



IPSS

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IGAD: Dialogue and Mediation in Demand

RECs Spotlight: Tracking Africa's
Peace Through a Regional Lens

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BACKGROUND

In 1996, peace and security became one of the pillars of cooperation within the International Authority on Development (IGAD) region. Pillars such as environment, economy, integration, health, and development are essential stand-alone agendas that intersect with peace and security. The recent activities of IGAD, particularly between the last quarter of 2023 and the first quarter of 2024, stress this intersection more than ever. Two major focus areas that emerge from IGAD's peace and security engagements within this timeframe are efforts to initiate dialogue and mediation between Ethiopia and Somalia, and in the context of the Sudan conflict.

The number of intra- and inter-state conflicts that end through mediation and dialogue have increased significantly around the world in the post-cold war period. Even though this is true for the IGAD region, peace agreements brokered through mediation have not always resulted in peace in the IGAD region. In the region, the greatest number of peace agreements over internal conflict has taken place in Somalia while the least number of agreements (0) has taken place in Eritrea. The need for mediation and dialogue remains high in this timeframe.

DEMAND FOR DIALOGUE AND MEDIATION

IGAD has remained determined to encourage and even take the lead (alongside the African Union) in initiating and facilitating dialogue and mediation in both the case of Sudan and the controversy that has risen between Ethiopia and Somalia. Since the outbreak of war in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the falling apart of the promising talks in Jeddah in October 2023, the situation remains a stalemate. Devising a fresh roadmap for mediation, forming a quartet, and planning unsuccessful meetings and phone negotiations were critical areas of engagement until Sudan's unwarranted move to suspend its membership in the regional bloc.¹

The Sudan conflict was the main agenda of the 41st Extraordinary Session of the IGAD Assembly of Heads of State and Government on 9th December 2023 and the 42nd Extraordinary Session in January 2024.² According to the Communique of the 41st Extraordinary Session, the Executive Council was responsible for presenting candidates for the position of IGAD Special Envoy to Sudan.³ The Communique of the 42nd Extraordinary Assembly of IGAD Heads of State and Government seemed to emphasise the need for mediation and peaceful resolution among conflicting parties despite the contradictory parties' hesitation to engage with IGAD.⁴ IGAD and the African Union (AU) jointly coordinate mediation efforts, advocating that local and international actors should be organised through the same channel.^{5 6}

Initial announcements of a possible meeting between the conflicting parties fell apart twice when Sudan's foreign ministry rejected IGAD's statement for essential aspects of its position and demanded the withdrawal of

1 Al Jazeera. Sudan suspends membership in IGAD regional bloc. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/20/sudan-suspends-membership-in-igad-regional-bloc>

2 IGAD, 09 December 2023, "Extra-Ordinary Summit of IGAD Heads of State and Government" <https://igad.int/extra-ordinary-summit-of-igad-heads-of-state-and-government/?fbclid=IwAR3ai7490BEDq9HKDIFKxUS3sNha3S7QeSl53CMEjfsMo79oaM2meblYM>

3 IGAD, 09 December 2023, "Communiqué of the 41st Extraordinary IGAD Assembly of Heads of State and Government." <https://igad.int/communique-of-the-41st-extraordinary-assembly-of-igad-heads-of-state-and-government-djibouti-republic-of-djibouti-9th-december-2023/>

4 IGAD, 18th January 2024, Communiqué of the 42nd Extraordinary Assembly of IGAD Heads of State and Government, Entebbe, Republic of Uganda, <https://igad.int/communique-of-the-42nd-extraordinary-assembly-of-igad-heads-of-state-and-government/>

5 Ethiopian News Agency, 10 December 2023, "IGAD calls for Unified Africa-anchored Mediation Process in Sudan" https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/eng_370727

6 FBC, 21 December 2023, "IGAD Executive Secretary, AUC Chairperson Discuss Regional Peace, Stability" <https://www.fanabc.com/english/igad-executive-secretary-auc-chairperson-discuss-regional-peace-stability/>

RSF forces from major cities.⁷ Similarly, the leadership of the RSF claimed that the meeting could take place “if General Burhan did not participate in his capacity as President of the transitional government.”⁸ On 16th January 2024, Sudan’s foreign ministry announced that it had “suspended its involvement in mediation efforts with IGAD,” posing further challenges to the peace process.⁹

Within this timeframe, IGAD also confronted another regional security challenge requiring urgent intervention. On 1st January 2024, Ethiopia and Somaliland announced they had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to provide Ethiopia with access to the port and Somaliland, possibilities of a de jure statehood. Based on the nature and implications of the MoU and Somaliland’s self-determination quest, signing it meant Somaliland received its first official recognition as a State from Ethiopia.

