CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

THE 4TH COMESA-IRSK ANNUAL CONFERENCE

11TH – 13TH NOVEMBER 2026, NAIROBI, KENYA

INTRODUCTION

The international system is undergoing a profound period of transformation marked by geopolitical rivalry, the weakening of multilateralism, protracted conflicts, climate stress, technological disruption, and economic fragmentation. The erosion of consensus-based global governance, rising great-power competition, and the instrumentalisation of trade, finance, and security have fundamentally altered how states and regions pursue peace, development, and strategic autonomy.

For Africa, this fragmenting global order presents both acute risks and strategic opportunities. On the one hand, external shocks, ranging from conflicts in Europe and the Middle East to supply chain disruptions and climate-induced crises, have exposed Africa's structural vulnerabilities. On the other hand, Africa's continental and regional institutions have gained renewed relevance as platforms for collective action, resilience-building, and strategic coordination. Institutions such as the African Union (AU), Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and specialised continental agencies increasingly function as anchors of peace and security, economic integration, norm-setting, and diplomatic agency.

These institutions' ability to deliver meaningful outcomes, however, continues to be undermined by threats of a varied nature - threats that are not solely geopolitical, but financial and transnational in nature. Africa's peace, security and development agenda has been increasingly impacted by illicit financial flows, transnational organised crime, and corruption - particularly through sophisticated channels that exploit gaps in trade, customs, banking oversight, and regional regulatory coordination. Of growing concern is the emergence of Trade-Based Money Laundering (TBML), in which criminal networks disguise their proceeds through trade transactions. Practices such as these not only erode financial integrity, but consequently distort regional markets, weaken state legitimacy, and fuel conflict economies.

Against this backdrop, the International Relations Society of Kenya (IRSK) proposes to convene the 2026 IRSK Annual Conference as a high-level forum bringing together policymakers, diplomats, scholars, development partners, and practitioners to critically examine how Africa's continental and regional institutions can be more effectively harnessed to advance peace, resilience, and transformative development in an increasingly fractured global system. This fourth edition of the conference is being organised in partnership with the **Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)**, the **African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD)** and **Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) – Kenya Office**.

The 2026 IRSK Conference, whose theme is **"Harnessing Africa's Continental and Regional Institutions for Peace, Resilience and Transformation amid a Fragmenting Global Order,"** will be held in Nairobi, Kenya from **Wednesday, November 11 to Friday November 13, 2026**. The Conference is expected to draw approximately 200 attendees, including government officials, parliamentarians, diplomats, scholars, policymakers, youth and business leaders, media personnel, think tanks, and civil society representatives, among others. Special attention will be given to ensuring broad geographic representation and the involvement of women and youth from COMESA Member States.

CONFERENCE METHODLOGY

The conference will encompass a dynamic blend of elements, ensuring a rich and transformative experience for all participants. Participants can expect captivating keynote addresses, engaging roundtable discussions, debates, dialogue, and workshops aimed at propelling these vital discussions, paving the way for informed action as well as impactful solutions. Beyond intellectual discourse, the agenda also encompasses vibrant social events, networking sessions and cultural activities. The fusion of these components creates an inclusive platform that aims to nurture knowledge, dialogue and collaboration amongst participants, making the conference an exceptional and memorable event.

CONFERENCE OBECTIVES

- Policy dialogue and intellectual discourse.
- Practical policy incubation
- Knowledge exchange and research dissemination
- Professional development and skill enhancement.
- Networking and collaborative engagement.
- Promoting Inclusivity

RATIONALE AND POLICY RELEVANCE

Africa's continental and regional institutions were conceived as collective responses to historical fragmentation, external dependency, and political instability. Foundational frameworks such as the Abuja Treaty, the Constitutive Act of the African Union, Agenda 2063, and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) articulate an ambitious vision of integration, peace, and self-reliant development. More recently, initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and evolving regional peace mechanisms signal a shift toward functional integration and problem-solving regionalism.

However, the effectiveness of these institutions is increasingly tested by overlapping mandates, capacity constraints, financing gaps, and complex geopolitical pressures. At the same time, the global turn toward protectionism, bloc politics, and selective multilateralism has elevated the strategic importance of regional and continental cooperation as buffers against global volatility.

This conference is therefore timely and policy relevant. It seeks to interrogate not only what Africa's institutions do, but how and under what conditions they can deliver peace dividends, economic resilience, and structural transformation. It asks how these institutions can be strengthened, synergised, and made more effective to secure African interests, manage continental peace and security, build economic resilience, and catalyse sustainable transformation. Building economic resilience serves as a solid pathway towards sustainable peace. However, as regional trade expands under the RECS as well as the AfCFTA, vulnerabilities linked to economic ills such as TBML are likely to grow, thereby necessitating strengthened capacity and institutional coordination between continental and regional institutions, Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs) and law enforcement across the continent.

The Conference will move beyond normative commitments to examine institutional performance, political economy constraints, diplomatic practice, and reform pathways grounded in empirical evidence and applied policy analysis. The conference will also provide a platform for advocacy aimed at ensuring this evidence-based research meaningfully informs policy conversations and mechanisms at continental, regional, and national levels.

