Moderator

Dr. Claire Amuhaya (Ph.D.), Senior Lecturer, RUDN University

Panelists

- **Dr. Kasaija Phillip Apuuli (Ph.D.)**, The Deployment of The East African Community Regional Force in The Democratic Republic of Congo (EACRF-DRC): Prospects and Challenges
- **Mr. Muhindo Vyalirendi Jacques**, The East Africa Community Regional Force in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Successes, Challenges and Prospects
- **Dr. Kizito Sabala (Ph.D.)**, The East Africa Community Regional Force in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Successes, Challenges, and Prospects

Discussant

- **Dr. Oita Etyang (Ph.D.)**, Governance, Peace and Security Analyst, COMESA

Key Interventions

Dr. Apuuli critically reviewed the historical background as well as the normative and institutional framework of the EAC intervention in the DRC that was mandated by East African heads of state to addresses insecurity in Eastern DRC caused by rebel groups. Using the theory of liberal interventionism, he highlighted the prospects and challenges of the East African Community Regional Force in The Democratic Republic of Congo (EACRF-DRC) intervention, noting funding issues, regional politics, and the complex mandate of dealing with "negative forces." Despite challenges facing the EAC-RF's operations, he argued that the EAC's intervention is seen as a positive step toward stabilizing the DRC, especially with the country joining the EAC as a partner state and new initiatives like the Nairobi Process and Luanda Roadmap.

Dr. Sabala and Mr. Muhindo explored the rationale and context of the deploying the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the EAC's first military deployment since its establishment in 1986. They delved into the EACRF's achievements, the suitability of its mandate compared to MONUSCO, and the challenges and prospects for peace, security, and political stability in the DRC. They argued that the deployment raises questions about its necessity in the presence of the UN Peacekeeping Force (MONUSCO) but also the ongoing twin process - Nairobi and Luanda Process. Of great concern is the conflicting stakeholder expectations regarding the EACRF's mandate which has complicated the situation on the ground. Also, the multiplicity of armed groups raises question about the inclusivity of the negotiations. They conclude that while the EACRF's intervention is has achieved an initial ceasefire, it is not sustainable in the absence of a lasting political solution.

According to Dr. Oita, one major obstacle facing the deployment of the EACRF revolves around the conceptualization of "negative forces," revealing a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at play in the conflict theater. He also pointed out that the absence of Rwanda from the intervention raises fundamental questions about its collective legitimacy, potentially impacting its overall efficacy. He also delved into the crucial issue of planning, shedding light on the hurdles and uncertainties that have impeded the seamless execution of the EACRF's mandate. He also invites a deeper exploration of the nationalistic interests and motives behind the intervention and its potential implications for the broader geopolitical landscape of the Great Lakes region.



SESSION 4: INTERNATIONAL LAW PANEL

Charting Legal Frontiers in COMESA and Beyond: Perspectives on International Law and Governance in Africa

This session ventured into the legal horizons shaping international law and governance in the African context. The presenters brought forth unique and intellectually stimulating perspectives in the realms of trade cooperation, geopolitical dynamics, and human rights within the African context. The insightful discussions broke free from the confines of a simplified academic debate, broadening participants understanding of the intricate forces shaping the economic, legal and governance systems on the continent.

Moderator

Mr. Wilson Rading, Legal Practitioner, Kenya

Panelists

- **Ms. Adelaide Musanga Muchesia**, Implementing Chapter 6 of the COMESA Treaty for Enhanced Trade Cooperation: A Case Study of Kenya
- **Mr. Peterson Waweru**, Africa's Geopolitical Transposition – Is It an Indictment on the Western-Led International Legal Order?
- **Dr. Edison Ziso (Ph.D.)** Enhancing implementation of decisions by increasing the cost of non-compliance: Proposing a new agenda for the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

Discussant

- **Mr. Moronge Obonyo**,
Lecturer and Trade Law Expert, Kenya

Key Interventions

Ms. Muchesia critically examined the practical challenges, opportunities and prospects associated with the implementation of Chapter 6 of the COMESA Treaty from the perspective of Kenya, one of trading block's key member states. Chapter 6 of the COMESA Treaty specifically addresses trade matters, emphasizing on the removal of trade barriers, the harmonization of trade policies, and the promotion of intra-regional trade. Effective implementation of this chapter is pivotal for COMESA member states to harness the region's economic potential and confront the challenges posed by polycrisis and geostrategic competition. She outlined the far-reaching implications of successful Chapter 6 implementation for Kenya and the broader COMESA region, envisioning a future marked by burgeoning trade, robust economic growth, and seamless regional integration. She also argues that a thriving intra-COMESA trade ecosystem can contribute to regional peace and stability, as economic interdependence and shared interests can incentivize cooperation, reducing the likelihood of conflicts that often disrupt trade. By undertaking this timely analysis of Kenya's trade cooperation journey within COMESA, she provides crucial insights for both its policymakers and stakeholders within the broader COMESA community.

Mr. Waweru undertook a comprehensive examination of the interplay between power and equality in the evolving international legal order. He employed the instrumentalization and withdrawal theories to analyze how international legal order is affected by hegemonic geopolitics and multipolarity, with particular emphasis on the place of Africa in international power competition—a dimension that has been glaringly overlooked. He underscores the growing disorientation with the prevailing international legal order and increasing mistrust in Western jurisdiction and norms by African states against the backdrop of a rise in alternative perspectives to international law (influenced by the emerging powers such as China) and the decline in international legal order. With Africa still largely confined to the periphery of global power politics, he looks at the impact of the changing power asymmetry on the continent's trade relationships, participation in multilateral institutions, democratic practices, as well as human rights situation. In his assessment, developments such as open markets and enhanced participation in multilateral institutions have been overwhelmingly received by African leaders and people. On the other hand, there is a growing rejection of the other two areas or dimensions - liberal democratic principles and human rights - pointing to mistrust of western values and ideas on the continent.

SESSION 4: ENVIRONMENTAL DIPLOMACY PANEL

Achieving Sustainability and Climate Action through Partnerships, Policy Cohesion and Environmental Diplomacy: A Case of the COMESA Region

This session explored how stakeholder partnerships, cohesive policies, and diplomatic efforts drive sustainable development and climate action within the COMESA region. The panelists shared valuable insights into the challenges faced by member states, the nexus between policy coherence and practical implementation, and the pivotal role of environmental diplomacy in addressing sustainable development as well as climate change goals. Overall, they provided a comprehensive overview of the opportunities, challenges, and prospects regarding sustainability and climate action in the dynamic landscape of the COMESA region.