The announcement immediately provoked a rejection by Somalia and drove a wedge between Somalia and Ethiopia, with Somalia warning that it would “defend its territory from aggression” if Ethiopia pursued this.¹⁰ Somalia considered the signing of the MoU and its implications as an act of aggression on its sovereign rights. Following this development, the IGAD’s 42nd Extraordinary Session asked both countries to “de-escalate tensions and instead engage in constructive dialogue.”¹¹ IGAD, Like the other regional blocs in the vicinity, the Arab League and the African Union, also made an essential note in support of the cause of Somalia, saying that such an arrangement between Ethiopia and Somaliland should come with the approval of Somalia because of “the cardinal principles of respect for the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Somalia.”¹²

ANALYSIS AND WAY FORWARD

IGAD has noted and responded to the challenge of parallel and sometimes competing peace processes. While the AU is onboarding the coordination task and the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General has welcomed the efforts, parallel processes still seem to unfold in the region. Countries within Africa and the Middle East have shown signs of following divergent paths, attempting to offer different platforms.

In the past, African conflicts have witnessed armed groups that would instrumentalise peace processes as a medium of drawing paying attention to their demands and enhancing visibility.¹³ There is a cloud of suspicion hanging over Hamditi’s recent tendencies of seeking visibility through tours in the continent, meeting with exiled politicians, and appearing to call for the commencement of peace talks. However, the actual commitment is yet to be tested and proven.¹⁴ Conflicting parties in the region have used the sovereignty excuse to avoid mediation (in the case of Sudan) and simply show defiance through absenteeism during extraordinary meetings (in the case of Somalia and Ethiopia).

7 ISS Today, 12 January 2024, “After a glimmer of hope, Sudan’s peace effort fades” <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/after-a-glimmer-of-hope-sudans-peace-effort-fades>

8 MENAFN, 14 December 2023, “Sudan refuses ‘misleading’ declaration from dispute mediators” <https://menafn.com/1107594208/Sudan-refuses-misleading-declaration-from-dispute-mediators>

9 Reuters, 16 January 2024, “Sudan says it suspends contact with IGAD mediation group” <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/sudan-says-it-suspends-contact-with-igad-mediation-group-2024-01-16/>

10 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-67861390>

11 IGAD, 18th January 2024, Communiqué of the 42nd Extraordinary Assembly of IGAD Heads of State and Government, Entebbe, Republic of Uganda, <https://igad.int/communique-of-the-42nd-extraordinary-assembly-of-igad-heads-of-state-and-government/>

12 Ibid

13 Assefa, H. (1992). The challenge of mediation in internal wars: Reflections on the INN experience in the Ethiopian/Eritrean conflict. *Security Dialogue*, 23(3), pp.101-106.

14 ISS Today, 12 January 2024, “After a glimmer of hope, Sudan’s peace effort fades” <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/after-a-glimmer-of-hope-sudans-peace-effort-fades>

Despite agreements and statements by the Secretary-General of IGAD and the Commissioner of the AUC, member states in Sudan's proximity are not coordinating their peace efforts in Sudan. Analysts are warning against such approaches, citing the recent prolonged conflict in Ethiopia, where the regional response to the conflict fuelled the war. Notably, "The end of the two-year war between the Ethiopian federal government and the Tigrayans most likely could have been concluded much earlier, with far fewer casualties and much less economic damage, had the countries of the region and beyond agreed to use their influence forcefully to stop the bloodshed."¹⁵ Such coordination efforts by IGAD should prioritise the role and contribution of Sudan's neighbours, especially Chad and Egypt; and building on Ambassador Ibn Chambas mission to Sudan's neighbours in 2023. A coordinated regional approach beyond multilateral anchors can be leveraged.

