



## **MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY ON COVID-19 TO THE ICGLR MEMBER STATES**

The whole world is going through a serious health crisis linked to the sudden appearance of the coronavirus pandemic or commonly known as COVID-19. All states are facing an unprecedented health, economic and social crisis. The countries of the Great Lakes Region are not spared from this.

Like other regions of Africa and the world, Heads of State and Government, national health authorities and certain authorized voices of the region have risen here and there to enact barrier measures recommended by the World Organization Health (WHO), the African Union Center for Disease Control (African CDC) decided containment, and state of emergency to contain the spread of the pandemic and protect the health of the populations. Economically, according to some projections, global economic losses are expected to exceed 10% of global GDP, or more than \$ 9 trillion. This far exceeds the effects of the 2008 economic and financial crisis. I am touched with the immense uncertainty and psychosis created by the occurrence of this pandemic which affects us all deeply, as it continues to negatively impact the economies of the Member States. Also, in these more than difficult moments, my

thoughts and prayers are with you and your loved ones so that you are safe and healthy. Indeed, since the first appearances of the pandemic at the regional level, each country acts individually while the virus knows no borders. Solidarity and regional coordination are sorely lacking and this is a matter of concern at the level of the ICGLR Secretariat. Reports coming from member states indicate that the virus continues to gain ground and wreak havoc among the population. To date, May 28, 2020, worldwide figures reveal that there are 5,822,571 confirmed cases against 358,127 and 2,522,999 recoveries.

In the Member States of the Great Lakes Region, the total number of confirmed cases is 13,465 with 385 deaths and 3,074 recoveries. More specifically, the cases of contamination by State at the regional level are as follows: Sudan (4346), Democratic Republic of the Congo (2833), Kenya (1618), Zambia (1057), South Sudan ( 994), CAR (755), Congo (571), Tanzania (509), Rwanda (349), Uganda (317), Angola (74) and Burundi (42).

Allow me to offer my sincere condolences to the grieving families who have lost their loved ones as a result of this pandemic. Due to quarantine, there has been a significant increase in gender-based violence, in particular domestic violence characterized by physical violences, rapes and sexual abuses of which women and girls are the first victims. In the absence of appropriate structures to accommodate them, these victims are forced to stay at home with

their executioner, despite the risks they run. Their lives are more than in danger.

This unsustainable situation challenges us and invites us to take urgent and coordinated efforts to continue protecting our communities, especially women and girls whose homes are no longer safe places to take refuge.

Furthermore, women being the main caretakers of their families, this status gives them a place on the front line in caring for the sick, thus exposing them to a high risk of infection and / or death, given that they are not always in possession of adequate protective equipment or materials when searching for food or looking after sick family members.

Limited access to masks and water for handwashing is a major challenge in some countries, mainly in rural areas and especially in refugee and IDPs camps, which requires special regional attention.

In terms of communication, false rumors about the disease are disseminated in the media and social networks. In order to avoid misinformation and speculation around COVID-19, we appeal to governments, opinion leaders, artists and other actors involved in the fight, to be the only channels authorized to share official information and to raise awareness on pandemic prevention and response.

The Pandemic is a serious threat, especially when it is rife in conflict zones where armed groups are active, particularly in eastern DRC. In this part of the region, the population continues to suffer from attacks by armed groups and the resurgence of Ebola virus disease. In order to help prevent the spread of COVID19, the United Nations Secretary General and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC) have stressed the urgency for armed groups in conflict to declare the "cease fire" and "to silence their guns".

A teleconference of the representatives of the Guarantors of the Peace, Security Framework Agreement was held on April 2, 2020. They were concerned about the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the states and populations of the Great Lakes region already weakened by endemic conflicts. They also noted that if the pandemic is not resolved, the economic, social and health consequences would be dramatic for the most vulnerable, in particular women and girls.

Faced with the unforeseeable consequences of the pandemic, the signatory countries to the Framework Agreement invited States to take all necessary measures to protect the most vulnerable populations and ensure that regional supply chains continue to function, in order to allow free movement of goods and road freight.

Furthermore, the Guarantors asked all stakeholders to create assistance and support mechanisms for the protection of the lives of women and girls, as well as to combat domestic violence and gender-based violence.

I welcome the various initiatives taken by governments, international organizations, women's and youth organizations, civil society organizations at regional level to prevent and fight the pandemic. My advocacy goes in the direction of the establishment of regional coordination and cooperation to carry out the struggle and of a stronger solidarity with regard to the responses to be made to COVID-19.

I call on the Member States to work together and pool our resources, both nationally and regionally, to overcome this pandemic.

We need to make all the efforts in order to strengthen prevention, response through a more secure health system, the creation of hotlines to ensure the protection of populations, in particular children, women, young people, people living with disabilities and vulnerable or marginalized groups.

We invite partners to continue to support Civil Society Organizations and the Media in order to ensure better awareness in national languages and dialects.

We look forward to sharing our experiences in the coming days, during the meeting of Ministers of Public Health with whom we will note the presence of Ministers of Public Safety, Finance and Humanitarian Action as well as Ministers of Gender, to find immediate, joint and lasting solutions in the fight against this formidable, invisible and common enemy.

A regional aid plan will be developed to organize a vigorous response to contain the impact of the pandemic at the health, social, economic and financial levels, because it is only together that we will triumph over COVID-19 .

I urge you to take care of yourself and your families.

God bless our region.

Thank you.