Moderator

Dr. Peter Mwencha (Ph.D.), Council Member, IRSK

Panelists

- **Dr. Alice Karuri (Ph.D.)**, Climate Policy Cohesion of COMESA Member States: A Comparative Assessment of Kenya, Somalia, Zimbabwe, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
- **Mr. Japheth Kasimbu**, A Critical Analysis of the Nexus Between Environmental Diplomacy and Climate Action in the COMESA Region
- **Ms. Susan Handa**, Climate Policy Cohesion of COMESA Member States: A Comparative Assessment of Kenya, Somalia, Zimbabwe, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
- **Mr. Charles Elly Atamba**, Partnership For Sustainable Development: A Case of Kenya a Member State of COMESA

Discussant

- **Mr. Lweendo Kambela**, Peace and Security Expert, Zambia Human Rights Commission (ZHRC), Zambia

Key Interventions

Dr. Karuri and Ms. Handa's focus was on climate change policy cohesion amongst COMESA member states with a comparison between Kenya and Sudan. Using the Green Theory analytical framework, they emphasised the need for alignment and consistency of policies across different levels—nationally, regionally and internationally—to address the challenges posed by climate change. Based on the case of two COMESA member States with shared resources, they highlighted some of the climate challenges in Sudan and Kenya which include desertification, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, water scarcity, tribal and ethnic conflict. Their analysis shed light on the critical importance of bridging the gap between policy formulation and practical implementation, especially in the context of international commitments like the Paris Agreement. Crucially, they underscored the need for a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by nations in translating climate policies into tangible actions. The study's focus on Kenya and Sudan offers insights into the unique contexts of different countries within the COMESA region, providing a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities they encounter in aligning with global climate goals.

Mr. Kasimbu focused on the nexus between environmental diplomacy and climate action, advocating for collaborative efforts to address the environmental challenges in the COMESA region. He highlighted the pivotal role of environmental diplomacy in addressing the far-reaching impacts of climate change, including temperature variations, erratic rainfall, and extreme weather events, emphasizing the need for collective action and cooperation at international, regional, and sub-regional levels. In this context, he called on member states to develop robust mitigation and adaptation strategies to combat the impacts of climate change and outlined significant climate change impacts in the COMESA region, such as cyclones, agricultural productivity challenges, biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, sea-level rise, and coastal vulnerability. His recommendations included enhancing collaborative frameworks within COMESA, aligning regional environmental goals with international targets like the Paris Agreement, establishing mechanisms for capacity building and technology transfer, and engaging non-state actors for comprehensive climate action.

On his part, Mr. Atamba sought to rethink and enhance existing partnership models for achieving national and regional sustainable development goals against the backdrop of evolving global paradigms. In this regard, he explored the role of collaborative approaches in achieving sustainable development in the COMESA regions, focusing on Kenya as a case study. According to him, while the shift from MDGs to SDGs has come with its own complexities and significant challenges for countries, it offers a great opportunity for coordinated efforts to promote sustainable development in Africa. In this regard, he highlighted the mechanisms employed by the Kenyan Government for engendering sustainable development using a systematic review of secondary data. He also addressed the various challenges hindering countries within the region from forming effective partnerships and proposed recommendations to policymakers.

SESSION 4: PEACE AND SECURITY PANEL 2

Advancing Peace and Security in the COMESA Region: Exploring Challenges, Opportunities, and Collaborative Solutions

The session featured presentations by distinguished peace and security scholars drawn from the COMESA region. These presentations provided a rich exploration of intricate issues shaping the political, economic, and security landscape in the COMESA region. The insightful presentations also offered reflections and delved into diverse aspects of political representation, food security, regional stability, and peace and security, providing valuable insights and reflections. Over and above, the discussions contributed to the collective knowledge and a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities that define the COMESA region.

Moderator

Dr. Andrea Prah (Ph.D.), Senior Researcher, ACCORD

Panelists

- **Dr. Mumo Nzau (Ph.D.)**, Maintaining Regional Stability in the Midst of Complex Regime Transitions in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities for COMESA Region Countries
- **Mr. Evans Daka**, The Role of COMESA in Promoting Peace and Security in the Extraction of Transitional Minerals in Zambia
- **Dr. Ndakaitei Makwanise (Ph.D.)**, The Russia-Ukraine War and food security: Lessons for Zimbabwe and Africa
- **Dr. Philip Buchere (Ph.D.)**, Parliaments and Regional Security: The Case of the Legislative Bodies in the COMESA Region
- **Dr. Edison Ziso (Ph.D.)**, Displaced Representation in Political Parties: Examining Party Cartelisation in Africa.

Discussant

- **Prof. Kasaija Apuuli (Ph.D.)**, Professor, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Makerere University, Uganda

Key Interventions

Mr. Daka provided a critical review of the role of COMESA in peace and security. In his analysis, COMESA, whose initial objective was to foster economic integration in Eastern and Southern Africa, has evolved into a security community that recognizes the vital role of peace and security in fostering stable socio-economic development. Accordingly, COMESA established a dedicated governance, peace, and security program to address the conflicts in member states that are hindering the integration process. In his conclusion, he calls for further studies to comprehensively understand the dynamics of peace and security within member states and the role of international security communities in the region. Overall, he provides valuable insights the pivotal role of COMESA, emphasizing the interdependence of economic and security considerations for effective regional integration.

On his part, Dr. Ziso provided an overview of how political parties in Africa have paradoxically become more self-serving, with elites exploiting them for personal gain over the interests of their members and the broader public, potentially harming representative democracy. He started by introducing the concept of political party cartelization in Africa and examined how it results in exclusion and displaced representation of voters. Initially envisioned as a vehicle for democratic participation and representation, he contends that political parties become delinked from the wishes of the majority and come to represent special interest. He also challenges the conventional notion of political parties as essential vehicles for citizen participation and representation in Africa, arguing that, contrary to expectations, political parties may be contributing to, rather than alleviating, the continent's political, economic, and social crises. In order to address this disconnect between political parties and the people, Dr. Ziso calls for a reevaluation of the role of political parties in Africa's political landscape, advocating for new thinking that might reimagine or even exclude traditional political party structures to enhance democratization efforts on the continent.

