

THE IMPLICATION OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON PEACE AND SECURITY: THE CASE OF ICGLR MEMBER-STATES

Second Draft Report

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List of Acronyms

ADB	-	African Development Bank
AUC	-	African Union Commission
CAR	-	Central African Republic
CDC	-	Centre for Disease Control
Covid-19	-	Corona Virus 2019
DDR	-	Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration
DRC	-	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECA	-	Economic Commission for Africa
EJVM	-	Enlargement of the Verification Mechanism
EU	-	European Union
FP-ICGLR	-	Forum of Parliaments of the International Conference on Great Lakes Region
GBV	-	Gender-Based Violence
GLITC	-	Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference
GLR	-	Great Lakes Region
ICGLR	-	International Conference on Great Lakes Region
IDPs	-	Internally Displaced Persons
IFIs	-	International Finance Institutions
IMF	-	International Monetary Fund
JIFC	-	Joint International Force of Combatants
KIs	-	Key Informants
MoFPED	-	Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
MoH	-	Ministry of Health
MONUSCO	-	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MoU	-	Memorandum of Understanding
MPs	-	Members of Parliament
NGOs	-	Non-Governmental Organizations
PSC	-	Peace, Security and Cooperation
SADC	-	Southern African Development Community
SC	-	Security Council
SDGs	-	Sustainable Development Goals
SoPs	-	Standard Operating Procedures
SSA	-	Sub-Saharan Africa
UN	-	United Nations
WHO	-	World Health Organization

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Context

This assignment interrogates the implications of the coronavirus 2019 (henceforth, Covid-19) pandemic on peace and security using the case of Member-States of the International Conference on Great Lakes Conference (ICGLR). The Covid-19 pandemic first hit the global headlines in December 2019.¹ Indeed, it found some of the Member-States of the twelve countries that comprise the ICGLR engaging in various types of conflicts. Hence, the Covid-19 pandemic added a new dimension or layer onto this conflict. Burke (2020) underscores the fact that as the Covid-19 pandemic spreads across conflict zones, the impact will be unpredictable and potentially catastrophic. He is, therefore, absolutely correct in observing that the pandemic is exposing fractures, prejudices and weaknesses among conflict-affected populations.

Historically, many countries of the Great Lakes Region (GLR) have experienced violent conflicts and instability during the 1990s whose consequences were felt beyond national borders and neighboring countries.² The consequence of this endemic political violence and dangerous insecurity caused enormous crisis to the populations of the region. Some of these endemic conflicts included: genocide in Rwanda in 1994; civil war and political violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), armed conflict in South Sudan, insecurity perpetuated by armed groups in Central African Republic (CAR); etc.³ In its 1st ICGLR Summit held on 20th November 2004 which was adopted in Dar-es-Salaam Declaration on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the GLR, the Heads of State and Government declared that they were:

Deeply concerned about the endemic conflicts and persistent insecurity caused or aggravated by, *inter alia*, economic stagnation and poverty aggravation, mistrust and suspicion between governments, massive violation of human rights and other policies of exclusion and marginalization, gender inequality, use of violence to conquer and conserve power, impunity of crimes of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons, proliferation of armed groups, organized crime, and illegal exploitation of natural resources.⁴

Thus, the Forum of Parliaments of the International Conference on Great Lakes Region (FP-ICGLR) (2020) noted that: “The pandemic has far reaching effects on different sectors of society, peace and security being one of them”. In fact, the pandemic poses serious challenges to conflicts among some Member-States in the GLR in a variety of ways. However, it is yet to be known with the highest degree of certainty how the pandemic is affecting the Member States and the nature of the conflicts they have engaged in, their economic and social bases – all of which could accelerate the conflicts to uncontrollable proportions. The ICGLR Member-States, therefore, face hard choices of how to go about managing the pandemic amidst the GLR’s conflict-prone environment.

1.2 The Role of the ICGLR in Peace and Security

¹ See Mustasilta Katariina (2020); The Brenthurst Foundation (2020).

² For the detail of this conflict narrative, see Sebahara and Ntaganda (2016), p. 6.

³ Uganda, under President Yoweri Museveni, has engaged in peacekeeping role or missions and active combat at interventions, from Liberia to South Sudan, Rwanda, the CAR, and Somalia; see Kalyegira Timothy (2020), pp. 14-30.

⁴ Sebahara and Ntaganda, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

The FP-ICGLR is an inter-parliamentary organization bringing together national Parliaments of the twelve member-states of the ICGLR, namely; Angola, Burundi, CAR, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia, Sudan, Tanzania and South Sudan. Endowed with legal personality, FP-ICGLR is a constituent organization of ICGLR as provided for in the Nairobi Pact that established the ICGLR. The general objective of the FP-ICGLR is to bring significant parliamentary contributions to the implementation of the Pact on Peace and Security, Stability and Development in the GLR as signed on December 15th, 2006.⁵ In other words, its main aim is to promote, maintain and strengthen peace and security in the GLR in accordance with the will of the Heads of States and Government in the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the GLR. In response to addressing conflict in the GLR, the Pact has two components, the legal framework containing ten (10) Protocols on the one hand, and four policy programs, on the other.⁶

There are many specific objectives that the FP-ICGR is supposed to achieve. Those that are specific to peace, security, and conflicts include the following: (i) To provide a platform for exchange of experiences, conflict resolution and dialogue between the Parliaments of the member countries of the ICGLR; (ii) To support the efforts of Governments in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and to contribute to the consolidation of the peace processes and national reconciliation; (iii) To contribute to the implementation of the resolutions of the United Nations (UN) on the respect and protection of the rights of women, children and vulnerable persons in periods of armed conflicts; (iv) To ensure that all the Protocols of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the GLR are embedded in the national domestic legislation of the member countries; (v) To ensure that the national Parliaments of the member countries are fully involved in the evaluation and follow-up on the implantation of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the GLR; and (vi) To assist in resolving any conflicts that may arise between the Parliaments or between the Member States of the ICGLR.

Thus, for the objectives set out in Article 2 of the Inter-Parliamentary Accord and as defined by its respective permanent committees to be achieved effectively, the FP-ICGLR has five main interventions, one of them being Peace and Security.⁷ With regard to this specific assignment, the FP-ICGLR, whose mission is to facilitate effective engagement of Parliamentarians in the implementation of the Pact, is planning, through its organs and Committee on Peace and Security, to provide an opportunity for the Parliaments of the ICGLR Member States, and stakeholders to reflect on a contemporary issue of global proportions entitled “*The Implication of Covid-19 Pandemic on Peace and Security: The Case of ICGLR Member States*”.

It has to be noted that the role of the FP-ICGLR is to represent the interests of the populations of the GLR.⁸ It performs this role by influencing national legislations in favor of the common good of the region as provided for in the Pact. Further, the ICGLR has established that conflicts in the GLR

⁵ The ICGLR has made steady progress in implementing the Pact and its different Protocols (see Okuthe 2018, p. 11). For example, the following steady progress has been achieved: restoring and consolidating peace in eastern Congo; promoting transparency in the exploitation and sale of natural resources in the GLR; and fighting against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (GBV).

⁶ Okuthe (2018), p. 11.

⁷ The other four main areas of intervention are: (a) Democracy and Good Governance; (b) Humanitarian and Social issues; (c) Economic Development, Natural Resources and Regional Integration; and (d) Gender, Children and Vulnerable Persons issues.

⁸ Okuthe, op. cit., p. 5.

are a product of bad governance, failure to respect the rule-of-law, and violation of human rights.⁹ Lastly, the ICGLR has realized that the scramble for natural resources has led to persistent conflicts thereby increasing the levels of poverty, unemployment, refugees, and displaced populations in the GLR.¹⁰

1.3 Justification of the Assignment

The motivation of the FP-ICGLR's General Secretariat to examine the Peace and Security situation of the ICGLR Member States is because of the realization of the new global threat arising from the Covid-19 pandemic that has impacted specifically on the GLR. In this regard, the General Secretariat saw it fitting to reflect deeply on the subject of the "Implication of Covid-19 Pandemic on Peace and Security: The Case of ICGLR Member States". This deep reflection accords neatly with Article 17 of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the GLR which states that: *"Member States undertake to ensure lasting peace and security in the whole region of the Great Lakes, in the framework of the Programme of Action for Peace and Security"*.

1.4 Objectives of the Assignment

This assignment has two objectives, namely; General Objective and Specific Objectives.

1.4.1 General Objective

The overall objective of the assignment is to conduct a desk assessment on **"The Implication of Covid-19 Pandemic on Peace and Security: The Case of ICGLR Member States"** with the options of identifying key responses and proposing future prospects to curb the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the assignment are as follows:

- a) Assess the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on Peace and Security in the ICGLR Member States;
- b) Identify key responses provided by the Governments of the ICGLR Member States to curb the impacts of this global real threat, Covid-19 pandemic;
- c) Propose scenarios for supporting the Parliaments of the ICGLR Member States to ensure that they truly play a major role in taking measures to curb the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on peace and security; and
- d) Propose a draft resolution on mitigating the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on peace and security in the GLR.

1.5 Covid-19 questions ICGLR Member-States should answer

The key questions that the ICGLR Member States should answer in order to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic are as follows:

⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

1. What are the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on peace and security in the ICGLR member states?;
2. What responses have the Governments of the ICGLR Member States provided to curb the impacts of the global real threat of Covid-19 pandemic?;
3. What scenarios can be proposed for supporting the Parliaments of the ICGLR Member States to ensure that they truly play a major role in taking measures to curb the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on peace and security?; and
4. What kind of draft resolution can be proposed to mitigate the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on peace and security in the GLR?

1.6 Methodology

A mixture of methods was used to achieve the expected results. In particular, the following methods were deployed to collect and analyze the information/data: Review of documents obtained from various sources such as the internet and individual libraries related to conflict in the GLR in general and the Covid-19 pandemic in particular; and information obtained from Key Informers (KIs) through interviews. KI interviews are qualitative in-depth interviews with people who know what is going on in the community or subject matter under investigation. The main purpose of the KI interviews was to gather information from a wide range of people (or respondents) – e.g., community leaders, professionals or residents – who have first-hand knowledge about the community or subject matter. The number of KIs was six (6) – i.e., 2 Members of Parliament (MPs) from Uganda due to their proximity and potential availability, 2 senior technocrats from the Ministry of Health (MoH), and 2 senior technocrats from the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED). Six KIs was considered an adequate number to obtain useful information on the topic. The technique of gathering information from the KIs was through face-to-face interviews.

The information obtained from the above two methods was analyzed based on documentary analysis and content analysis of responses of the KIs. Documentary analysis is simply a type of qualitative research in which documents are reviewed by the researcher or analyst to assess or appraise a theme. Content analysis is the study of documents and communication artifacts, which might be texts of various formats, pictures, audio or video. Content analysis is used to examine patterns in communication in a replicable and systematic manner. Hence, it is a research tool which is used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given qualitative data (i.e., text). That is to say, through content analysis, researchers can quantify and analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of certain words, themes, or concepts. In the analysis of a KI interview, once the information or data has been analyzed, the researcher or Consultant will have an idea of what the KIs collectively think about the subject matter the interviews addressed; and

Ultimately, the Consultant produced a Draft Report containing the key findings and recommendations for presentation to the virtual meeting¹¹ of September 1st, 2020, of the FP-ICGLR

¹¹ The virtual meeting is being organized by the FP-ICGLR's Committee on Peace and Security. It is a technical group charged with examining the specific issues relating to peace and security action program contained in the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the GLR. In addition, the Committee is responsible, *inter alia*, for promoting common policies and strategies to ensure sustainable peace and security throughout the GLR. This 7th Statutory meeting of the Committee on Peace and Security, which is being organized virtually due to the Covid-19 pandemic, follows from

stakeholders (i.e., Parliamentarians, Members of the Permanent Committee on Peace and Security, Staff of the General Secretariat, etc.) mainly to ensure that their relevant inputs were taken into consideration during the write-up of the Final Report.

2.0 Defining peace and security

Peace and security, together with conflict and development, have very specific histories – i.e., socio-political contexts shaping their disciplines over time, thus leaving a huge mark on their theoretical and political trajectories¹². Peace and security, like peace and conflict, go hand-in-hand. In this regard, when making theoretical and/or conceptual sense of what the terms mean, they have to be seen as being two sides of the same coin. But what is “peace” and what is “security”? It is vital to understand clearly the meanings behind these two terms in order to put them in their proper perspective.

2.1 Peace:

Simply defined, peace is freedom from disturbance; it is tranquility. Put differently, it is a state or period in which there is no war or a war has ended. In other words, peace is a stress-free state of security and calmness that comes when there is no fighting or war, everything co-existing in perfect harmony and freedom. Galtung (2015b, p. 2) notes that:

The use of the term ‘peace’ may in itself be peace-productive, producing a common basis, a feeling of communality in purpose that may pave the ground for deeper ties later on... It provides opponents with a one-word language in which to express values of concern and togetherness because peace is on anybody’s agenda.

To discuss the idea of peace, Galtung (Ibid.) invites us to start from three simple principles: one, the term ‘peace’ is used for social goals at least verbally agreed to by many, if not necessarily by most; two, these social goals may be complex and difficult, but not impossible, to attain; and, three, the statement *peace is absence of violence* is retained as valid. To him, this third principle is not a definition, because it is a clear case of *obscurum per obscurius*. Therefore, peace is a concept of societal friendship in the absence of hostility and violence. In a social sense, peace is commonly used to mean a lack of conflict (such as war) and freedom from fear of violence between individuals and groups.

Generally, there are two classifications of peace, namely; internal peace (or inner peace or peace of mind) and external peace. Internal peace refers to a deliberate state of psychological or spiritual calm despite the potential presence of stressors. Here, the issue is that the question of real and lasting world peace concerns human beings – i.e., basic human feelings is at its roots. Through inner peace, genuine world peace can be achieved. In this, the importance of individual responsibility is quite clear; an atmosphere of peace must first be created within individual human beings, then gradually expanded to include families, communities, and ultimately the whole planet.

External peace, on the other hand, represents peace in society. It is the absence of all social evils as well as the presence of all social virtues. Internal peace and external peace are interrelated or interdependent because they support or reinforce each other; they co-mingle. Therefore, peace

the decision of the 10th Ordinary Session of the Plenary Assembly held in Bujumbura, Republic of Burundi, in December, 2019.

¹² Zarkove and Hintjens (2015), p. 3.

indicates a state of perfect balance and harmony all of human beings' internal and external functions and activities.

The eight pillars of peace are: a well-functioning government; a sound business environment; an equitable distribution of resources; an acceptance of the right of others; good relations with neighbors; free flow of information; a high level of human capital, and low levels of corruption. It should be mentioned that the lack of all or a combination of these pillars in some of the ICGLR Member States is the reason why peace has eluded, and continues to elude them for decades. Therefore, any security strategy that seeks to attain peace, like that of the Defence Union in Europe,¹³ should address all these pillars. Other security strategies should include: common capability development, additional resources for security and defence, strengthening common security and defence policy action, a common strategic culture, reinforced cooperation between Member States' armed forces and intelligence organizations, and enhanced core partnerships.

2.2 Security

The traditional concept of security refers to it in the most general sense as freedom from threats, fear and dangers. It is also about resilience against potential harm caused by others.¹⁴ The three primary areas that security control falls under are management security, operational security, and physical security. The beneficiaries of security may be of persons and social groups, objects and institutions, ecosystems or any other entity or phenomenon vulnerable to unwanted change.

The theories of security - which will not be discussed here for lack of space and time - include the following: realist and liberal perspectives; Marxist and feminist perspectives; constructivism and secularization; risk; security as bio-politics; emancipation and the idea of 'human security'; strategic; and just war. Apart from the theories, there are three approaches to security, namely; prevention, protection and resilience.

Three main reasons can be advanced as to why security is important to a country. First, security is vital for survival. An insecure country cannot survive as a free and self-respecting member of the comity of nations. In short, security is survival. Second, a nation that cannot secure its borders and vital national interests will always feel threatened, exploited, dominated or worse. Third, a nation that cannot secure itself against internal security threats will have no peace, law and order, unity, integrity or development.

When these three main reasons are placed within the context of the ICGLR Member States, one can visualize why they are in the state that Covid-19 found them. First, some of the Member States can barely offer security to their citizens and their properties. Many of their citizens are internally

¹³ In the case of the ICGLR, the awareness of the common destiny through cooperation on joint security issues led to the establishment in 2011 of the JIFC and the Enlargement of the Verification Mechanism (EJVM) in 2010 by the Defence Ministers of the Member States (for details, see Sebahara and Ntaganda 2016, p. 29). Sebahara and Ntaganda (Ibid) rightly note that this is a clear indication of increased awareness for a common destiny which is sustainably established among political, military and social actors. The EJVM extends from 2012 to other Member States of the region with the sole aim of preventing all security threats such as terrorism (e.g., *Al-Shabab*), cross-border crime by negative forces - such as fraud of minerals, the trafficking of small arms and light weapons, human trafficking, drug trafficking, etc. Further, the ICGLR Member States know that security threats cannot be resolved by a single country without joint actions based on mutual trust and respect. The argument is that this common destiny strengthens the trust between Member States and their interest to cooperate on issues of common concern.

¹⁴ Galtung (2015a).

displaced while others are refugees in neighboring countries with nearly no hope for the future. The lack of survivability brought about by insecurity, is the reason why some of the countries are not free and cannot command much respect from the international community, let alone from the continent. Second, a number of the Member States have failed to secure their borders. Hence, their vital national interests have always remained threatened, exploited and dominated not only by some developed countries but shrewd international organizations and international businesspersons. Third, some of the Member States have failed completely to secure themselves against both internal security threats and marauding armed groups. Consequently, they have failed to embed durable peace, law-and-order, unity, integrity or development. Speaking on the question of development, it is so disheartening to note that most, if not all, the ICGLR Member States are so richly endowed with natural resources but are among the most backward in the world. The reason for their underdevelopment is the endless conflicts and wars that have afflicted them since colonial times.

3.0 An Assessment of the implication of the Covid-19 pandemic on peace and security in ICGLR Member States

From the time Covid-19 appeared onto the global scene in 2019, it has had seven major implications on peace and security to the ICGLR Member States, namely; legal, political, security, human rights, humanitarianism, economic, and reallocation of resources. Each of these implications will be discussed in turn.

First and foremost, Covid-19 has legally hampered efforts towards implementing the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the GLR. Consequently, the pandemic's interruption of the peace and security process in the GLR has remained unimplemented and behind schedule.¹⁵ The need for the ICGLR Member States to operate within a legal framework cannot be over-emphasized. Laws are critical in the way States and institutions function.

Second, politically, Covid-19 has greatly slowed down the efforts to implement the Peace, Security and Cooperation (PSC) Framework¹⁶ and to capitalize on the recent positive momentum to advance regional cooperation to address peace, security and development issues. For example, the 10th Summit of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the PSC Framework and the Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference (GLITC) had to be postponed. Hence, key initiatives on regional security cooperation and economic development had to be halted. Also, the meetings of the quadripartite process on normalization of the Rwanda-Uganda relations, being facilitated by Angola and the DRC, were delayed from March 2020 and resumed in June 2020 via teleconference. In the meantime, Burundi went ahead to hold General Elections on 20th May 2020 despite concerns 'voiced' over the risks associated with the pandemic. Thus, the pandemic is limiting peace operations and postponing or distracting the conflicting parties from nascent as well as ongoing diplomatic efforts and peace building. In addition, unscrupulous leaders could end up exploiting the pandemic to advance their selfish interests in ways that exacerbate cross-border conflicts thus flaring the conflicts that could further complicate cooperation on conflict management, peace and security in the region.

¹⁵ The Impacts of Covid-19 on the GLR are discussed at length in the UNSC (2020).

¹⁶ The PSC Framework was signed on 24th February 2013 by Angola, Burundi, the CAR, Congo, the DRC, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia in 2014. Kenya and Sudan became the 12th and 13th signatories of the Framework. The UN, AU, the ICGLR and the SADC are acting as Framework Guarantors. The PSC Framework encompasses national, regional and international commitments geared towards addressing the root causes of conflict and ending the recurring cycles of violence in eastern DRC and the GLR.

Third, as regards security implication, so far the impact of the pandemic and the measures put in place to contain its spread has not had a disastrous effect on the activities of armed groups in eastern DRC. However, attacks against the civilian population have continued and slightly increased in North Kivu and Ituri Provinces in eastern DRC. In addition, operations by the Congolese Armed Forces, with the support of the MONUSCO Force Intervention Brigade, have not subsided. In spite of the mediation by Angola and the DRC, Uganda and Rwanda are still in confrontational terms. The border disputes between the DRC and Zambia is still rife. Formation of a Unity Government in South Sudan continues to be illusory.

Fourth, with regard to human rights, the Covid-19 pandemic has put many countries on the spotlight on the persisting inequalities, including access to health care, labor rights and social protection.

Fifth, on humanitarian implication, the pandemic and associated movement and border restrictions have affected the mobility of refugees, migrants and IDPs. In fact, access to refugees by humanitarian workers has been limited in some areas. So, the pandemic is having negative effects on humanitarian aid flows.

Sixth, on the economic front and especially as a result of disrupting economic activities in the GLR, Covid-19 has taken a significant toll on Member States at a time when they were emerging from years of conflict. For instance, in spite of the measures taken to curb the pandemic's progression, its adverse effects have led to a near-total halt to air, transport, tourism, agriculture, petroleum and other extractive industry activities. The pandemic has certainly weakened the already-fragile economies of the ICGLR Member States. So, measures taken to contain the outbreak have come at great socio-economic cost, significantly eroding progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). That is why countless livelihoods, especially of the category of the most vulnerable, have already been upended. Those living in extreme poverty are, therefore, expected to increase. Rising prices of basic foods, unemployment and falling exports have further increased pressures on already fragile economies. The sectors that are particularly hard hit are: tourism, export of minerals and other primary products, transport, construction, manufacturing, and agriculture in some countries. In addition, some countries in the region have been facing multiple shocks, which have presented additional challenges during the Covid-19 crisis. For instance: the DRC faced the 11th Ebola outbreak; Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda had to contend with the locust infestation; and a sharp decline in oil export revenues is also impacting on the economies of the Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and Angola.

Finally, seventh, Covid-19 has led to the reallocation of resources from other health related diseases such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis. Indeed, Covid-19 has forced countries to re-direct their priorities, resulting in the postponement of two major events, namely: The GLITC (which was to be held in Kigali, Rwanda, from 18-20 March 2020), and the 10th Summit of the Regional Oversight Mechanism (which was to be held in Kinshasha, DRC, from 27-29 March 2020). This reallocation of funds and other resources in order to respond to Covid-19 has certainly impacted on progress on reforms and projects that are critical for regional peace and development, for instance, the demobilization, disarmament and re-integration (DDR) of former non-state armed group combatants and cross-border economic and infrastructure projects.

Lastly, eighth, Covid-19 has caused widespread social tensions and human sufferings in the region. For example, some neighboring communities, for example, some Ugandans and some Rwandese, do not see eye to eye, and many ethnic groups are not living settled lives in their respective localities.

4.0 Key responses provided by the Governments of the ICGLR Member States to curb the impacts of the global threat of Covid-19 pandemic

The governments of the ICGLR Member States have made attempts to respond to the impacts of the global threat coming from the Covid-19 pandemic as well as mitigating the risk it poses to stability and human security in the region. Before discussing this critical issue, it is important to highlight the issues that emerged from a high-level meeting of the ICGLR Ministers of Health on Covid-19 pandemic because their position places this matter squarely on a politico-technical health trajectory.¹⁷

The ICGLR Ministers of Health met via videoconference on July 10th, 2020, under the Chairmanship of Her Excellency Jacqueline Lydia Mikolo, Minister of Health, Population, Promotion of Women and Integration of Women in Development of the Republic of Congo, to discuss collective measures and the way forward to fight the Covid-19 pandemic in the GLR. During this meeting, the Ministers: a) Expressed concern over the increase in the spread of the pandemic in the ICGLR Member States; b) Shared existing knowledge and information on the SARS-Cov2 Corona Virus Disease, and agreed to harmonize and coordinate the prevention and response to the Covid-19 in the GLR; c) Noted the current response capacity of Member States to the pandemic and committed themselves to strengthening national response plans and emergency funds to fill gaps in prevention, mitigation of impacts and other interventions; and d) Resolved to foster exchanges between ICGLR countries in order to close existing gaps in expertise in all areas of response to the pandemic. These were laudatory responses by the Ministers of Health.

Having traced the above political-technical input by the Ministers of Health, it is now imperative to discuss the specific responses provided by the governments of the ICGLR Member States to curb the impacts of the global threat of Covid-19. These responses will mainly rely on various press statements released by various diplomats.

On 11th June 2020, the Chair of the Peace-building Commission, His Excellency Mr. Marc-Andre Blamchard, convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting to discuss how best to provide support for regional socio-economic cooperation among the countries of the African GLR, as a key component of building and sustaining peace and fostering sustainable development in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the continuing challenges posed by Ebola.¹⁸ The Press briefing contained, among others: i) Movement towards enhanced cooperation in key peace-building areas reflected in the PSC Framework for the DRC and the region. It also welcomed progress in economic cooperation, including in the area of natural resources management; ii) Emphasized the importance of the programs of action stemming from the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the GLR, particularly those that lie at the intersection between peace-building and sustainable development. The Special Envoy's efforts were welcomed in accompanying the region in nationally-owned peace-building efforts which can benefit from PSC attention and support; iii) Welcomed all efforts in

¹⁷ Secretariat ICGLR (2020).

¹⁸ Press Release by the Peace-building Commission on the Meeting on the Great Lakes Region, dated 15 June 2020. See also Meeting of 9th June 2020: Meeting on the Impact of Covid-19 on Peace-building in Central Africa.

support of continuing cross-border cooperation in the context of the PSC Framework, including ongoing support for enhanced security cooperation, especially military measures to eradicate non-state armed groups in eastern DRC. Thus, they acknowledged the important role that the PSC can play in support of peace-building activities in the DRC, in close collaboration with MONUSCO and DRC authorities; iv) Recognized that the Covid-19 pandemic has postponed major activities related to the implementation of the PSC Framework for the DRC and the region. That the pandemic could lead to the deterioration of regional macroeconomic indicators and the disruption of economic activities in key sectors, such as health, education, transport, trade and tourism, and increase pressures on national budgets, thereby affecting the countries' capacities to address peace and security challenges, among others; v) Coordinated responses to the Covid-19 at regional and sub-regional levels and call for international solidarity in the fight against its spread. They expressed readiness to support the countries of the region in their strides towards ensuring post-Covid-19 socio-economic recovery and development. In this context, they underscored the importance of giving priority consideration to the pivotal role that women and youth play, as key agents of change, as well as to improve the business climate to unleash the potential of small and medium-sized businesses in the region; vi) The Special Envoy planned to organize a Round Table with international financial institutions (IFIs) in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) on 18th June 2020 in order to mobilize resources for effective socio-economic responses and recovery. They also welcomed preparations for the GLITC, scheduled to take place in December 2020 in Kigali, Republic of Rwanda, to help enhance the business environment in the region. This is an initiative in the region to be supported through the collaboration of the UN and the World Bank; vii) They also emphasized the importance of supporting improved governance and management of natural resources to leverage the socio-economic opportunities for the GLR; viii) Welcomed the support provided by the Peace-building Fund in the region to help address drivers of instability associated with forced displacement; create peace dividends for women and youth through increased cross-border trade and strengthened food security; ix) Supported the idea of the reintegration of former combatants into their communities; and, x) Committed themselves to remain engaged with the Member States and countries of the region and convene additional meetings to support their efforts to enhance economic cooperation and regional integration as key vehicles for building and sustaining peace and stability in the region, including a meeting focused on the participation of women.

Another vital press release is that following the virtual meeting of the Peace-building Commission convened by its Chair, H.E. Mr. Marc-Andre Blanchard, which took place on 8th April 2020 on the implications of Covid-19 for peace-building and sustaining peace in the countries and regions under the Commission's consideration. His Excellency Mr. Blanchard released the following statement, among others: i) Covid-19 is both a public health emergency and a human crisis, and that the virus poses a considerable risk to hard-won peace-building gains around the world. Hence, the Commission's call for global solidarity and the recognition of the continued efforts of the World Health Organization (WHO) in responding to the pandemic in the face of this unprecedented crisis, and stressed the importance of working together and acting fast to address its multi-faceted and multi-sectoral impacts; ii) The Commission underscored the importance of multilateral cooperation in the fight against the pandemic in all countries. They welcomed the plan to address the potentially devastating socio-economic impact of Covid-19 as well as his recently published piece of March 2020 on "Shared Responsibilities, Global Solidarity: Responding to the Socio-Economic Impacts of Covid-19"; iii) The Commission noted that the pandemic may undermine social cohesion, strain the capacity of governance institutions, increase risk of instability and have potential consequences for food security in countries and regions under its considerations. They also expressed concern that the

crisis may adversely affect employment, livelihoods, and incomes and potentially exacerbate underlying tensions, as well as compounding already dire humanitarian situations in affected countries; iv) Recognized the importance of ensuring that the most vulnerable are protected and empowered; v) Reiterated the importance of coherent and coordinated action across all the pillars of the UN system in support of nationally-defined peace-building priorities; vi) The Commission will continue serving as an intergovernmental platform to advocate for predictable financing and strong partnerships for peace-building and sustaining peace; and vii) Called for global ceasefire around the world.

In a message from the Executive Secretary on Covid-19 to the ICGLR Member States, the following were the responsive issues contained in it: i) Heads of States and Government, national health authorities and certain authorized ‘voices’ of the region have enacted barrier measures recommended by WHO, the AU Centre for Disease Control (African CDC) decided on a state of emergency to contain the spread of the pandemic and protect the health of the populations; ii) Because economic projections indicated that global economic losses were expected to exceed 10% of global GDP, or more than \$9 trillion, which far exceeded the effects of the 2008 economic and financial crisis, the Covid-19 was bound to create immense uncertainty and psychosis as it negatively impacts the economies of the ICGLR Member States. Also, from the time the pandemic appeared at the regional level, each country has been acting individually at a time the virus knew no borders; solidarity and regional coordination were solely lacking – a matter that became of concern to the ICGLR Secretariat (table 1 shows the statistics of Covid-19 in the ICGLR Member States).

Table 1: Covid-19 in ICGLR Member States

S/No.	Country	Confirmed Cases	Recoveries	Deaths
1	Angola	1,935	632	88
2	Burundi	413	336	1
3	CAR	4,667	1,748	61
4	Congo (Republic of)	3,831	1,625	76
5	DRC	9,706	8,705	243
6	Kenya	30,365	17,160	482
7	Rwanda	2,540	1,661	8
8	South Sudan	2,490	1,175	47
9	Sudan	12,410	6,385	803
10	Tanzania	509	183	21
11	Uganda	1,560	1,165	15
12	Zambia	9,839	8,575	264
	Africa	22,053,135	14,796,532	777,489

Source: Consultant’s compilation as at Tuesday, 18th August 2020.

Table 1 clearly demonstrates that Covid-19 is more endemic in some countries than in others with the highest confirmed cases being in Kenya followed by Sudan, DRC, Zambia, and CAR; the lowest confirmed cases is in Burundi. There are remarkable cases of recoveries in all the countries. To-date, the death cases in order of highest to the lowest are: Sudan, Kenya, Zambia, DRC, Angola, CAR, Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. In general, however, the picture of the pandemic in all the countries is something that should not be taken lightly. Indeed, the statistics on the pandemic in Africa does not look good. It appears a spike is in the offing; iii) GBV has increased, in particular domestic violence characterized by physical violence, rape and sexual

abuses of which women and girls are the first victims. The problem, as pointed out by the Executive Secretary, is that in the absence of appropriate structures to accommodate them, these victims are forced to stay at home with their tormentors, despite the risks they face. Hence, their lives are more in danger. Also, women being the main caretakers of their families, they are in the front line in caring for the sick, thus exposing them to 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. Hence, the need for urgent and coordinated efforts to continue to protect the communities, especially women and girls, whose homes are no longer safe; iv) Limited access to masks and water for hand-washing is a major challenge in some countries, mainly in rural areas and especially in refugee and IDPs camps, which requires special regional attention; v) In terms of communication, false rumors about the disease are disseminated in the media and social networks. As a way to avoid misinformation and speculation around the pandemic, governments, opinion leaders, artists and other actors involved in the fight, should be the only channels authorized to share official information and to raise awareness on the prevention and response to the pandemic; vi) 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 Covid-19, the UN 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”; and vii) Faced with the unforeseeable consequences of the pandemic, the signatory countries to the Guarantors of the Peace, Security Framework Agreement¹⁹ invited Member 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 for free movement of goods and road freight.

A Press Release by the Executive Secretary of ICGLR, in Bujumbura, on 3rd April 2020, raised several interesting responses, namely: i) Close monitoring of the development of the pandemic in the world and GLR; ii) Raised concern about the unsustainable and potentially uncoordinated global and regional responses to combat the pandemic. Hence, the need for coordinated global and regional plans and approaches to respond to the health and economic implications of the pandemic; iii) Encouraged more cooperation and collective work among ICGLR Member States to address the pandemic and the huge humanitarian, social and economic problems it has triggered; iv) Called on ICGLR Member States to join forces to address the multi-dimensional threat of the pandemic and to guarantee access to humanitarian and emergency aid; and v) Called on ICGLR Member States to consider establishing a Humanitarian, Social and Environmental Agency for the GLR, which has to involve all stakeholders such as economic operators, donors, civil society, religious groups and international organizations in order to address the negative impacts caused by the pandemic.

Furthermore, at yet another press release of the “Peace and Security in the GLR: International Community, Enhancing Partnership with the ICGLR, Said Djinnit, the former Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for the GLR, once said:

¹⁹ A teleconference of the representatives of the Guarantors of the Peace, Security Framework Agreement was held on April 2, 2020. Their main concern was with the spread of the Covid-19 and its impact on the states and populations of the GLR 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.

We need to do more to address the critical needs in the Great Lakes Region. The joint launch of a regional Peace and Security initiative with European Union (EU), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and ICGLR is an important next step.²⁰

Lastly, on June 1, 2020, the Secretary General of the FP-ICGLR, Ambassador Onyango Kakoba, issued a statement entitled “Statement on the Operations of FP-ICGLR Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic”, barely three months when the pandemic was reported to have spread to the GLR on March 10, 2020.²¹ The thrust of the Ambassador’s Statement were twofold. The first thrust of the Statement was that Covid-19 was causing both devastating as well as positive effects. The devastating effects of the pandemic that the Secretary General spelt out included: infections and deaths; severe socio-economic disruptions, including the largest global recession since the Great Depression; postponement or cancellation of several events; widespread supply shortages exacerbated by panic buying at its onset; it led to the closure of schools, universities and colleges in over 190 countries thus affecting about 73.5% of the world’s student population; created health measures such as social distancing, travel and other restrictions which have had a great impact on planned activities worldwide; and affected many aspects of everyday life. On the positive aspect of the pandemic, the Secretary General noted that it had decreased emissions of pollutants and greenhouse gases.

The second thrust of the Secretary General’s Statement was that remedial action needed to be taken to tackle the pandemic. In this regard, he identified fundamental issues such as empathizing with those (e.g., Member Parliaments, MPs, the citizens of the GLR, and FP-ICGLR partners both within and outside the GLR) who have been affected by the pandemic; rescheduling of key activities that had been suspended due to the pandemic; and encouraging MPs, partners and the citizenry of the GLR to continue practicing and abiding by the preventive measures constituted against the pandemic.

Throughout the past decades, political and security development in the African GLR have provided significant challenges to civilians, communities and governments. However, the continued violence in some areas, unresolved underlying conflicts and activities of illegal armed groups in border areas, keep hindering reconstruction and development efforts in the GLR despite the huge natural resource potential. Because the ICGLR Member States remain determined to transform the region into an arena of durable peace and security as well as socio-political stability for the benefits of the people, the EU has stepped up its support to the ICGLR Secretariat and its regional activities. Indeed, this support materialized in a regional program funded for a total of US\$10m over a span of four years and launched in December 2018.²²

²⁰ It should be noted that this action falls within the ambit of the EU’s support for peace, security and regional stabilization measures, which is crucial for the development of the countries of the GLR through the 11th Regional Indicative Programme for Eastern Africa, Southern Africa, and the Indian Ocean for the period 2014-2020.

²¹ FP-ICGLR (2020) “Statement on the Operations of FP-ICGLR Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic” (Kinshasa: DRC), June 1st.

²² The programme is jointly implemented by the ICGLR, the UN and the GIZ. Its overall goal is to contribute to the consolidation of peace and security in the African GLR by strengthening the capacity of the ICGLR Secretariat in the areas of peace and security, responsible management of mineral resources and combating sexual and GBV, to facilitate conflict resolution and to prevent the emergence of new conflicts. Also, this joint programme aims to achieve three key results: strengthening the ICGLR’s peace and security program; enhancing control of the exploitation of selected mineral resources, and providing protocol on prevention and suppression of sexual violence against women and children for

5.0 Relevant scenarios for supporting the Parliaments of ICGLR Member States to ensure that they truly play a major role in taking measures to curb the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic on peace and security

The main mission of the FP-ICGLR is to: *“facilitate the effective engagement of parliamentarians in the implementation of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region and its ten Protocols”*.²³ The objectives of the FP-ICGLR that are outlined in Article 2 of the Inter-Parliament Accord that have specific relation to peace and security are as follows: to provide a platform for exchange of experiences, conflict resolution and dialogue between the Parliaments of the Member States of the ICGLR; to support the efforts of Governments in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and to contribute to the consolidation of the peace processes and to national reconciliation; to ensure that the national Parliaments of the Member States are fully involved in the evaluation and follow-up of the implementation of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the GLR; and to assist in resolving any conflicts that may arise between the Parliaments or between the Member States of the ICGLR.

To achieve the above objectives, it has to be noted that Parliaments play three crucial roles or functions, namely; legislation, representation and oversight. These three functions have now got to be directed towards relevant scenarios for supporting the Parliaments of the ICGLR Member States to ensure that they truly play a major role in taking measures to curb the adverse impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on peace and security. The underlying discussions tease out the possible scenarios.

5.1 Legislation

Since Parliaments play a key role in making new laws and change or improve old laws, it is time that they do so regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. Indeed, as legislative institutions, the Parliaments of the ICGLR Member States should have the right capacity (i.e., expertise and support to effectively formulate fair laws) and collaborative initiative to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic as a matter of urgency. Further, the Parliaments need to synergize with other governmental branches especially the Executive. Consequently, in the legislative sense, the Parliamentarians, in their respective Parliaments, should do the following: Establish or strengthen Parliamentary Committees, for example, Parliamentary Health Committees, in the ICGLR Member States on the Covid-19 pandemic specifically and on health in general; Given that Covid-19 is putting to test many of the regional institutions, laws and policies governing those organs, there is a need to formulate appropriate laws, where necessary, to aid the Member States to climb out of the Covid-19 pandemic;²⁴ Give the above Parliamentary Committees enough resources (e.g., time, funds, support staff, and logistics) and sharing of resources particularly for the technical personnel, to enable them to familiarize themselves with the Covid-19 pandemic in order to take the appropriate and prompt decisions and actions; Provide the Member States with an appropriate forum, through the structural organs of the Parliaments of the ICGLR Member States, to ensure active participation, discussion, planning and implementation of common measures required for containing the spread of the

effective application in the GLR. These results are expected to strengthen the ICGLR Secretariat, the delivery under its Programme on Peace and Security as well as enhancing the implementation of measures preventing and protecting women and children from sexual harassment and GBV.

²³ Okuthe Frank (2018), p. 2.

²⁴ Musekura Kenedy (2020), p. 10.

pandemic; Establish an effective channel of mediation between the Parliaments and their Executives on how to develop Action Plans and strategies to tackle the spread of the pandemic; Develop fair and clear procedures (e.g., motions, hearings, Orders of the Day, time allocation on speeches) on the pandemic; and communicate effectively on the Covid-19 pandemic to broaden the scope of knowledge of all concerned actors on its dangers and mitigating measures.

5.2 Representation

The role of the different Parliamentarians, as representatives of the people, implies making them more responsive to the needs of the peoples of the region, irrespective of their geo-political and societal differences. For this significant role to be performed effectively, the Parliaments should be structured in such a way that the Parliamentarians are able to speak with one 'voice' for their constituency or constituencies.

