

From *Uhuru* to *Umoja*: East Africa is at the threshold of itself

Early congratulations to President Museveni upon his assumption of the chairmanship of the East African Community (EAC). I equally salute the summit for endorsing Amb Stephen Patrick Mubundi from the United Republic of Tanzania as the new secretary general of the EAC Secretariat.

President Museveni has spent over five decades proving, through concrete and costly action, that African unity is achievable.

It is against this record that his assumption of the chairmanship of the EAC Summit on March 7, in Arusha, Tanzania carries specific weight.

Few leaders alive today were present at the founding arguments for East African integration, witnessed the collapse of the first community in 1977, championed and participated in its revival in 2000, and now sit at its head.

The Community he now chairs spans eight nations: Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Somalia. Intra-regional trade reached

duced by political choices. These choices were made by governments that have not yet decided the cost of integration is worth paying.

President Museveni has named this failure plainly. He calls it *okukonesa*, loosely translated as the mis-cooking of the African revolution, applying insufficient heat at the critical moment. The summit in Arusha moved to correct the structural conditions that enable this pattern.

Leaders approved an equity-based contribution framework replacing the equal-share model designed for three founding nations, adjusted quorum rules to prevent defaulting States from paralysing decisions, and approved a 50 percent waiver on arrears conditional on full payment within two years.

The instruments are in place. The chairmanship must now enforce what the summit agreed. Uganda has paid 99 percent of its statutory obligations. That is the floor, and every partner State must be held to it. Beyond financial discipline, the agenda is clear: Eliminate the non-tariff barriers that frustrate cross-border traders daily; deepen the operationalisation of the common market; elevate Kiswahili as a deliberate instrument of shared identity across partner state institutions; and build the symbols of integration that move citizens rather than officials.

Museveni has articulated the deeper logic precisely. East Africa's 300 million people represent a domestic market large enough to support industrialisation at scale. A smallholder farmer in Uganda, a textile manufacturer in Tanzania, an artisan in Kenya each produces value. What they lack is the market depth to convert that production into compounding wealth. The borders between them are the primary obstacle.

East Africa holds the population, the resources, and the geographic corridors connecting the continent to the ocean. What it has sometimes lacked is the sustained political will to convert those advantages into compounding power.

Uhuru was achieved. That chapter is written. *Umoja* is the chapter that remains and it will be written in budgets paid on time, borders made genuinely open, and institutions funded to do the work they were created to do, certainly not forgetting the need and urgency to engage the young generation to be the vanguard of this dream of a politically federated East Africa.

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\$40.3b (Shs151 trillion) in 2025, a 22 percent increase in a single year. The architecture of integration is real, and it is growing.

The crises are equally real. The East African Legislative Assembly has been on indefinite recess since July 2025 for want of funds. The East African Court of Justice, carrying 260 unresolved cases, can afford to convene only four times a year.

Statutory arrears stand at \$89m (Shs333.5b). The Secretariat has frozen hiring, leaving 150 positions vacant. These are institutional failures pro-

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