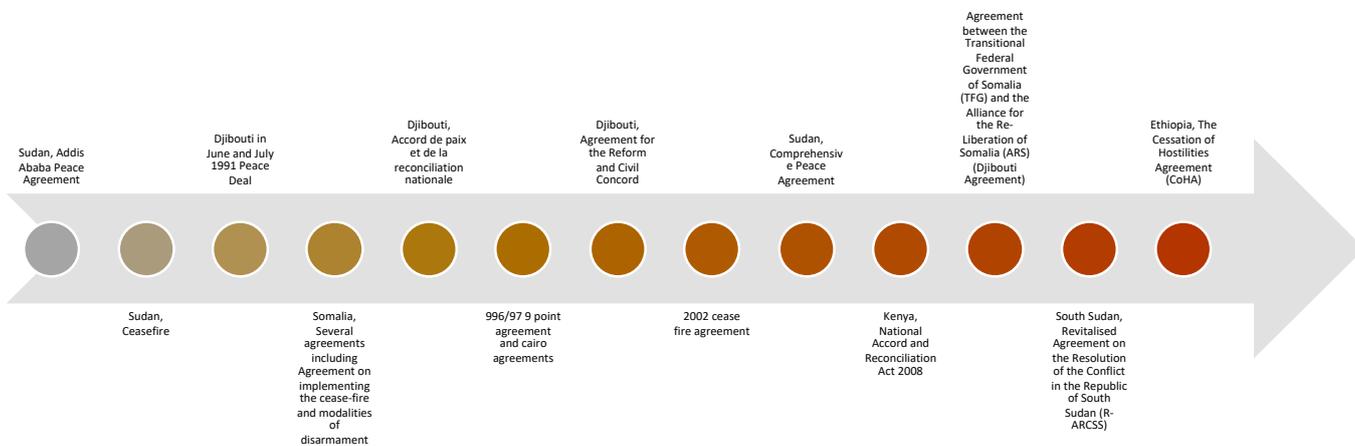
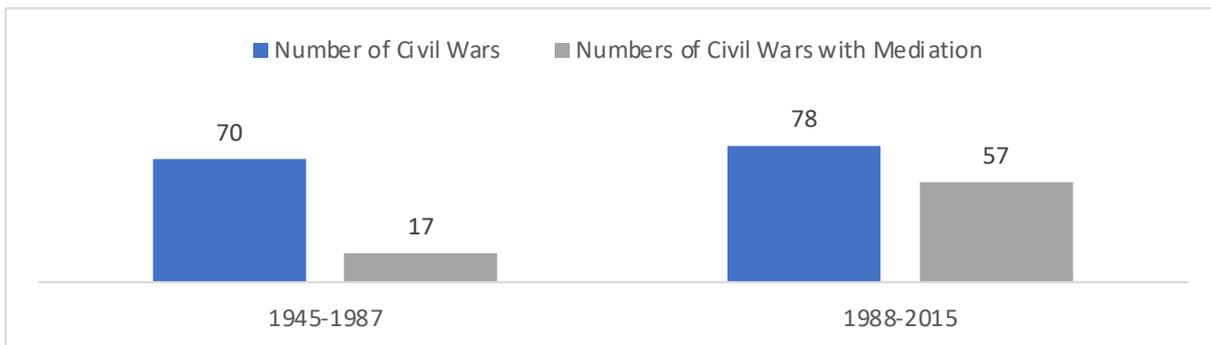
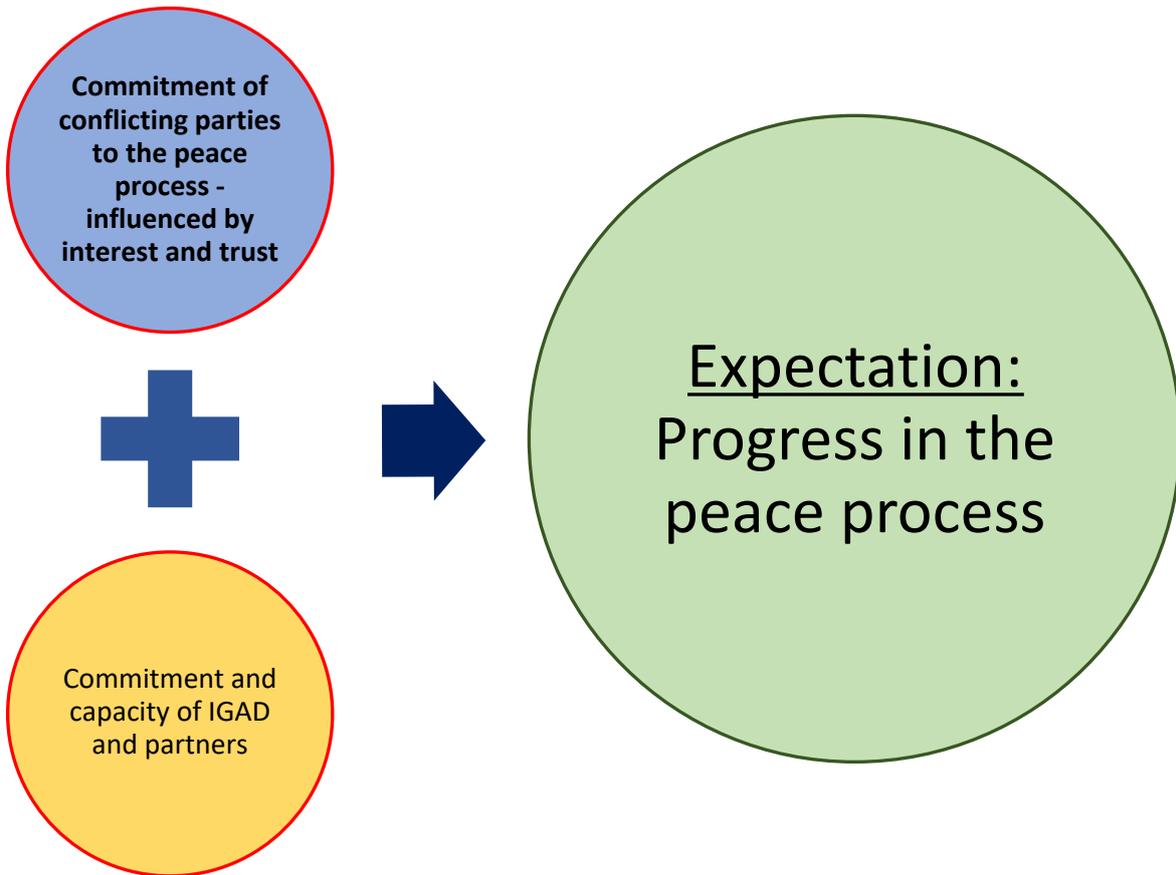
So far, political actors, including institutions like IGAD, have not paid civilian groups due consideration, but the statements from the 42nd extraordinary meeting were promising. It affirmed its commitment to human security 'the security of the Sudanese people' in dealing with the inter-state conflict. The call for mediation is more human-centred, emphasising that the country "does not emphasise parties to the conflict only but the Sudanese people". Further, the Heads of State underscored that "the primary responsibility of IGAD Member States to ensure the will of the people of Sudan prevails." As long as the pursued method of intervention is mediation, the process is highly dependent on the commitment of the two conflicting parties. However, this does not rule out inducement mechanisms that different regional and international actors can deploy to encourage conflicting parties to come to the table for dialogue.