Dr. Makwanise examined how the Russia-Ukraine war has disrupted Africa's food supply chains, drawing lessons for the continent's food security. With Africa being heavily dependent on wheat imports from Russia and Ukraine, millions of people on the continent have become increasingly vulnerable to hunger due to disrupted food channels. Using the Resource Dependency

Theory (RDT), the study explored how the conflict led to a shortage of food supplies but has also led to negative impacts on fertilizers and fuel prices. He concluded by emphasizing that the responsibility for securing Africa's food future lies within the continent, necessitating proactive measures to address geopolitical disruptions and enhance resilience in the face of global challenges. To eliminate this dependency, he recommends that Africa must prioritize reinvestment in agriculture, adopt effective policies, reconsider traditional approaches, value peace, and manage food supply chains strategically.

Dr. Nzau delved into the phenomena of regime transitions affecting several COMESA countries, posing challenges to regional stability and economic potential. Guided by Neofunctionalism and Liberal Institutionalism theories, Dr. Nzau examined the associated challenges, identified potential opportunities, and proposed robust policy solutions for member states. He argues for a more strategic and proactive approach by COMESA to address the political uncertainties during regime changes in order to forestall the impact of resulting instability on investments and economic growth. Given the conflict is a major hinderance to economic development, he concluded by calling for careful navigation of political transitions so as to ensure regional stability as this will foster a conducive environment for economic growth and maximize the collective potential of the trading bloc.

Dr. Buchere delved into the role of parliamentary bodies in COMESA member states in fostering security and peace within the region, utilizing case studies of conflict-ridden countries like Libya, Somalia, and Sudan. He highlighted the Pan-African Parliament's (PAP) pivotal role in parliamentary diplomacy on the continent, which includes peacekeeping missions, fact-finding missions, and fostering dialogue between conflicted parties. In contrast, the COMESA Inter-Parliamentary Forum faces challenges, including financial constraints and a lack of skilled personnel, limiting its potential to promote peace and security in the region. In conclusion, he called on COMESA to consider strengthening the Inter-Parliamentary Forum by providing it with sufficient funding and giving it legislative mandate to take part in parliamentary diplomacy.

SESSION 4: PUBLIC DIPLOMACY PANEL

Shaping Diplomacy through Media and Cultural Narratives: Analysis of Selected African Newspapers and their Influence on Regional and International Relations

This session interrogated how media and culture influence and shape African diplomatic relations and international affairs. The panelists shed light on the evolving landscape of international relations and its close linkages to media and cultural institutions, emphasizing the profound influence wielded by these two institutions in the contemporary global landscape. Overall, the session provided an in-depth exploration of the multifaceted relationships between media, cultural narratives, and diplomacy, providing participants with a deeper understanding of the dynamic forces at play in the contemporary global landscape.

Moderator

Mr. Mwangi Maina, Senior Diplomatic Editor, Standard Group

Panelists

- **Dr. Esther Muthoni King'ori (Ph.D.)**, Framing of diaspora diplomacy in Kenyan media: An analysis of selected media conversations
- **Dr. Maureen Syallow (Ph.D.)**, Framing of diaspora diplomacy in Kenyan media: An analysis of selected media conversations
- **Ms. Maureen Ooko**, Leveraging Cultural Diplomacy to Achieve Sustainable Foreign Policy: A Case of Sino-Africa Relations
- **Mr. Eliud Kibii**, The Role of Media in Diplomacy: Shaping Diplomacy through Media Narratives

Discussant

- **Prof. George Nyabuga (Ph.D.)**
Associate Professor, Graduate School of Media and Communications, Aga Khan University, Kenya

Key Interventions

Ms. Ooko's shed light on the historical and contemporary aspects of the Sino-Africa relations, which encompass cultural, economic, and political ties. She underscored the historical depth of this relationship, citing the example of archeological evidence of historical ties between Kenya and China dating back to 697 AD. Moreover, she outlined the multifaceted and dynamic nature of the contemporary Sino-Africa diplomatic relations, which are characterized by Chinese cultural and economic dominance, manifested through avenue such as the media, education institutions, cultural exchanges as well as entertainment. To address this imbalance, she called on African nations to proactively engage with China to ensure a relationship that is not only reciprocal but also promotes shared prosperity. This can involve leveraging cultural exchanges, reciprocal African investments, and other mutually beneficial initiatives. By addressing the existing imbalances, Africa can assert itself as an active participant in shaping the narrative and contribute to deeper and more resilient Sino-Africa relations.

Dr. King'ori and Dr. Syallow critically examined Kenya's diaspora diplomacy, a key pillar of Kenya's foreign policy, and its portrayal in the media. Employing the media framing theory, they scrutinized news coverage, revealing narratives that oscillate between positive frames lauding the government's economic policies and investment facilitation that have resulted in an increase in remittances, and critical assessments of the government's failure to safeguard migrant workers in the Middle East, and discontent with the diaspora affairs department's associations with potentially questionable figures. Notably, mainstream outlets leaned towards positive spins and featured more government quotes, while social media exhibited a mix of positive and negative perspectives, with reduced gatekeeping effects. They underscored the vital role of strategic diaspora diplomacy and media management in crafting a narrative that optimizes the positive impact of Kenya's engagement with its diaspora community.

Mr. Eliud Kibii underscored the paramount role of media in shaping diplomatic narratives and influencing public opinion. Pointing out the absence of a formal policy delineating the media's role in diplomacy, he outlined the challenges facing Kenya in effectively communicating its narrative on the international stage. Kibii delved into the 'Mass Media' Effect of 'Big Media,' elucidating how states strategically utilize media to craft narratives and influence policies. Drawing on global examples from

China, the West, and the Middle East, he highlighted how media portrayal significantly shapes global perceptions. Crucially, he drew attention to the government's current communication gaps, which leave the media to fill crucial informational voids. In an era where information is power, Kibii emphasized the need for a policy on media diplomacy and urged policy makers to prioritize strategic media engagement and proactive government communications to advance national interests on the global stage.

In his feedback to Maureen Ooko's paper, Prof Nyabuga acknowledged the robust Sino-Africa ties, but highlighted the concerns regarding its perceived exploitative nature. While emphasizing China's strategic deployment of soft power and public relations is meant to bolster its diplomatic position, Prof Nyabuga also questioned the concept of 'Chinese mutuality,' contending that it primarily serves China's vested interests rather than fostering genuine shared interests. Shifting focus to the papers by Drs King'ori and Syallow, as well as Mr. Kibii, Prof Nyabuga Media acknowledged the pivotal role played by media outlets in constructing narratives that influence public opinion and, consequently, diplomatic relations. However, he questioned the media's pursuit of ratings, and queried the processes of frame selection, the involvement of the diaspora, the methodologies employed in story sourcing, as well as the degree of media influence and control. This critique urged a more profound contemplation of the intricacies influencing media narratives and their impact.



