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THEME:

Leveraging UNGA 81 to Strengthen Eastern Africa's Strategic Agency and Regional Resilience

The 81st United Nations General Assembly convenes at a critical juncture for Eastern Africa, where geopolitical fragmentation, fiscal pressures, democratic contestation, transnational crimes and protracted conflicts are placing growing demands on national and regional institutions. The session's theme, "Restoring trust, sparking transformation," and its priorities on peace and security, sustainable development, human rights, emerging technologies and multilateral reform provide important entry points for advancing Eastern Africa's interests. Rather than approaching UNGA 81 as a collection of separate national priorities, Eastern African states should use it to develop coordinated positions around issues where collective action can generate greater diplomatic leverage and practical returns. This requires moving beyond participation towards strategic agency by shaping negotiations, building coalitions, securing resources and influencing institutional decisions. The region can use its collective position to pursue stronger African representation in global governance, more predictable development financing, resilient democratic institutions, coordinated responses to transnational crime and greater international support for African-led conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The value of UNGA 81 will ultimately depend on what Eastern Africa secures from the process and how effectively those commitments are translated into regional action. The objective should be a more coordinated, resilient and strategically influential Eastern Africa capable of advancing its interests within an increasingly contested multilateral order.

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Bolstering Eastern Africa's Collective Capacity to Prevent and Resolve Conflict

Eastern Africa's persistent conflicts reveal a recurring weakness in regional security management where too much intervention occurs after political crises have already hardened into violence. Sudan's war, instability in South Sudan, insecurity in Somalia and continuing conflict dynamics in the Great Lakes demonstrate how quickly domestic crises can generate into regional consequences through displacement, disrupted trade, humanitarian pressures and cross-border insecurity. These conflicts are rarely driven by a single factor. Political exclusion, weak institutions, competition over resources, communal tensions, climate pressures and illicit economies can interact to create conditions in which violence becomes self-reinforcing. The strategic challenge is therefore to strengthen the political capacity to identify these pressures early and act before they become entrenched. Early-warning systems have limited value when information does not translate into timely mediation, political engagement or preventive action.

UNGA 81's "Silence the Guns, Amplify the Voices" pillar provides a framework for

strengthening this preventive approach through political dialogue, mediation, peace-building and civilian protection. Eastern African states should advocate for predictable international support for African-led peace processes while strengthening the ability of the AU, IGAD and EAC to coordinate responses to crises with regional implications. Mediation should also move beyond elite bargaining by giving greater space to women, youth, local authorities and communities affected by violence. Peace agreements that do not address local grievances or create credible implementation mechanisms risk reproducing instability rather than resolving it. Eastern Africa therefore needs a prevention-to-peacebuilding continuum connecting early warning, preventive diplomacy, mediation, humanitarian action and post-conflict recovery. The objective should be to make conflict prevention a standing regional capability rather than an emergency response. Greater international backing for African-led initiatives would strengthen regional ownership while allowing the UN systems to complement, rather than substitute for, African peace and security mechanisms.



Tuesday 1st September 2026

Strengthening Regional Cooperation Against Transnational Organized Crime in Eastern Africa

Eastern Africa's expanding connectivity is generating significant economic opportunities, but it is also creating new spaces for criminal networks to operate across jurisdictions. Transport corridors, ports, informal border crossings, financial systems and digital platforms can be exploited to move illicit commodities, people and proceeds. The 2025 Global Organized Crime Index continues to identify significant criminal-market pressures in East Africa, including illicit drug markets, while highlighting weaknesses in the region's capacity to withstand organized crime. The strategic concern is therefore not simply the volume of individual crimes but the criminalization of legitimate economic systems. Organized crime increasingly intersects with money laundering, trafficking, corruption, cyber-enabled fraud, environmental crime and other illicit activities. These linkages can undermine public institutions and legitimate businesses while weakening confidence in regional integration itself.

The UNGA 81 priority of "Silence the Guns, Amplify the Voices" explicitly recognizes transnational organized crime, trafficking,

money laundering and illicit drug trafficking as interconnected challenges requiring stronger international action. Eastern African states should use this opening to build a regional architecture capable of following criminal networks across borders and tracing the proceeds that sustain them. Priority should be given to cooperation between financial intelligence units, customs, immigration, police, prosecutors and judicial authorities; cross-border investigations; beneficial-ownership transparency; asset tracing and recovery; and timely intelligence exchange. The objective should be to make regional integration more resistant to criminal exploitation without undermining legitimate trade and mobility. International partners should consequently support institutional interoperability and investigative capacity rather than focusing predominantly on additional enforcement hardware. Protecting the integrity of the region's emerging economic and digital corridors will be essential to ensuring that connectivity generates development rather than expanding the operating space of criminal enterprises.