While these mediation efforts have succeeded so far, the pre-mediation efforts by different actors, including IGAD and AU's high-level panel on Sudan, should prioritise the inclusion and participation of women and youth. Despite being a war between two armed groups, civilians have disproportionately suffered from the conflict in Sudan, with over five million internally displaced.¹⁶ In the past, civil society groups in Sudan have pointed out the lack of engagement with non-armed groups by multilateral institutions like the UN.¹⁷ Only when IGAD and its partners succeed in launching an inclusive peace process will substantive issues such as the place of civilian voices in peace deals, particularly youth, women, Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), issues associated with RSF and its involvement in the Darfur genocide through the Janjaweed militia, and modality of transition to civilian rule receive their deserved attention for redress.

15 Feltman, J. 14 December 2023 "A way forward on Sudan", Brookings, <https://www.brookings.edu/people/jeffrey-feltman/>

16 IOM, 12 December 2023, "Regional Sudan Response Situation Update" <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/regional-sudan-response-situation-update-12-december-2023>

17 Sudan Tribune, 14 January 2024, "UN envoy highlights path to peace in Sudan while facing criticism for excluding civilian forces" <https://sudantribune.com/article281305/>



18 The following pie charts are created based on Gowan, R. & S.J. Stedman, "The International Regime for Treating Civil War, 1988-2017," *Daedalus*, 147:1 (2018): 174.

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