CONFERENCE TRACKS

The conference will be organised around three distinct tracks with various thematic strands. For each sub-theme, there will be keynotes, roundtable discussions, and research presentations highlighting specific issues, including case studies, and moderated discussions.

Track I: International Relations, Peace and Security

- African Peace and Security Architecture in a contested global order
- Conflict prevention, mediation, and peace enforcement
- Governance, legitimacy, and democratic resilience
- Cyber security, emerging technologies, and regional stability
- Money laundering and financing of crimes
- Migration, displacement, and human security
- Multilateralism, Regionalism, and South-South Cooperation
- The politics of gas and rail infrastructure

Track 2: Diplomacy, Global Governance and African Resilience

- African diplomacy in a multipolar and fragmented world
- Economic and commercial diplomacy under geoeconomic competition
- Climate, environmental, and humanitarian diplomacy
- Digital and public diplomacy in an era of disinformation
- Norm diffusion, soft power, and Africa's global voice
- Mineral Diplomacy and Green Energy Transition

Track 3: Regional Integration, Transformation and Development

- AfCFTA, Tripartite, regional markets, and industrial transformation
- Infrastructure, connectivity, and supply chain resilience
- Finance, debt, and development cooperation
- Labour mobility, social cohesion, and inclusive growth
- Regional institutions as drivers of structural transformation
- Trade governance and Trade-Based Money Laundering (TBML) risks under AfCFTA

Across all tracks, the conference will emphasise interdisciplinary analysis, empirical evidence, and policy applicability.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

1. **Manuscript Submission Format:** All text must be typed in 12-point Times New Roman font with 1.5 line spacing. Margins should be at least 1 inch on all four sides.
2. **Abstract:** Articles will be preceded by an abstract of between 200-300 words describing the purpose, significance, methodology, general findings and recommendations of the study and should contain a minimum of five (5) keywords listed in alphabetical order.
3. **Cover Page:** The complete manuscript title, name(s) and addresses of the author(s), institutional affiliations, and status should be clearly stated on this page.
4. **Numbering:** Pages should be numbered consecutively.
5. **Biography Page:** Please provide a short biography (fewer than 100 words) for yourself and each author, if the paper is the work of more than one author.
6. **Referencing:** The APA Style Version 7 (2020) referencing style is to be used
7. **Word Count:** Between 5,000 – 7,000 words.
8. **Important Timelines:**
   - Deadline for Submission of Abstracts by 1st of May 2026
   - Feedback on reviewed Abstracts by 1st of June 2026
   - Submission of full Papers by 1st of September 2026
   - Submission for peer review by 15th of January 2027
   - Publication of peer-reviewed papers in the second quarter of 2027
9. **Submission of Abstracts and Papers:** In soft copy (MS Word) and should be done through the following email address conference@irskenya.or.ke

REGISTRATION FEES

International Presenters	KES 15,000
Non-Members	KES 10,000
IRSK Members	KES 8,000
Undergraduate Students	KES 5,000
Postgraduate Students	KES 10,000

Payments should be made through one of the following methods:

Bank Transfer

Bank: National Bank of Kenya Ltd.
Branch: Kenyatta National Hospital Branch
Account Name: International Relations Society of Kenya Account
Account Number: 01020248155100
Swift Code: NBKEKENXXXX
Bank Code: 12
Branch Code: 025

M-Pesa Pay Bill

Business Number: National Bank of Kenya Ltd.
Account Number: 01020248155100

Deadline for Payment: Payment should be made on or before **15th October 2026**

PARTNERING ORGANIZATIONS

International Relations Society of Kenya (IRSK)

IRSK is the professional body for the international affairs and diplomacy fields in Kenya. The Society serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas, networking, and programmatic initiatives among those involved in the study, teaching, and practice of international relations and diplomacy. IRSK works to promote policy dialogues on international affairs and diplomacy between various parties, carry out pertinent and substantial research, and engage in collaboration with various actors at national, regional, and international levels.

www.irskenya.or.ke

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)

COMESA was established in 1994 to replace the former Preferential Trade Area (PTA). It is the largest Regional Economic Community with a total of 21 Member States. COMESA's main focus is to promote economic prosperity through regional integration. Its objective also includes the promotion of peace and security in the region as espoused in Article 3(d) of the COMESA Treaty. The program on peace and security specifically focuses on governance, conflict prevention, conflict management and post-conflict reconstruction.

www.comesa.int

African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD)

ACCORD is a civil society organisation working throughout Africa since 1992, to bring creative African solutions to the challenges posed by conflict on the continent. We impact political developments by bringing conflict resolution, dialogue, and development to the forefront as an alternative to protracted conflict. As part of its strategic objectives, ACCORD aims to generate, document, and share knowledge that positively impacts conflict prevention, management, resolution and transformation.

www.accord.org.za

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS)

KAS is a German political foundation, present in over 100 countries around the globe, and has been active in Kenya since 1973. The KAS cooperates with governmental institutions, political parties, civil society organizations, and academia, building strong partnerships along the way. The Foundation seeks to intensify political cooperation at the national and international levels through the promotion of productive diplomatic engagements and shared democratic values.

www.kas.de/en/web/kenia