

# Only a unified approach can tackle threats to peace and security

By ISAAC MWANGI of EANA

**T**HE recommendation by an inter-parliamentary seminar that a multi-dimensional and regional approach to security be developed deserves a lot more thought than has hitherto been accorded such proposals.

The need for such a conceptual framework on terrorism is particularly important given the rising cases of terrorist attacks, especially in Kenya.

But it does not have to be limited to addressing terrorism. The labyrinth of challenges to peace and security includes other crimes such as money laundering, human and drug trafficking, poaching and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

There have been numerous efforts, even at the regional level, to address peace and security issues. However, these have tended to be restricted to specific sectors, say military co-oper-

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ation or meetings of religious leaders. What East Africa now needs, however, is an all-inclusive approach that brings together the key participants from various sectors.

This is why the resolution calling on the East African Legislative Assembly and national parliaments to develop a joint platform to work on issues of peace and security in the region is so important.

In fact, a beginning point would be to lobby partner states to expedite



**Richard Sezibera, Secretary General of the East African Community.**

the ratification and implementation of all regional peace and security-related protocols and commitments. These will provide the initial legal and administrative framework for real work in the peace and security sector to begin.

Thereafter, there is the obvious need to develop a programme of deliberate inclusion of persons and sectors of society that are often left out of peace and security initiatives. These include women, youth, children and various minorities.

An initial effort that has been proposed to kickstart this arrangement is the establishment of twinning programmes between people and institutions of various partner states to facilitate social cohesion. In actual fact, this is already happening to some extent with border communities, who have long associated with each other. Sensitization campaigns targeting these communities have in the past been spearheaded by the EAC Secretariat.

These initiatives now need to be expanded to include other communities far from border areas, creative industries, schools, universities, labour movements, and as many other sectors as possible so as to increase citizen participation in regional peace and security efforts.

The framework to be developed will have to address all these matters as well as overlapping relationships between the various institutions. Moreover, we need to take into account that different partner states have varying commitments to one or more bodies and blocs.

Peace and security matters are intertwined with the development of a common identity, and in this context the use of Kiswahili should be promoted as the lingua franca in the whole region.

A shared East African identity that narrows down our differences while exhibiting tolerance for our diversity is a critical aspect in the promotion of peace and security.

This will also be better served through simple measures such as observing the same driving code - either left-side driving as happens in Rwanda and Burundi or right-hand driving as in the rest of East Africa.

It would also be prudent to adopt a common time zone; currently, Rwanda and Burundi are one hour behind the rest of East Africa.

The peace and security challenges faced by East African countries are often localized and differ in many ways, calling for local solutions.

While Kenya is constantly faced with the threat of terrorism emanating mainly from Somalia's Al Shabaab militia, Rwanda has had to deal with former genocide perpetrators and Interahamwe fighters for years.

Yet, there are common grounds that can form the basis of inter-state co-operation. A regional approach in addressing security threats will make it impossible for perpetrators of violence in any part of our region to find safe sanctuary anywhere else among our partner states.

The Interahamwe threat must be seen as a threat to Kenya and Tanzania as well, while terrorism in Nairobi must be taken as a threat to the citizens of Kigali and Bujumbura too.

When the enemy of one becomes the enemy of all, we shall well be on the way to establishing the basis for lasting peace and security in the region.