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Maximizing Eastern Africa's Gains in the 2026 UN Secretary-General Elections

Africa's numerical strength within the United Nations gives its states considerable potential influence in the selection of the next Secretary-General, but numbers alone do not constitute diplomatic power. The 2026 contest therefore presents a strategic test of whether African states can coordinate preferences, identify common interests and negotiate collectively. For Eastern Africa, the question should not be limited to which candidate eventually prevails. It should also concern what Africa's support can secure within the wider UN system. Fragmented national positions risk dissipating the continent's bargaining power, whereas an early common position could enable African states to negotiate around representation, institutional reform, senior appointments and greater responsiveness to African peace, development and governance priorities. Eastern African governments should consequently coordinate their assessments through the AU and regional mechanisms, examining candidates' positions on issues that matter directly to the continent rather than relying principally on geographical or bilateral considerations.

This makes the Secretary-General selection relevant to UNGA 81's renewed multilateralism and UN reform agenda. The Assembly Presidency has emphasized the need to strengthen a multilateral system capable of responding more effectively to contemporary global challenges and ensuring broader participation in global governance. Eastern Africa should use this moment to push beyond symbolic representation towards institutional influence. Its governments could establish common negotiating priorities covering equitable geographical representation, African participation in senior UN appointments, stronger support for African-led peace initiatives and greater consideration of developing country interests in global decision making. Such coordination would also strengthen the region's diplomatic credibility in future multilateral negotiations. The strategic objective is not simply to determine who occupies the Secretary-General's office, but to demonstrate that African diplomatic support can be organized as a source of sustained negotiating power.



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Thursday 3rd September 2026

Renewing Commitment to the SDGs and Agenda 2063 to Bolster Eastern Africa and Global Development

Eastern Africa's development challenge is increasingly characterized by a widening gap between ambition and implementation. Governments have adopted extensive commitments through the SDGs, Agenda 2063 and national development strategies, yet fiscal constraints, debt pressures, climate shocks, conflict and limited access to affordable capital continue to restrict their capacity to deliver. The central issue is therefore not another reaffirmation of development aspirations, but how the international system can help countries finance and implement them at the scale required. For Eastern Africa, this requires presenting development priorities as interconnected investments in productive capacity, human capital, infrastructure, resilience and regional integration. Fragmented national demands are less likely to secure meaningful international support than a coherent regional proposition that demonstrates how financing can generate cross-border economic and social returns.

UNGA 81's "No One Left Behind, No Country Left Out" priority provides a direct entry point for this agenda. Eastern African states should use the Assembly to press for greater access to concessional finance, climate finance, technology transfer and investment while strengthening regional mechanisms for mobilising private capital. The SDGs and Agenda 2063 should also be operationalized through stronger alignment between national plans and EAC, IGAD and AU priorities. Such alignment would allow the region to articulate a clearer investment pipeline and negotiate with development partners from a stronger collective position. The emphasis should shift from seeking resources for individual programmes to financing structural transformation. This would make multilateral engagement more consequential by connecting global development commitments to regional economic integration, employment creation, resilience and improved livelihoods.

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Rebuilding Democratic Trust in Eastern Africa Is Essential for Strengthening Electoral Governance

The resilience of Eastern Africa's democracies increasingly depends on whether citizens believe political institutions are legitimate and capable of treating competing interests fairly. Electoral disputes often become symptoms of deeper institutional distrust involving electoral commissions, courts, legislatures, political parties and accountability bodies. Where citizens perceive these institutions as partisan or inaccessible, the acceptance of electoral outcomes can weaken even when formal procedures have been followed. This creates a wider governance problem because declining confidence can intensify violent political mobilisation, weaken constitutional safeguards and make peaceful political transitions more difficult. With Kenya's 2027 General Election approaching alongside political transitions elsewhere in Eastern Africa, institutional credibility should therefore be treated as a regional stability concern rather than simply an electoral management issue.

UNGA 81's focus on human rights, prote-

ction and restoring trust offers an opportunity to address these underlying institutional weaknesses. Eastern African states should strengthen the independence and professional capacity of electoral management bodies, improve transparency in campaign financing, reinforce credible electoral dispute resolution and protect civic and media space throughout the electoral cycle. Regional institutions can complement national reforms through peer learning, election observation, preventive diplomacy and early-warning mechanisms capable of identifying tensions before they escalate. The objective should be to create political systems in which citizens can reasonably expect their rights to be protected whether their preferred candidate wins or loses. Democratic trust is ultimately an institutional product built through consistent impartiality, accountability and inclusion rather than through election-day interventions alone. Strengthening these foundations would enhance both democratic legitimacy and the broader resilience of Eastern African states.



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