

The appointment of President Yoweri Museveni as chairman of the East African Community (EAC) Summit is both a great honour for Uganda and a significant milestone for regional integration across East Africa and the broader African continent.

This decision, taken during the 25th EAC Heads of State Summit at the Arusha International Conference Centre in Arusha, Tanzania, comes at a critical moment in the region's history. For the next year (from March 2026 to March 2027), President Museveni will steer the affairs of one of Africa's most ambitious regional blocs, succeeding William Ruto of Kenya. I would wish to congratulate our dear President upon this great milestone.

The EAC today comprises eight member states — Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, Somalia and the DR Congo — representing a combined population of over 330 million people and a rapidly growing economic space whose GDP is estimated at over \$300b. President Museveni's election to lead this bloc is, therefore, not merely ceremonial. It carries profound implications for the stability, economic growth and integration of the region.

LEADERSHIP AT A CRITICAL TIME

The EAC faces both opportunities and challenges. On the economic front, the community continues to deepen integration. Yet the bloc also confronts financial constraints, including about \$89m in outstanding statutory contributions owed by some member states.

Security concerns equally demand urgent attention. The ongoing instability in eastern DR Congo remains a major regional concern, with the EAC working alongside the African Union to advance diplomatic and security efforts aimed at restoring peace.

These realities make the choice of leadership particularly important. At such a moment, the region has turned to a leader widely regarded as one of Africa's most experienced statesmen.

CHAMPION OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION

Museveni's commitment to East African integration stretches back decades. Indeed, he was among the leaders who championed the revival of the East Africa Community, following its collapse in 1977, culminating in

Why Museveni's EAC chairmanship is defining moment for the region



the signing of the treaty that formally re-established the bloc in 1999.

His deep understanding of the historical foundations of East African co-operation has often been acknowledged by his peers. During the 24th EAC Heads of State Summit in 2024, President Ruto praised President Museveni for his enduring role in promoting unity within the region. That experience is rooted in history. The early vision for East African co-operation was laid in the 1960s by founding leaders including Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Milton Obote of Uganda and Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya. President Museveni has often acknowledged being mentored by these pioneers and has remained a consistent advocate of their dream of a politically and economically integrated East Africa.

Beyond modern history, he frequently reminds the region that integration is not a new idea. Trade between the East African coast and the civilisations of the Middle East and Asia existed centuries ago, creating a natural network of commerce that modern regional co-operation seeks to revive.

PEACE AND SECURITY
Economic integration cannot succeed without peace and

stability. Investors, traders and entrepreneurs require a secure environment to thrive. Over the past four decades, Uganda has transformed from a country once devastated by conflict into one of the most stable nations in the region. Under Museveni's leadership, the country has also contributed troops to peacekeeping missions across Africa, including in Somalia and the DR Congo. These contributions reflect a broader philosophy: that regional security is a shared responsibility. As chairman of the EAC Summit, Museveni brings to the position extensive experience in conflict resolution and regional diplomacy. These qualities will be invaluable as the bloc works to address security challenges.

ADVANCING THE VISION OF AFRICAN UNITY

During his acceptance remarks at the Arusha summit, Museveni articulated a broader vision for the continent. Africa, he said, must avoid what he described as *okukonesa* (the mismanagement of the African revolution).

Having achieved *uhuru* (political independence), he argued, the continent's next mission must be *umoja* (unity). That unity is not merely symbolic. It is economic and strategic. Africa's prosperity, Museveni emphasised, depends on increased production, larger markets and deeper regional integration.

The EAC, therefore, represents more than a regional bloc. It is a building block towards the broader aspirations of continental initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area, which seeks to create the world's largest free trade area.

The good news is that the EAC already stands as one of Africa's most successful regional organisations. Intra-regional trade within the bloc accounts for 25-28% of total trade, the highest rate among African economic communities. The community has also established functioning institutions including the East African Legislative Assembly and the East African Court of Justice.

Infrastructure development is also accelerating. Improved road networks, energy projects and cross-border investments are gradually reducing barriers to trade and mobility across the region.

Uganda itself has invested in strategic infrastructure, including road construction projects linking it with eastern DR Congo, an initiative designed to expand trade routes and strengthen economic ties between the two nations. Such projects illustrate the practical benefits of integration: connecting producers to markets, lowering the cost of transport, and creating opportunities for millions of East Africans.

MOMENT OF OPPORTUNITY

Museveni assumes the chairmanship of the EAC at a moment when the region stands on the threshold of transformative progress. With a young population, abundant natural resources and expanding markets, East Africa has the potential to become one of the fastest-growing economic regions in the world.

Realising that potential will require visionary leadership, political commitment and continued co-operation among member states. Fortunately, the region now finds itself under the stewardship of a leader who has consistently championed the ideals of unity, stability and economic transformation. Museveni's chairmanship is, therefore, not only a recognition of his personal experience and contributions.



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The author is the Minister for the President