Ms. Rosely
Vice Chair - Intern
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SESSION 5: WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS PANEL

Breaking Barriers: Inspiring, Empowering, and Supporting Women in Diplomacy and International Affairs

This session sought to highlight the inspiring role of women's leadership in diplomacy and international affairs and its transformative impact on shaping international relations. The session placed a special focus on the importance of inspiring, empowering and supporting women to take on leadership roles in diplomacy and international affairs contexts and explores strategies to foster gender equality within the field. The session also featured discussions on the achievements and challenges faced by women in diplomacy and international affairs, shedding light on the opportunities they create for positive change and cooperation on the global stage.

Moderator

Ms. Winnie Rugutt, Lecturer, DDIS, University of Nairobi

Speakers

- **Amb. Rose Makena**, Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Kenya to United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) and UNEP
- **Eng. Mwende Njiraini**, Africa Initiatives Coordinator, Diplo Foundation
- **H.E. Ms. Caroline Vicini**, Ambassador of Sweden to Kenya
- **Ms. Betty Sungura**, CEO, National Gender and Equality Commission, Kenya

Key Interventions

Ambassador Makena spoke about her rich experience and shared valuable insights as a woman in a senior role in a diplomatic role. She observed that while the fields of international relations and diplomacy have long been male-dominated professions, this is starting to change, as the number of women in important and influential positions in diplomacy and foreign affairs is increasing exponentially. She also outlined the various pathways for women to get into diplomacy and highlighted the various challenges that women in the field are confronted with such as limited opportunities, pressing family commitment, political dynamics and social challenges amongst others. She passionately appealed for increased efforts in empowering women in diplomacy and helping those who come after them to climb the ladder and get their rightful place.

Engineer Njiraini discussed the important work spearheaded by DiploFoundation in diplomacy and internet governance. This includes policy advocacy, research, and capacity development, underscoring their commitment to fostering expertise in these critical areas. While some progress has been made, she expressed concern over the prevailing gender disparity in diplomatic roles, noting the under-representation of female ambassadors worldwide, particularly in Africa. In conclusion, she stressed the need for networking forums for women in international relations and diplomacy.

Ambassador Vicini provided an overview of her long career in diplomacy and her work as the Swedish Ambassador to Kenya. In a poignant observation that the foreign service is a reflection of society, she argued that unequal societies cannot be expected to have a gender-balanced foreign service. She highlighted Sweden's leadership role in this regard, stressing their gender-equality credentials. She advised women to gain foundational knowledge and become specialists in technical areas as route to going up the foreign policy ladder.

Ms. Sungura spoke of the work that the national gender and equality commission (NGEC) does in line with their mandate and how it aligns with broader global objectives for gender equality. In light of the prevailing gender disparity in diplomatic roles, she called for more work to be done on identifying and understanding the barriers to women in diplomacy. She called for a more equitable and representative diplomatic landscape, reinforcing the urgency of addressing gender disparities and creating more opportunities for women in the field of diplomacy. Ms. Sungura advocated for mentorship programs tailored for entry-level and mid-level women so as to foster their professional growth and enhance their representation in diplomatic space. In conclusion, she urged stakeholders to progressively work towards gender equality as well as the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the diplomatic space.

SESSION 6: THINK TANK DIPLOMACY SESSION

The Evolving Role of Think Tanks in Diplomacy and International Relations

This session delved into the evolving and influential role of think tanks in the realm of international diplomacy and global policymaking. The session explored how think tanks, as non-governmental and independent research institutions, bridge the gap between academia, policy circles, and diplomatic arenas. In particular, the pivotal role of think tanks in generating actionable insights and policy recommendations that cater to the evolving challenges in the global landscape was emphasized. It also scrutinized the various challenges facing think tanks in Africa as well as their future prospects.

Moderator

Prof. Kasaijja Apuuli (Ph.D.), Professor, Makerere University

Panelists

- **Prof. Peter Kagwanja (Ph.D.)**, President & Chief Executive, Africa Policy Institute (API)
- **Dr. Rosa S. Ko (PhD)**, Co-Founder and President, Sochin Research Institute
- **Prof. Macharia Munene**, Professor of History and International Relations, USIU-Africa

Discussant

- **Dr. Andrea Prah (Ph.D.)**, Senior Researcher, ACCORD

Key Interventions

The session kicked off with Dr. Rosa Ko shedding light on the vital role African think-tanks play in generating and sharing knowledge. According to Dr. Ko, these independent research institutions play a key role in contributing to the diversity of research and development of different knowledge systems, as well as fostering evidence-informed policy making. Despite a 24% rise in African think-tank numbers, challenges persist, with funding and independence being chief concerns. In comparison to developed nations, where government funds and foundation support fuel research, Africa lacks diverse funding sources, casting a shadow on their sustainability. Dr. Ko outlined future prospects for African think-tanks, emphasizing the need for increased research opportunities, avoidance of narrow interests, public involvement in knowledge dissemination, the creation of government-relevant knowledge, and diversification of funding sources to ensure sustained impact. These measures are crucial to ensuring the continued effectiveness and contribution of African think-tanks to policy shaping and impacting the overall development of the continent.

Prof Peter Kagwanja delivered an insightful presentation underscoring the critical role of African think-tanks in the contemporary global landscape. With the new Cold War, escalating US-Russia tensions, and the resurgence of the 'scramble for Africa,' these institutions are pivotal in guiding the continent through complex geopolitical shifts. The Middle East's conflicts, coupled with the rising influence of powers like Turkey and Iran, further emphasize the need for strategic thinking. In a world inundated with diverse ideas, amplified by social media, think-tanks act as essential policy advisors, shaping the language of engagement in foreign policy. Prof Kagwanja highlighted the correlation between a country's think-tank share and its discourse; the United States, India, and China lead in this regard, while Africa lags behind. As the world undergoes profound transformations, Prof Kagwanja stressed the necessity for African think-tanks to cultivate innovative perspectives. A continent with the lowest share of such institutions needs to develop new thinking to effectively navigate the emerging global order. By doing so, African think-tanks can contribute significantly to addressing the unique challenges and opportunities the continent faces in an ever-evolving international arena.

