



THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

**STATEMENT BY HON. COL.(RTD) OKELLO CHARLES
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LABOUR, EMPLOYMENT AND INDUSTRIAL
RELATIONS**

AT

**THE IGAD MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON LABOUR,
EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR MIGRATION**

DJIBOUTI

21ST OCTOBER 2021

Hon Ministers,
Your Excellences,
Distinguished invited Guests,
Ladies and gentlemen

It is my pleasure to address you all invited guests to this IGAD Ministerial Conference on Labour, Employment and Labour Migration

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Uganda, I take this opportunity to thank the Government of Djibouti for the warm hospitality and for hosting this important meeting. In the same vein I thank IGAD Secretariat, ILO and the European Union for organising this meeting.

Ladies and Gentlemen, labour, employment and labour migration are key factors we need to consider in the strategies of human development, i.e., development that is economically, socially and ecologically sustainable and that enlarges the range of people's choices by increasing their opportunities for education, income and employment.

Uganda's population has continued to rise, having increased from 24.2 million in 2002 to 40.8 million people in 2019 which is expected to reach 75 million by 2040. The country has one of the youngest and most rapidly increasing populations in the world with an estimated 29.4 million people (75%) under the age of 30 years in 2018. With a working age population (14-64) of 18.9 million, the greatest challenge with the country's labour force is unemployment (9%). Youth unemployment stands at 13%.

While providing employment at home to all the youth would be the ideal and is a priority for Government, this is practically impossible in a developing country.

As a result of the increasing numbers of Ugandans seeking employment abroad, in 2005 the Government of Uganda through the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development embraced the Externalization of Labour Programme with two objectives:

- I. To create a safe, formal and regular pathway for Ugandans who chose to seek employment abroad;
- II. To establish a short-term window for addressing the unemployment challenge in the country.

Through this programme over 200,000 Ugandans have been formally deployed to the Middle East for employment since 2005 to date.

To date Uganda has signed two Bilateral Labour Agreements and one MOU with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and United Arab Emirates respectively. However, the BLA with Jordan was suspended because of widespread violation of rights of Ugandan migrant workers. In addition, the Bilateral Labour Agreement with the United Arab Emirates is not yet operational. Indeed, the suspension of the BLA with Jordan, demonstrate the firm commitment of the Government of Uganda to ensure rights-based approach to labour migration and its vigilance in the protection of Ugandan migrant workers in the receiving countries.

The Ugandan Government has recently taken some measures to ensure the protection of Ugandan migrant workers abroad. These include: -

1. Revision of the Law governing externalization of labour;
2. Deployment of the Online System for Management of External Employment;
3. Posting of two Labour Attachés to Saudi Arabia, one to United Arab Emirates and one to Qatar;
4. Deployment of an online mobile application for monitoring distressed workers abroad;
5. Negotiations of Bilateral Labour Agreements with other major destination countries like Turkey, Oman, Bahrain and Kuwait.

The Government of the Republic of Uganda warmly welcomes the initiative by IGAD Secretariat to form an IGAD Ministerial Committee on Labour, Employment and Labour Migration. Uganda has for long advocated for a common approach to challenges of Labour, Employment and Labour migration at East African Community, IGAD and African Union levels.

The formation of the IGAD Ministerial Committee on Employment, Labour and Labour Migration is therefore timely and will go a long way to foster harmonized labour migration and employment policy frameworks among Member States. Uganda is in support of a collaborative approach in the following areas:

- i) Developing a Regional Academic Qualifications Framework to harmonise certification, accreditation and mutual recognition of qualifications within the region. This will promote skills development and facilitate the transfer of skills within the region;
- ii) Negotiate and conclude a region-wide framework on social security and protection which should address issues of portability within the region;

- iii) Harmonize emigration–immigration policies in general and labour laws in particular;
- iv) Research and information sharing;
- v) Regional Labour Agreement negotiations and implementation;
- vi) Consular services

In conclusion, I assure the IGAD Secretariat and Member States of Uganda's commitment in ensuring that the objectives of the IGAD Ministerial Committee on Labour, Employment and Labour Migration are achieved.

Thank you for listening to me.

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY