****

**EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY**

**EAST AFRICAN LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY - FOURTH ASSEMBLY**

**PRESS STATEMENT ON THE 14TH MEETING OF THE BUREAU OF THE EAC SPEAKERS OF NATIONAL LEGISLATURES AND THE EAST AFRICAN LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY HELD ON 11TH NOVEMBER, 2022 IN NAIROBI, REPUBLIC OF KENYA**

Speakers of East African Community (EAC) legislatures yesterday called for the entrenchment of the East African Bureau of Speakers entity into the organogram of the Community.

Speaking at the 14th forum of the East African Community Bureau of Speakers meeting held at a Nairobi Hotel, the Speaker of the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA), Rt. Hon. Ngoga Martin, said that the process of amending the Treaty to reflect the current state of affairs of the Community was long overdue and that an opportunity to amend the document, which establishes the East African Community, would give the Speakers an opportunity to embed the Bureau into the structure of the Community.

During the meeting, respective Clerks of the EAC national legislatures were tasked by the Bureau to undertake the process of drafting a Private Members’ Bill to be considered by EALA. The Bill will seek to enact laws to govern the envisioned organ of the Community.

While attending the meeting, Rt. Hon. Amason Kingi Jeffah, Speaker of the Senate, Parliament of Kenya, who once served as a Minister of EAC, regretted that the EAC Council of Ministers had always been a stumbling block to the formation of the proposed organ that is expected to oversee matters of legislation in the region. This, he said, is due to the shallow nature of briefs done by the Secretariat at the Council of Ministers meetings which are not detailed enough to convince the Council.

A spotlight was turned on the on the arrears owed to the Community by some of the EAC Partner States. While noting that late remittances had denied the Community the opportunity to accomplish its projects and activities on time, the Bureau resolved that the Speaker of EALA had a duty to bring the issue to the attention of the EAC Secretary General as well as the East African Community Council of Ministers.

The Bureau, which was established in 2008, with a mandate to establish a functional working relationship among Speakers of the EAC Partner States and EALA, and to enhance the role of respective national legislatures in the EAC integration agenda, proposed the establishment of a Centre of Innovation in Parliaments (CIPs) Regional Hub for East African Parliaments. The hub is set to share technological working solutions between EAC legislatures.

The Bureau also touched on the issue of the Inter-Parliamentary Games (IPG) which are held every year, on rotational basis, in one of the EAC Partner States and resolved that this year’s tournament, which will mark the 12th IPG, will be held in Juba, Republic of South Sudan, from 25th November to 4th December, 2022.

The Bureau took issue with the visa requirement that is imposed on citizens of some EAC Partner States while accessing the Republic of South Sudan and urged the Speaker of the Transitional National Legislative Assembly (TNLA), Rt. Hon. Jemma Nunu Kumba, who was in attendance, to take up the matter with her government with a view of eliminating the visa requirement for all EAC citizens and especially during the oncoming tournament.

While chairing the meeting, the Speaker of the Kenya National Assembly, Rt Hon. Moses Wetangula, outlined his country’s commitment in implementing the resolutions of the Bureau. He noted that Parliament of Kenya had managed to amend its rules of procedure to make provisions on how to handle matters EAC-EALA, including providing for procedures on how to handle bills, protocols, treaties and debates.

The Speaker also reported that Kenya had long adopted the report on the EAC Single Customs Area which contained a comprehensive section on Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) in August, 2014. This included the East African Legislative Assembly Bill on the Elimination of Non-Tariff Barriers Bill, 2015; and enhanced collaboration between EALA Committees and its regional integration Committee to pursue a dedicated approach to integration matters.

Following the Communique of the East African Regional Heads of State Conclave on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) held on 21st April 2022, in Nairobi, Rt. Hon. Wetangula reported that the National Assembly of Kenya had approved the deployment of the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) to the East Africa Community Regional Force in the Democratic Republic of Congo, for peace-keeping operations. This was after the Heads of State approved the formation of the East Africa Community Regional Force to the Democratic Republic of Congo (EACRF-DRC), marking the first time the East Africa Community had been called upon to organize a regional force for deployment in a member state.

Other EAC countries that have sent battle groups include the republics of Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda while Tanzania has given the commitment to join the peace efforts at a later date.

Others who attended and addressed the meeting were Dr. Alvera Mukabaramba, MP, and the Vice President of the Senate of Rwanda; Rt. Hon. Speaker Anita Annet Among, Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda; Hon. Eddy Mundela Kanki, MP, Prime Vice-President of the Senate of the Democratic Republic of Congo; Rt. Hon. Dr. Emmanuel Sinzohagera, MP, and President of the Republic of Burundi, Senate; Rt. Hon. Jemma Nunu Kumba, Speaker of the Transitional National Legislature of the Republic of South Sudan; and, Hon. Abbas Tarimba, MP, representing the Speaker of the National Assembly of the United Republic of Tanzania.

At the end of the meeting, the leadership of the Bureau was handed over to the Rt. Hon. Jemma Nunu Kumba, Speaker of the Transitional National Legislature of the Republic of South Sudan. The Speaker accepted her new role as the new Chairperson of the EAC Speakers’ Bureau and committed to continue steering the Bureau to greater heights. She also lauded Bureau for its democratic nature of running its affairs.

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