On his part, Professor Macharia Munene underscored the pivotal role of think-tanks, emphasizing their vital contributions in guiding policymakers, anticipating challenges, and shaping public opinion. Despite the growing numbers of African think-tanks, challenges persist, including skepticism from government officials, funding shortages, and the perception of intellectualism as a threat. However, the increasing societal demand for answers presents opportunities for think-tanks to thrive, particularly in correcting policy blunders. A central challenge for Africa is determining who interprets the continent to the world, and Professor

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Munene advocates for African think-tanks to assume this crucial role. As a parting shot, he decried the dependency of African think tanks on external support for their sustenance, cautioning that this will hamper their ability to conduct relevant research on areas of interest for the continent.

The session wrapped up with insightful remarks from Dr. Andrea Prah, who delved into three key areas of consideration for the audience. Firstly, she highlighted the intricate relationship between think tanks and their donors, shedding light on how it influences research agendas, work programs, and ideological identities. Secondly, the need to precisely define and measure influence and impact emerged as a crucial consideration. Thirdly, the discussion extended to the operational level of think tanks and the beneficiaries of their work, emphasizing the importance of engaging with the local communities. The multifaceted exploration underscored the complex dynamics shaping the landscape of think tanks and their pivotal role in influencing policy and public discourse.

SESSION 7: PEACE AND SECURITY PANEL 1

Building Peaceful and Secure Futures: A Multifaceted Exploration of Perspectives on Peace and Security in Africa

This session discussed the multifaceted prospects, opportunities and challenges inherent in addressing terrorism in Africa, focusing on the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) and the Kenya's Engagement in Peace Support Operations. Presenters emphasizing the critical importance of adopting comprehensive strategies that not only focus on military responses but also address the root causes and engage local communities in meaningful ways. The complexities discussed provided a nuanced perspective, urging a more holistic and collaborative approach to effectively counter the evolving threats of terrorism on the continent.

Moderator

Dr. Claire Amuhaya, Senior Lecturer, RUDN University

Panelists

- **Dr. Oita Etyang (Ph.D.)**, Terminating Mozambique's Terrorism Maneuvers: Perspectives from The SADC Peacekeeping Model
- **Mr. Lweendo Kambela**, Terminating Mozambique's Terrorism Maneuvers: Perspectives from The SADC Peacekeeping Model
- **Maj. Stephen Muleya**, Terminating Mozambique's Terrorism Maneuvers: Perspectives from The SADC Peacekeeping Model
- **Ms. Irene Ogaja**, Kenya's Engagement in Peace Support Operations: Patterns Prospects and Challenges

Discussant

- **Dr. Kizito Sabala (Ph.D.)**, Senior Lecturer, University of Nairobi, Kenya

Key Interventions

In an enlightening session, Dr. Oita gave a brief overview of the situation threat of terrorism in Africa and highlighted the worrying trend of the increasing attacks on the continent. His analysis illuminated key characteristics of the terrorism scourge, emphasizing the surge in attack numbers, the prevalence of foreign interventions, the increasing sophistication of attack methods, the proliferation of terrorist groups, and the strategic use of technology for propaganda. He also discussed the contestation regarding the conceptualization and definition of terrorism.

Further enriching the discussion, Mr. Kambela delved into the historical roots of the terrorism problem in Mozambique and the drivers of terrorism in the Cabo Delgado province. In his analysis, the failure of government to honor the social contract with the local community is a key driver of the emergence and growth of terrorism. He also discussed the mandate of SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), and some of the challenges that it is facing, including limited finances, alienation of the local population non-cooperation of various actors, change in tactics by Ansar al-Sunna Wa Jamma (ASWJ) and the exclusive use of military force.

Major Muleya in his contribution, offered valuable lessons learned from the deployment of SAMIM in Mozambique. One prominent observation was SADC's failure to effectively mobilize the necessary funds for the mission. The self-sustaining model adopted by SAMIM resulted in insufficient equipment and personnel, hindering the mission's effectiveness. The alienation of local communities is compounded by the fact that they don't derive any benefits from the exploitation of their resources. Also the lack of coordination amongst various actors has led to the inability to effectively confront the insurgents, who have changed their tactics and are now trying to win the hearts and minds of the local population. The exclusive military approach being employed has left the underlying social issues unaddressed.

Dr. Oita and Ms. Ogaja provided a comprehensive examination of Kenya's engagement in peace support operations within the COMESA region and beyond. The session also explored the security, political, diplomatic and economic rationale guiding Kenya's involvement in peace support operations, illuminating the motives behind these deployments. The presenters further delved into the distinctive patterns characterizing Kenya's engagements, providing a valuable perspective on the nation's peace support initiatives. The speakers also shed light on the prospects and challenges associated with Kenya's strategic initiatives in the region, offering a holistic view of Kenya's role in fostering peace and stability.

SESSION 7: INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ECONOMY PANEL

Enhancing Economic Resilience and Development in the COMESA Region: The Critical Role of Nation Branding and Foreign Aid.

This session brought together experts and thought leaders to share perspectives, analyses, and insights around the pivotal roles of nation branding and foreign aid in fortifying economic resilience and fostering sustainable development within the COMESA region. It delved into how nation branding, a nuanced and multifaceted concept with the capacity to shape international perceptions of a country, and attract investments, stands as a strategic tool for nations aspiring to strengthen their global presence. Concurrently, it scrutinized the impact of foreign aid, assessing its efficacy in driving industrialization and bolstering economies within the COMESA framework. Overall, the discussions contributed valuable insights that will inform strategies for advancing economic prosperity within the COMESA region.

Moderator

Mr. Edward Kakumu, KIC Sweden, Program Manager

Panelists

- **Dr. Peter Mwencha (Ph.D.)**, Nation Branding as a Competitive Identity Tool: A Case of Select Countries in the COMESA Region
- **Ms. Thrity Engineer**, Nation Branding as a Competitive Identity Tool: A Case of Select Countries in the COMESA Region
- **Ms. Winnie Cheptoo Rugutt**, The Role of Foreign Aid in Influencing Manufacturing in Africa: Lessons from Kenya and Mauritius

Discussant

- **Dr. Maureen Syallow (Ph.D.)**, Lecturer, Strathmore University, Kenya

Key Interventions

Ms. Thrity-Engineer started off by adeptly introducing participants to the intriguing concept of a brand, emphasizing its role in distinguishing one product or, in this case, a country from another. She also showcased examples of 'nation-brands' and delved into various definitions offered by scholars while underscoring its role as a form of public diplomacy aimed at enhancing national reputation. She took the audience through two popular nation branding models – Bloom's Consulting Brand Wheel and Anholt's Branding Model. These models incorporated various vectors, from tourism and talent to governance and culture, offering a comprehensive understanding of nation branding.

