

By Rhyman Agaba

Twelve African countries under the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) have agreed to jointly fight sexual and gender-based violence, while integrating mental health and psychosocial support, especially in conflict areas.

The delegates reached the agreement during a two-day regional stakeholders' meeting that started on Wednesday at Onomo Hotel in Nakasero, Kampala city.

The meeting that ended yesterday, was attended by over 50 government officials from ICGLR member states and civil society organisations.

ICGLR member states include Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic (CAR), Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Republic of South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Opening the meeting, the ICGLR deputy executive secretary, Ambassador Yasir Ibrahim Ali Mohammed, said the agreement was an important step towards a holistic regional response to sexual and gender-

UGANDA AMONG 12 TO FIGHT GBV WITH PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

BETWEEN THE LINES

Addressing sexual and gender-based violence requires not only legal and security interventions, but also sustained mental health support for survivors.

based violence, especially in conflict-affected settings.

"The member states agreed to set up a special regional facility for training and sensitising judicial officers, police officers, social workers, medical officers and other categories of persons who handle cases of sexual violence in the Great Lakes region," Yasir stated.

He noted that addressing sexual and gender-based violence requires not only legal and security interventions,



Dr Janviere



Ambassador Yasir



Dr Edith Namutebi

but sustained mental health support survivors as well.

The meeting was conducted in Portuguese, French and English. Delegates reviewed a draft regional assessment report on the integration of mental health support and peace-building, implementation guidelines and a draft training handbook designed to support professionals who will be

working on sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response.

Dr Janviere Ndirahisha, the ICGLR regional training facility co-ordinator, commended Uganda and Kampala's leadership for hosting the meeting. She also acknowledged the German and Dutch governments for funding the meeting.

Moses Bwesige, a mental health expert based in Belgium, led a two-hour interactive session and unveiled a summary draft report on integration of psychosocial support and peacebuilding in ICGLR member states.

UGANDA ON TRACK

The Government of Uganda was represented by Dr Edith

Namutebi, who heads regional peace and security in the foreign affairs ministry. She said conflicts usually leave behind psychological scars in society, especially from sexual and gender-based violence.

Namutebi also pointed out the severe shortage of mental health professionals in post-conflict countries, with fewer than one psychiatrist serving 100,000 people in the region.

She, however, noted that Uganda has taken proactive steps to incorporate mental health into its national policies.

The ICGLR Regional Training Facility (RTF) on sexual and gender-based facility was established in 2014 in Kampala, in alignment with the ICGLR Protocol on Prevention and Suppression of Sexual Violence against women and children.

The training facility is mandated to skill up judicial officers, police officers, social workers, medical personnel and other frontline responders in handling sexual and gender-based violence cases.

Beyond agreeing on the guidelines, the meeting resolved to strengthen cross-border collaborations to prevent sexual and gender-based violence.