



STATEMENT BY THE ICGLR EXECUTIVE SECRETARY ON THE OCCASION OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY UNDER THE THEME: "FOR ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS: RIGHTS, EQUALITY, AND EMPOWERMENT"

As we come together to commemorate International Women's Day on March 8, 2025, my heart goes out to all the women in the Great Lakes region, particularly those who are facing the harsh realities of conflict in places like the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, CAR, Sudan, and South Sudan. The challenges they endure are unimaginable, with their fundamental rights continually compromised. It's profoundly tragic that their voices often remain unheard in vital peace efforts and decision-making discussions. We must recognise not only their struggles but also their incredible resilience and advocate for their rights and representation in every aspect of life.

Two decades have passed since the Heads of State and Government of the ICGLR adopted the Protocol on the Prevention and Suppression of Violence against Women and Children, yet the need to protect women and children from the impunity of sexual violence, especially in the Great Lakes Region, is as urgent as ever. We continue to call on Member States to establish a robust legal framework that ensures perpetrators of sexual violence are held accountable.

This year's theme, "***For ALL women and girls: rights, equality and empowerment***," is timely and resonates powerfully in our region, where women and girls shoulder the burdens of armed conflict, confront sexual and gender-based violence, face forced displacement, and grapple with economic challenges and massive poverty.

As the ICGLR, we understand that achieving sustainable peace and development is impossible without the active participation of women in all areas of society. Creating inclusive platforms where women and girls can engage meaningfully in peacebuilding and development initiatives is crucial. Thus, we warmly welcome the African Union's recent adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls on February 16, 2025. We encourage our Member States to take swift action to incorporate this convention into their laws. We appeal to

governments, international organisations, and civil society to take substantial steps to protect women and girls—this includes enacting laws that safeguard their rights, promoting education and awareness, and supporting economic initiatives that empower them to play pivotal roles in their communities and the broader region.

Implementing the ICGLR Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region, particularly the Protocol on the Prevention and Suppression of Violence against Women and Children, is our shared priority. We will strive to revitalize women's role in the efforts for peace and stability in the Great Lakes region. We urge all of us to unite in our purpose to amplify the voices of women and girls, defend their rights, and place them at the forefront of decision-making processes.

Let us envision and work toward a Great Lakes region where all women and girls, without discrimination, can realise their full potential and contribute to their countries' sustainable peace and development. Together, let us commit to advancing women's rights, ensuring peace, and creating a Great Lakes region where conflict is a thing of the past.

ICGLR, 8th March 2025