Dr. Mwencha underscored the benefits of Nation Branding, emphasizing its capacity to create a distinct self-image, shape an international reputation, and foster a nation's ability to attract investments and skills. At the same time, he pointed out the challenges and the complexities African countries encounter in shaping and managing their international reputations. These include the 'continental brand effect', incongruency between a country's actual characteristics and its desired image, as well as the fragmented national branding architecture. He also compared Kenya's and Rwanda's branding experiences, showing the similarities and differences in their approaches. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of a well-defined central idea, the establishment of measurable KPIs, maintaining consistency and congruency in messaging, and ensuring coordination across public diplomacy efforts to achieve effective national branding.

On her part, Ms. Rugutt explored the connection between industrial development and improved welfare outcomes in Africa. Her analysis juxtaposed the contrasting experiences of Kenya and Mauritius, spotlighting the latter's notable success. The presentation explored various theories on development aid and provided a historical overview, spanning from the colonial to post-colonial eras. A key divergence surfaced in Kenya's emphasis on local consumption versus Mauritius' strategic focus on export-oriented industries, particularly textiles. The paper underscored Mauritius' adept management of foreign assistance, leveraging its diverse foreign heritage, and drew attention to its superior performance in governance and business indices when compared to Kenya.

SESSION 7: PEACE AND SECURITY PANEL 2

Intersecting Dimensions of Security Challenges in East Africa: Balancing Competing Interests, Foreign Policy Dynamics and Climate Action

This session delved into multifaceted issues crucial for understanding and addressing security challenges in the region, highlighting the complex interplay of factors shaping security dynamics in East Africa and the Horn Region. The speakers shed light on the intricate web of factors shaping East Africa's security landscape, including conflicting interests, foreign policy dynamics, and the impact of climate change on security. The discussions underscored the necessity of adaptability, strategic foresight and collaborative efforts in effectively addressing the evolving security landscape in East Africa.

Moderator

- **Mr. Richard Atwaru**, Data Conflict Analyst, COMESA

Panelists

- **Dr. Kizito Sabala (Ph.D.)**, Resolving the Sudan Conflict: A Case of Too Many Cooks Spoiling the Broth?
- **Hon Rachel Ameso**, The Relationship between Climate Change and Security in COMESA Region: The Case of Kenya
- **Mr. Nasongo Muliro**, Rethinking Kenya's Foreign Policy Strategy in the Evolving Peace and Security Architecture in Eastern Africa
- **Mr. Mutinda Mutisya**, The Nexus between Climate Change and Security in the Horn of Africa
- **Ms. Berita Mutinda Musau**, The Enemy of my Enemy is my Friend: Ethiopia-Eritrea Relations and the 2020 Tigray Crisis in Ethiopia

Discussant

- **Mr. Tapera Chinemhute**, Conflict Analyst, COMESA

Key Interventions

Dr. Sabala examined why various peace efforts have been unsuccessful in bringing peace to Sudan and explores potential solutions to the intermittent cycles of violence and conflict, with the latest cycle initiated on April 15, 2023. He delved into the historical context of the conflicts and the resulting militarization of Sudanese politics, raising critical questions about the capacity of current interventions. He also highlights the complexities and challenges that resulted in the failure of peace efforts, including the external interference, the unresolved issue of remnants from the Al Bashir regime, and the power struggle between former Chief of Staff Gen. Burhan and his deputy Gen. Hemdti. In conclusion, Dr. Sabala argues that the various uncoordinated international and regional peace efforts, including processes led by Saudi Arabia, Doha, and IGAD, will not be able to resolve the conflict. He therefore calls for concerted efforts and inclusive process so as to resolve the Sudan conflict.

Hon Rachel Ameso scrutinized the intricate link between climate change and security in the COMESA region, emphasizing its impact on environmental sustainability and regional security. She highlighted the multifaceted contributors to climate change, including both human and non-human factors, and emphasized the importance of collaboration among member states, regional organizations, and international partners to build resilience and avert potential conflicts arising from resource scarcity and displacement within the COMESA region. Ameso underlines the significance of this collaborative approach to foster resilience and proactively address potential conflicts arising from challenges like resource scarcity and displacement. The paper compellingly advocates for integrated approaches that holistically consider both environmental and security dimensions, recognizing the symbiotic relationship between these critical aspects in the context of COMESA.

Mr. Muliro delved into the underexplored realm of Kenya's foreign service management, emphasizing its crucial role as the technical driver of the country's foreign policy. By scrutinizing the foreign policy challenges and recent government restructuring, he highlighted the necessity of evaluating the effectiveness of Kenya's foreign service administration. He singled out the country's perceived reactionary approach to issues and a so-called "foreign policy of survival" as diminishing its leadership role in the region. He advocates for a strategic reassessment of Kenya's foreign service management in order to address gaps in governance

and implementation of foreign policy. In conclusion, Mr. Muliro outlined several strategies for optimal management of Kenya's foreign service administration, emphasizing its imperative role in securing Kenya's strategic relevance in the evolving global power dynamics. He recommends amongst others the re-establishment of adequately resourced special envoy roles, invigoration of the foreign service academy, and reliance on evidence-based policy.

Ms. Musau examined the intricate dynamics of Ethiopia and Eritrea's relations amidst the 2020 Tigray crisis, employing a historical lens and strategic analysis to unravel the motivations behind their collaboration against the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Tigray people. The alliance unfolds against the backdrop of Ethiopia's political transition in 2018, with the rise of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed disrupting decades-long Tigray dominance. According to her, this alliance has raised eyebrows, considering the historical frostiness between the two nations since the 1998 war over the Badme region. Traditionally at odds, the question arises: is this a case of "The Enemy of my Enemy is my Friend"? Ms. Musau argued that the involvement of Eritrea is deeply rooted in historical relations and strategic considerations, challenging conventional expectations. In conclusion, she underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of historical legacies and contemporary geo-strategic calculations to comprehend the intricacies of shifting alliances and evolving dynamics in the Horn of Africa region and the resulting instability and chaos.

SESSION 8: TRADING FOR PEACE PANEL

Trade as a Confidence-Building Measure amid Protracted Conflicts and War: Perspectives from the COMESA Region

The session brought together distinguished panelists to explore the nexus of trade and peace, drawing on their expertise and experiences to unravel the potential of trade to bridge divides, nurture cooperation, and lay the groundwork for lasting peace in the COMESA region, where countries grapple with both historical and contemporary conflicts. The panelists delved into how trade can transcend its economic function and contribute to fostering trust and cooperation amongst actors. The discussions offered both a nuanced understanding of the challenges and promising pathways toward fostering peace and security in the COMESA region in the face of the protracted conflicts and geopolitical tensions.