In view of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Parliamentarians will have to perform a number of representational roles, responsibilities and functions. Hence, the MPs should: Be in regular contact with the General Secretariat of the ICGLR on behalf of their national Parliaments. To do so, they must have adequate resources (i.e., time, funds, logistics, etc.); Connect periodically with their citizens on the pandemic. This also means that they should ensure that they receive information from their constituencies regarding the pandemic by being available in their offices at designated hours as well as inviting the citizens to the sittings of their Parliaments when the pandemic is up for debate; Acquire and disseminate information and data on the pandemic thus supplementing the efforts of their Governments and especially Ministries of Health (MoH). Where resources permit, they should disseminate information via radios and television as well as online to educate their citizens on how to avoid contracting the disease and what they should do once they have contracted it; and connect with civil society on the pandemic through Committees like the Parliamentary Committee on Health, etc.

5.3 Oversight or Control of the Executive

Parliaments all over the world provide oversight role over their Executives. Indeed, the Parliaments are expected to hold their Executives to account for their actions and inactions through, say, Committees of Inquiry and Hearings. Therefore, the roles of the Parliamentarians of the FP-ICGLR regarding the control of the Executive and particularly on the Covid-19 pandemic are twofold: Establishing periodic hearings in their respective Parliaments, including broadcasting live discussions in Parliament on television and radio coverage (e.g., scheduling a televised Question Hour where the presidents and other ministers are subjected to direct questioning by their citizens), on the pandemic; and since the potential for some unscrupulous individuals such as politicians, government officials, private sector entrepreneurs and international agents are likely to engage in dubious deals during this pandemic (as has already happened in Uganda where the Permanent Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister and three others have been arrested), the Parliamentarians should think of establishing a special Anti-Corruption Committee in order to frequently discuss and debate corruption related occurrences.

5.4 Trends ICGLR Member States should watch out for during the Pandemic

As regards the trends or ways the ICGLR Member States should watch out for during the Covid-19, several emerge in which the pandemic is bound to impact on the conflicts in the GLR.²⁵ These impacts are: exacerbating inequalities and further burdening the already vulnerable populations within the conflict-affected region; the behavior of local and external parties; economic fallout;²⁶ conflict management and conflict resolution mechanisms; risk to social order; opportunities for seizure; and potential conflict mitigation measures. Each of these aspects will be discussed in turn.

1. *Exacerbating Inequalities and Burdening Vulnerable and Affected Populations:* Populations in conflict affected areas are likely to be especially vulnerable to outbreaks of diseases such as Covid-19. In the face of a pandemic like Covid-19, conflicts, especially when compounded by mismanagement and corruption, can have devastating effects on national health systems which are profoundly ill-prepared. On top of such institutional problems, it can be hard to persuade the local populations who have little interest in government or political leaders but their own elders, to follow public health directives because they are frequently skeptical of what governments say or tell them to do. Security strategies or obstacles are liable to hamper the Covid-19 response in places where conflicts continue. For instance, where conflicts exist, where do the fleeing people sleep - in the fields or under trees? Do they respect basic hygiene and social distancing practices? How do lack of resources like water and soap affect the people? Do the health systems have vital test kits? Do health and humanitarian workers fear the outbreak of the pandemic? Does Covid-19 overwhelm aid efforts? In the context of Covid-19 and gender, particularly the effects of Covid-19 on women, the issue is whether it affects women disproportionately. Do women form the majority of the displaced populations in conflict-affected region? To what extent are women's access to services and ability to feed their families deeply constrained by Covid-19? To what extent are women sexually exploited or abused due to Covid-19? Is it of high priority for the governments of the Member States to rehabilitate or integrate the displaced women and children back into communities? Do displaced women and children stand poised to be affected fast and first by the economic crises that will be intensified by Covid-19? Etc.;
2. *The Behavior of Local and External Parties:* Local and external conflict parties could be quick to capitalize on various opportunities arising from the policy responses to the conflicts or wars which will complicate further peace and conflict management efforts;
3. *Economic Fallout:* The economic fallout due to the pandemic will put severe strain on already weak state institutions of Member-States thus undermining governance outcomes which, in turn, will increase the risk of further wars;
4. *Conflict Management and Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:* One reason why conflict-ridden populations are likely to be particularly vulnerable to Covid-19 is that it could severely weaken the capacity of both national and international institutions to serve conflict-affected areas. Indeed, restrictions associated with the pandemic will impede humanitarian supply chains as well as curb peacemaking. Already, national and regional organizations have suspended diplomatic initiatives due to ban on transport movements in border districts – e.g., in Uganda - and air travel. Today, all the governments are focusing on prevention of the

²⁵ For a similar discussion, see Crisis Group International (2020) “The Covid-19 Pandemic and Deadly Conflict”, 24th March.

²⁶ See Mustasilta Katariina (2020), op. cit.

spread of the pandemic rather than on the conflicts in the region. Hence, peacekeeping and security related remedies have been put at bay;

5. *Risk to Social Order*: Covid-19 has placed great stress on the governments of the Member States thus creating the potential for fresh outbreak of violence. In the short-term, the pandemic is acting as a deterrent to conflict in the region as the conflicting groups avoid large gatherings. This could change for the worse if conflict prevention measures are not put in place to forestall any fresh outbreak;
6. *Opportunities for Seizure*: While the warning signs associated with Covid-19 are significant, there are also glimmers of hope. The pandemic has created room for humanitarian gestures between the conflicting communities and Member States. As the pandemic hangs on, pressures may grow on the governments of the Member States to find common ground for stability to prevail. Indeed, the conflicting parties could respond positively to the pandemic to reduce the conflict; and
7. *Potential Conflict Mitigation Measures*: Looking ahead, the governments of the Member States will have to decide whether to support more cooperative approaches to handling the conflicts, not only in public health terms, but also as political and security challenges. This is especially so now that all leaders are faced with the pressure to focus on and spend money and political capital on other domestic priorities other than cross-border conflicts that may seem inconsequential enough to worry about. Nevertheless, the Member States as well as regional and multinational institutions will have to take both mitigating and preventive measures to limit the pandemic's impact on peace and security in the region. Thus, and to mitigate and prevent the possibility that Covid-19 brings about a new generation of security challenges, the governments of the Member States can limit the pandemic's impact by considering the following steps: a) Following needs assessment from relevant agencies - such as the UN and International Committee of the Red Cross - and inject essential Covid-19-related funding into humanitarian support especially for IDPs, factoring in the disproportionate risks for displaced women and children; b) Work with relevant agencies such as WHO, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, to mobilize funds to address challenges faced by the poor health systems in the affected region and economic jolts resulting from Covid-19; c) Remove any obstacles or restrictions to the delivery of humanitarian goods to the affected communities; d) Ensure that the peace process and conflict prevention efforts are kept alive by working with various mediating bodies to ensure communications with conflicting parties are kept open; e) Where possible, establish or strengthen diplomatic back channels among the governments of the Member States and non-state actors most affected by the conflicts to communicate over potential escalatory risk areas in the region; and f) Invest in sustained efforts led by the relevant organs of the governments of the Member States, independent media, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and civil society to share impartial news about Covid-19 to counter rumor and political manipulation of the conflicts as well as to keep a spotlight on the conflicts that require urgent action from the governments.

6.0 The ICGLR's challenges that will affect its fight against Covid-19

There are several in-built or inherent challenges that ICGLR faced even prior to the emergence of Covid-19 that are bound to affect its fight against the pandemic. These challenges are²⁷: Inadequate resources to carry out parliamentary diplomacy. The FP-ICGLR relies heavily on contributions from

²⁷ See Okuthe Frank (2018), p. 10.

the Parliaments of Member States. However, these contributions are irregular. Yet, it has not established sufficient partnerships with the donor community to facilitate its programmatic activities. Covid-19 requires colossal sums of money which the FP-ICGLR may not be in position to raise at the moment;²⁸ the development of FP-ICGLR's institutional structure is incomplete, again, due to lack of resources. Consequently, it was unable to execute awareness raising activities for the citizens of the Member States. This being the case, how can it be in position to take on such a new and expensive load as the Covid-19 pandemic which requires strong institutions?; There is a glaring gap with regard to a formalized coordination framework and complementarity between the Forum and the ICGLR Conference Secretariat. Whereas the opportunities for synergy between these institutions are massive, the current deficiency has raised the systemic problem of overlaps in interventions. Hence, this challenge is bound to spill-over into the war against the pandemic; The Forum has been unable to assess the impact of various resolutions adopted by the Plenary Assembly of the FP-ICGLR. The failure to do so has denied the twelve countries that constitute the FP-ICGLR to learn lessons which would have proved quite useful in fighting the Covid-19. This deficiency implies that the FP-ICGLR is likely to 'grapple in the dark' as it seeks answers on how to combat the pandemic; and insecurity in the GLR especially in DRC and the CAR where politico-military unrest is still simmering. South Sudan is still experiencing some tension between the different factions. A number of armed groups are still around who have the potential to cause serious economic damage to the Member States. The effects of the conflicts in the GLR have been responsible for causing refugees and displaced populations in neighboring countries.

7.0 Recommendations

There are various ways that have been identified by Mustasilta (2020) and Burke (2020) that can be applied to mitigate further conflicts in the ICGLR²⁹, and, in turn, Covid-19. These ways are:

1. Because Covid-19 is impervious to politics and its impact on peace and conflict dynamics will derive from policy responses that create certain opportunities and hinder others as well as generate humanitarian and socio-economic hardships, it will require an appropriate legal framework to tackle its adverse impacts;
2. Cultivating peace requires attention and money, both of which are not in abundance among ICGLR's Member-States. Hence, the FP-ICGLR should develop and implement a vigorous "resource mobilization strategy" not only to implement the Covid-19 related measures but for implementing its programmatic activities, including capacity building of its Parliamentarians. South Africa's strategy to mobilize funds from global partners and finance institutions such as the World Bank and the African Development Bank (ADB) could be mimicked;³⁰
3. The Forum should strengthen the relationships between the ICGLR General Secretariat and other ICGLR institutional structures such as the Fora, the Parliamentary Committees, and the Centres for Effective Implementation of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the GLR. Indeed, the ICGLR has been identified as the appropriate framework for

²⁸ It has only been able to establish partnerships with the Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (AWEPA) and Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) whereby activities of common interest have been implemented (Ibid., p. 10).

²⁹ For detailed discussion of the mitigation measures, see Mustasilta Katariina (2020) and Burke Adam (2020).

³⁰ See Hartley Ray, Merwe Emily van der, Nwokolo Marie-Noelle, and Greg Mills (2020), p. 3.

managing peace and security problems in the region.³¹ In the last decade, the ICGLR has been the most adequate institutional framework through which exchanges, discussions and resolutions on peace and security problems have occurred. This recognition is not only shared by the socio-political actors in the region but has been widely affirmed by the UN and the African Union (AU) which has signed a cooperation agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the ICGLR premised on the principles of complementarity and subsidiarity;

4. The Forum should endeavor to assess the impact of all the resolutions that have so far been adopted by the Plenary Assembly of the FP-ICGLR.³² It really serves no purpose when resolutions are adopted and they remain unimplemented. In addition to this failure is the fact that the Forum should develop a strategy for the domestication of the Pact and its ten Protocols by the Member Parliaments that are yet to do so; in spite of the ICGLR having developed a guide on how to domestic the Protocols, only three out of twelve Member States have domesticated it. The FP-ICGLR must be seen to be conducting its business within the legal framework and not haphazardly;
5. It is important to realize that Covid-19 is a slow and protracted pandemic that does not affect conflict parties equally and simultaneously. So, appropriate remedies and actions should be designed that take the differences among Member States into account. Further, although the capacity of the Member States to contain the pandemic may differ, their approaches to limiting its spread are similar, namely; restriction of movements, quarantine, social distancing, curfews, suspension of international flights and closing of borders for all movements except for cargo;
6. Supporting locally-embedded peace-building actors and governance providers: Building and maintaining peace should always rest on local leadership, and civil society actors can be crucial partners for national authorities and international aid organizations in combating the pandemic;
7. Economic shocks increase the risk of armed violence, and thereby conflicts. However, this risk can be curtailed by well-managed and targeted financial aid. National, regional, and international organizations should be identified which can support conflict-ridden Member-States in mitigating the negative consequences of the economic fallout. In order for this support to prevent rather than induce conflict, its distribution in conflict-affected countries should be based on the assessment of a conflict-sensitive risk and vulnerability. Thus, there is critical need to maintain unhindered humanitarian and other support towards countries menaced by the pandemic;
8. Through greater coordination and exchange of information among the armed forces of the DRC, Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda, gains have been made in combating armed groups in eastern DRC. Facilitation of consultations among the Heads of the Intelligence in these countries, as well as Tanzania, helped to identify non-military measures to compliment military operations. These measures should continue;
9. With regard to the “power of knowledge”, Mustasila (Ibid.) notes that rumors and misinformation can worsen the public health situation thus creating further tensions between

³¹ Sebahara and Ntaganda 2016, p. 29.

³² Okuthe (2018), p. 12, is absolutely correct when he asserted that: “The successful implementation of this ambitious Pact on Security, Stability and Development cannot be left to Governments of Member States in the Great Lakes Region alone because conflict is a multi-dimensional issue requiring multi-prong approach involving different actors and stakeholders. The stakeholders to include legislators, Civil Society, Media, and citizens of Member States need to create synergies and clearly state what their role and stake would be and then use their comparative advantage to meet the overall goal for their intervention”.

the conflicting Member-States or between the nationals embroiled in the conflict and the authorities (national or regional or international) seeking to manage and resolve the conflicts. Hence, she observed that this issue emphasizes the role of locally trusted actors in the communication realm. In addition, she notes that knowledge is essential to preempt the escalation of potential conflict. This is why she is absolutely correct in saying that in order for actors seeking to maintain or build peace to be able to act early, evidence-based conflict analysis on national and sub-national level vulnerabilities is vital. Also, it is important for the General Secretariat of the ICGLR to develop an effective communication strategy that will help in disseminating information and data on the pandemic;

10. As clearly suggested by Burke (2020), state authorities and development actors should ensure that the mitigation measures of the pandemic do not backfire by exacerbating current problems or unintentionally stocking violence;
11. Burke (Ibid.) also suggests that further steps should proactively seek to dispel rumors, build common understanding, and ease tensions. The gist of this proposition is that the risks and opportunities in peace-building are such that sudden crises like the Covid-19 pandemic can break established patterns of behavior, sometimes generating shared interest in ending violence. However, if not well-managed, the pandemic could lead to more intense conflict. Hence, the centrality of the media in influencing societal attitude deserves no over-emphasis. The media should be reoriented to serve the interests of the peoples of the GLR. Thus, its use of divisive language should be absolutely discouraged. Instead, the media should focus on fundamental aspects such as inclusiveness, participation and decentralization. In fact, the media should be geared towards promoting the culture of tolerance and peace.³³ The media should also provide the appropriate fora to allow the peoples of the GLR to openly discuss various issues affecting Member States, including development programs, how the resources are being utilized across sectors by whom and in whose interests, etc.;
12. Burke (Ibid.) further acknowledges that on the question of “working across conflict lines”, coordination and collaboration of stakeholders, two essential elements in addressing a pandemic, are especially hard to achieve in conflict zones where responses need the support of all armed actors. The point is that involving armed groups is critical if they exert strong influence over local civilian populations. In this sense, international agencies and civil society actors should back cooperation across conflict lines. He also rightly argues that the issue to address at this material time is whether non-state armed groups have assumed some responsibility for Covid-19 responses. More specifically, Burke says, and his idea deserves to be fully embraced, that the response to Covid-19 provides an opportunity for foreign aid agencies to support local capacity and devolve program design (*my addition*) and management so that they address practical local challenges;
13. In conflict-affected areas like is the case in the GLR where locals fear government representatives including even health workers, local organizations should play a vital role by providing health services, gathering accurate information, and persuading local communities to change behavior³⁴ [e.g., through the use of Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) issued by their Governments] in order to tackle the pandemic. Burke (Ibid.) argues that policymakers may have limited information on events in conflict-affected areas, from the spread of the pandemic through to the status of border closures and availability of basic goods. Consequently, he notes that measures to gather and report on data, both qualitative and quantitative, can make a significant difference for areas that are off the radar and for

³³ On similar arguments, see OSSREA (2001), pp. 20-21.

³⁴ Burke Adam (2020).

marginalized groups like children, youth, women and the elderly, who otherwise remain invisible. He adds that there is a need for transparency and timely sharing of public health data with neighbors and international community;

14. Gender inequalities tend to be exaggerated by the combination of conflict crisis (Ibid.). The indirect impact of the pandemic in the conflict region is likely to disproportionately affect women, thus aggravating GBV. This issue must be addressed with maximum attention and effort;
15. Like the Secretary General's Special Envoy told the Security Council (SC) in a videoconference held on 22nd April 2020, there will be need for greater international support, including development funding, not only to preserve and consolidate gains made in the past – i.e., some countries of the GLR which were emerging from decades of conflict will need steadfast and resolute support – but to push regional cooperation forward. Therefore, a comprehensive and coordinated effort by all partners is critical to respond effectively to the pandemic and to support national and regional efforts in ensuring that recent gains in regional cooperation are sustained and advanced;
16. Coupled with the above measure, is the need to advocate for few and targeted international peace initiatives where the local people can get engaged in developing and supporting initiatives of their own – beyond those that are initiated and driven by external bodies - as a possible agenda for national and regional peace and stability as well as transformation out of the conflict crisis.³⁵ In fact, for the initiatives to progress and achieve the anticipated tangible outcomes, broad popular support is a prerequisite;
17. The SC must support the work of regional organizations and UN Missions. Indeed, UN Missions like MONUSCO should engage actively with the local communities in resolving conflicts and building peace and security. MONUSCO should develop a joint strategy on the conflict in eastern DRC;
18. The UN's peace and security strategy for the GLR, which has been under development for quite some time now, should be completed. Without this strategy, no clear guidance is available for embedding peace and security in the GLR;
19. Women and youth, as key change agents, should be given priority consideration in the design of medium- to long-term post-Covid-19 recovery efforts. This is especially important to enable them to own the peace and security processes; and
20. There is urgent need to discuss seriously the process of peace agreement and its implementation arising from the conflicts in the GLR. Here, the key issue is to ensure that the reconstruction process is as inclusive as possible so that it is owned by all stakeholders. In other words, the grievances of the contesting parties should be taken into consideration in the peace, recovery and development processes. In this regard, a prior agreement needs to be arrived at by the parties with regard to the arrangements for implementation. The priorities of the Member States in post-conflict reconstruction would include: Rehabilitation of the combatants by helping them to lead a civil life and integrate with the community. Here, the activities would include income generating schemes, and provision of jobs in development projects; Rehabilitation of the environment because of the destruction and disappearance of the forest and soil erosion in several areas. To this end, mass afforestation programs would have to be implemented; De-mining, arising from scattered land mines in various battlefields would have to be carried out. This is an arduous and risky business which requires sophisticated equipment, skilled personnel, and huge sums of money that some Member

³⁵ OSSREA (2001), pp. 14-15.

States currently do not have; and new development projects will have to be implemented especially in the war-affected and marginalized areas to create jobs especially for the youth.

Of all these dimensions or impacts, the policy responses and distractions created by the pandemic could have the most significant repercussions.³⁶ Indeed, the global scale of the pandemic could complicate efforts to seize momentum for peace and set it (pandemic) apart from previous catastrophic or disruptive events.

8.0 Conclusion

The GLR is among the most war torn regions in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The incessant wars that have been going on for decades prior to Covid-19 have caused serious devastation to the peoples and countries of the ICGLR Member States. Indeed, these wars have claimed millions of lives, caused the displacement of peoples from their settlements, intensified refugee populations, damaged infrastructure and the environment, arrested development projects and initiatives, drained and diverted the meager resources of the Member States to non-productive ventures, and adversely affected the image of the Member States in various regional and international forums.

Thus, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought more devastation and in all forms (political, economic, social, conflict, peace, security, diplomatic, etc.). It also continues to threaten and drain various individuals and groups as well as governments. Resolving its effects and impact, whether diplomatically or otherwise, will certainly be difficult. Nevertheless, it is crucial to keep the communication channels open and a spirit of cooperation going in a period when the Governments of the ICGLR Member States are faced with serious challenges beyond the cross-border conflicts.

The conflicts in the GLR are complex because it involves many conflicts, internal and external interests, and frequent shifts in the arrangements of major conflicting actors. Thus, measures towards conflict resolution and management as well as post-conflict reconstruction and development efforts should be in line with this complexity. As a result, some challenges that are inherent to the ICGLR which are bound to affect the fight against the pandemic include: Inadequate resources to carry out parliamentary diplomacy; Incomplete development of the FP-ICGLR's institutional structure; Glaring gap regarding formalized coordination framework and complementarity between the Forum and the ICGLR Conference Secretariat; Failure by the Forum to assess the impact of various resolutions adopted by the Plenary Assembly of the FP-ICGLR; and simmering insecurity in the GLR.

To minimize the impact of such challenges, the following major recommendations are suggested: Policy responses by ICGLR Member States should create opportunities and hinder others that cause conflicts and insecurity; Since cultivating peace and security requires attention and money, resources should be mobilized for these purposes; The Forum should strengthen the relationships between the ICGLR General Secretariat and other ICGLR institutional structures for effective implementation of the Pact; The Forum should assess the impact of all the resolutions that have been adopted by the Plenary Assembly of the FP-ICGLR; Appropriate remedies and actions should be designed that take the differences among Member States into account; Locally-embedded peace-building actors and governance providers should be supported; Economic shocks, that increase the risk of armed violence and thereby conflicts, should be curtailed by well-managed and targeted financial aid as well

³⁶ Mustasilta (2020).

as maintaining unhindered humanitarian and other support towards countries menaced by the Covid-19 pandemic; Measures such as greater coordination and exchange of information among the armed forces to combat armed groups, and facilitation of consultations among the Heads of the Intelligence in the different countries, should continue; Locally trusted actors should be brought on board to de-escalate conflicts and tensions in the GLR; Authorities and development actors should ensure that the mitigation measures of the pandemic do not backfire; International agencies and civil society actors should back cooperation across conflict lines; Local organizations should play a pivotal role by providing health services, gathering accurate information, and persuading local communities to change their behaviors to tackle the pandemic; Maximum attention and effort should be exerted on the indirect impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups like women and youth; There is need for greater international support, including development funding, not only to preserve and consolidate the gains made in the recent past, but to push regional cooperation forward; There is a need to advocate for few and targeted international peace initiatives where the local people can get engaged in developing and supporting initiatives of their own as a possible agenda for national and regional peace and stability; The SC must support the work of regional organizations and UN Missions in close association with local communities; There is need to complete the development of the UN's peace and security strategy for the GLR; As key change agents, women and youth should be given priority consideration in the design of medium- and long-term post-Covid-19 recovery efforts; and there is urgent need to discuss the process of peace agreement and its implementation arising from the conflicts and instability in the GLR.

Other related, but equally significant, recommendations are: Experienced people should be included in the peace-building efforts who have access to important personalities in the conflicting parties; Outreach should include as many networks and as many people as possible and increase awareness about the content of the initiative; Open and transparent discussions should be promoted – including on issues regarding programs of Member States such as natural resources, national revenue and expenditure, etc. - on the comprehensive initiative to enhance ownership and participation; Ensure that actors are accountable to their peoples on whatever they do to create peace and security; Institutions of development-oriented foreign relations should be made to work not only for the conflicting parties but for the peoples of the GLR; Civil society and traditional institutions in peacemaking and peace-building should be recognized and supported; Comprehensive peace-building and security initiatives should be developed that will work for the peoples of the GLR; The media should be re-oriented to enable it to promote a culture of peace and tolerance; and an all-embracing post-conflict recovery and development programs should be formulated to settle the people, create jobs especially for the youth, etc.

With regard to future activities, two fundamental things can be done, viz: Special consideration should be given to the formulation and implementation of a comprehensive peace initiative; and review all the existing initiatives and try to incorporate the basic elements in each initiative to come up with one comprehensive initiative, which should be in position to marshal broad support among the ICGLR Member States as well as among external actors.

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