Moderator

Dr. Julian Rowa, Head of Programs, International Relations Society of Kenya (IRSK)

Speakers and Panelists

- **Ms. Jacinta Kiruthi**, CEO, In-Trade Africa
- **Dr. Claire Amuhaya**, Senior Lecturer, RUDN University
- **Dr. Kizito Sabala**, Senior Lecturer, University of Nairobi
- **Ms. Elizabeth Mutunga**, Head, Governance, Peace & Security, Common Markets for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)

Key Interventions

Dr. Sabala opened the session by making the point that peace and trade go hand-in-hand, arguing that nations and entities engaged in trade inherently seek harmonious relationships to safeguard their economic interests. According to Dr. Sabala, the fundamental premise behind this symbiotic relationship between peace and trade is that disrupting peaceful relations would jeopardize their trading relations. He emphasized the interconnectedness of peace and trade, arguing that economic collaboration and partnership serves as a catalyst for fostering amicable relations. Furthermore, Dr. Sabala underscored the pivotal role of diplomats as facilitators of international trade and cooperation, highlighting the importance of diplomatic efforts in ensuring the prosperity of nations through peaceful economic engagements.

Ms. Mutunga spoke of the economic dimension of conflicts, emphasizing the resilient nature of economic activities despite challenging circumstances. Citing the example of the protracted conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), she underscored a crucial point - that even amid warfare, trade persists. Within the context of COMESA, Ms. Mutunga emphasized the organization's pivotal role in fostering trade among member states. She also discussed the various barriers to trade and regional integration within the COMESA region, including conflict, protectionism, political differences, poor infrastructure amongst others. Importantly, Ms. Mutunga issued a call to action, urging COMESA member countries to institute effective mechanisms for addressing these barriers for sustained regional development.

Dr. Amuhaya provided an insightful perspective on the dual role of business elites in conflict situations. Notably, she highlighted their potential as mediators and influencers, capable of using their leverage to ease tensions and thus prevent outbreak of conflicts. The involvement of business elites as conduits for diplomacy, especially in situations where they have substantial stakes at risk, underscores their importance in conflict resolution. Simultaneously, Dr. Amuhaya acknowledged a less altruistic possibility of business elites instigating conflict for personal gain, which adds a layer of complexity to their involvement in conflict dynamics. Moreover, Dr. Amuhaya acknowledged the significant role of academia in the broader context of peacebuilding. She touched upon academia's contributions to research, training, and policy development, emphasizing the multifaceted approach needed to address the intricate relationship between trade and conflict. In doing so, Dr. Amuhaya illuminated the interconnected roles of various stakeholders, highlighting the potential for collaboration between business elites, academia, and diplomatic efforts in fostering peace amid complex conflict scenarios.

Ms. Kiruthi emphasized the adaptive nature of trade even in conflict-ridden scenarios. She highlighted the resilience of trade, detailing how it undergoes transformations to navigate the challenges posed by conflicts. In such situations, trade routes are altered, prices are adjusted, and the actors involved may change, showcasing the dynamic nature of commerce amidst turmoil. Crucially, Ms. Kiruthi underscored that those perpetuating conflicts often benefit from the resulting chaos, creating a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. This nuanced understanding of the interaction between trade and conflict provides valuable insights for policymakers seeking to develop strategies that account for the adaptive nature of trade in regions facing ongoing conflicts.

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Recommendation 1:

The partners to institutionalize research and discourse on the status on peace, security and governance in the region so as to inform policy and programming.

Recommendation 2:

The partners to work together to use their respective comparative advantages to collectively strengthen conflict prevention efforts with a focus on addressing structural factors of conflict the region. This should take into account emerging challenges in the region through an inter-disciplinary approach.

Recommendation 3:

Partners to institutionalize an annual conference on international Relations and Diplomacy for IRSK to interrogate the emerging issues in the region. The theme of the annual conference is determined by the contemporary peace, security and governance issues arising at the time. The conference will act as a mentoring space for students, advocacy and outreach. Use of the conference as a forum to build partnerships between academia, governments, think tanks, and practitioners.

Recommendation 4:

Production of a publication that reflects the discussions that emanate from the conference.

Recommendation 5

Utilizing digital platforms to disseminate the findings and contributions made in the conference.

The 2023 IRSK Conference was impactful in the following ways:**1. Knowledge Exchange and Enrichment:**

The 2023 IRSK Conference facilitated a robust exchange of knowledge among participants, including policymakers, scholars, practitioners, and students. Through engaging keynote speeches, panel discussions, and interactive sessions, participants gained valuable insights into the complex geopolitical landscape of the COMESA region. Specific topics covered included the role of regional organizations in promoting peace and security, the impact of think tanks in international relations, the nexus of trade and peace, as well as the obstacles and prospects faced by women in the field of diplomacy. The contributions made at the conference have enriched the understanding of international relations and diplomacy within the COMESA region and will undoubtedly inform future research and policy decisions in the field.

2. Collaboration and Networking:

The 2023 IRSK Conference served not only as an intellectual gathering but also facilitated the formation of partnerships and connections between various international relations and diplomacy stakeholders including academia, government bodies, think tanks, and practitioners. The meaningful partnerships and alliances that emerged extend beyond the conference, demonstrating the event's profound impact on fostering collaboration, laying the groundwork for future joint initiatives. For instance, participants from various COMESA countries have requested IRSK to assist them in establishing similar professional associations in their home countries. The shared commitment among these professionals emanating from the conference will contribute to impactful initiatives that transcend traditional boundaries as well as a stronger network of IR and diplomacy professionals across the region and beyond.

3. Policy Influence and Development:

The thought-provoking presentations, discussions and insights shared by distinguished speakers and panelists during the conference have been distilled into actionable policy recommendations that are meant to inform policy thinking and action within the COMESA region. These recommendations will be captured in this report publication as well as a series of short videos that reflect the discussions that emanate from the conference. It is hoped that going forward, the conference will become the premier forum for interrogating and shaping African international affairs and diplomacy frameworks, governance mechanisms, and strategies, thereby contributing to a more informed and adaptive approach to addressing the complex and multifaceted challenges facing the COMESA region.

4. Capacity Building and Skills Enhancement:

The 2023 IRSK Conference featured a series of well-structured sessions that sought to equip participants with the relevant skills and knowledge directly applicable to their academic as well as professional contexts. Through these sessions, attendees had the opportunity to deepen their understanding of key international relations and diplomacy concepts, tools, and methodologies, ensuring that they left the conference with enhanced capabilities and ready to apply their newfound skills in their respective fields. The IRSK Annual Conference also played a pivotal role in fostering mentorship for emerging scholars and students. Through dedicated sessions, nascent scholars and students had the unique opportunity to engage with seasoned academics and practitioners, receiving mentorship and guidance in navigating the complexities of the international relations and diplomacy space. Organizers, too, benefitted from hands-on experiences in event management, coordination, and strategic planning. This focus on capacity building not only elevated the expertise of individuals but has also enhanced the capabilities of the various IR and diplomacy stakeholders drawn from the COMESA region.



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Roselyn	Musera	IRSK	Vice Chair
Leonard	Wanyama	IRSK	CEO
Dr. Peter	Mwencha	IRSK	Council Member
Edgar	Mkalla	IRSK	Student Rep.
Mr. Julian	Rowa	IRSK	Moderator
Sincere	Shem	IRSK	Membership Officer
Dr. Maureen	Syallow	Strathmore University	Senior Lecturer
Dr. Claire	Amuhaya	RUDN University	Senior Lecturer
Ms. Irene	Ogaja	EASF	Conflict Analyst
Ken	Owotsi	IRSK	Member
Woodrow	Wilson	IRSK	Member
Moronge	Obonyo	JKUAT	Lecturer
Edward	Kakumu	KIC Sweden	Program Manager
Dismas	Mokua	IRSK	Media and Communications
Nasongo	Muliro	GLOCEPS	Foreign Policy Fellow
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Dr. Rose	Anyona	MoF&DA	Assistant Director
Dr. Fatma	Abdullatif	F&DA	Assistant Director
Patrick	Silla	IRSK	Consultant
Peter	Mbuthia	GLOCEPS	Research Assistan
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Lydia	Njoroge	IRSK	Student
Melvin	Segera	IRSK	Student
Nelson	Omwoyo	IRSK	Student
Stella Mercy	Nasirumbi	IRSK	Student
Anne	Wanjiku	IRSK	Student
George	Ngoha	UoN	Student
Byron	Osumba	UoN	Student
Esther	Nambuye	UoN	Student
Diana	Maweu	UoN	Student
Beru	Lilako	IRSK	Student
Abisage	Boyani	UoN	Student
Jacques	Muhindo	UoN	PhD Candidate
Basra	Ali	Riara University	Student
Ednah	Otao	IRSK	Member
Abisage	Boyani	UoN	Student
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Richard	Atwaru	COMESA	Conflict Analyst
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Prof. Kasaija	Apuuli	Makerere University	Professor
Lweendo	Kambela	Copperbelt University	Lecturer
Maj. Stephen	Muleya	Copperbelt University	Lecturer
Evans	Daka	University of Zambia	Lecturer
Amb. Erastus	Mwencha	ACBF	Chairperson
Eng. Julius	Okara	Business Link Africa	Advisor
Amb. Anthony	Okara	ALMA	Special Ambassador

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Prof. Macharia	Munene	USIU	Professor
Dr. Rosa	Ko	Sochin Institute	Co-Founder & President
Noah	Miller	Sochin Institute	Co-Founder & Director
Prof. George	Nyabuga	Aga Khan University	Associate Professor
Ms. Thrity	Engineer-Mbuthia	Aga Khan University	Lecturer
Angel	Idrovo	U.S. Embassy	Representative
Amb. Rose	Makena	UNEP	Permanent Representative
Amb. Caroline	Vicini	Sweden	Ambassador
Claudia	Lacave	Liberation	Press
Noé	Michalon	Africa Intelligence	Journalist
Dr. Mumo	Nzau	NDU-K	Senior Lecturer
Abdibashir	Ibrahim	UoN	Student
Wanjiku	Muchiri	USIU	Student
Mutinda	Mutisya	UoN	PhD Candidate
Maureen	Ooko	UoN	Lecturer
Dr. Mercy	Kathina	UoN	Lecturer
Peterson	Waweru	UoN	Student
Hon. Rachel	Amollo	UoN	PhD Candidate
Charles	Atamba	Parliament of Kenya	Policy Researcher
Adelaide	Muchesia	UoN	PhD Candidate
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David	Masai	IRSK	Member
Esther	John	IRSK	Member
Beri Mutinda	Musau	Strathmore University	Lecturer
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Martin	Kioko	Daystar University	Student
Edgar	Mkalla	IRSK	Student Rep.
Kenneth	Owotsi	USIU	Student
Stella Mercy	Nasirumbi	IRSK	Student
Diana	Maweu	IRSK	Student
Banice Ivy	Kinya	UoN	Student
Ndeto	Rabecca	UoN	Student
Njoki	Fridah	UoN	Student
George	Ngoha	UoN	Student
Judy	Mbugua	UoN	Student
Esther	Nambuye	UoN	Student
Byron	Osumba	UoN	Student
Basra	Ali	Riara University	Student
Anne Wanjiku	Muriithi	MKU	Student
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Teresia	Njogu	NGEC	Officer
Dr. Ndakaitei	Makwanise	Midlands State University	Lecturer
Mr. Japheth	Kasimbu	University of Nairobi	PhD Candidate
Eliud	Kibii	The Star	Diplomatic Editor
Mr. Mwangi	Maina	Standard Group	Senior Diplomatic Editor
Betty	Malamba	NGEC	Senior Programmes Officer
Bernard	Sompoika	NGEC	Personal Assistant

Drawing on a rich tapestry of experiences accumulated over three decades of working on diverse conflicts across Africa, I speak to you today with a heavy heart. This is because in my 31 years, I have not seen our continent in worse shape than it is today. The increasing frequency of coups across the continent and internal conflicts that we are seeing in countries such as Sudan and Ethiopia demands our introspection.

Dr. Vasu Gounden (Ph.D.),
Executive Director, African Centre
for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD)

I am persuaded that we must start thinking of African solutions to African problems. Owing to its shortcomings, the prevailing capitalist system has left millions of people behind. We therefore need an inclusive sustainable economic model system that is people-centered, one that will address the myriad crises and challenges we are facing on the continent, be it economic, social, environmental or political.

Amb. Erastus Mwencha,
Chairman, Africa Capacity Building Foundation, (ACBF)





2023 IRSK

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

International Relations and Diplomacy in an Era of Polycrisis
and Geo-Strategic Competition in the COMESA Region.

