

The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) has called on member countries to address mental health issues caused by war in order to build lasting peace. The region, made up of 12 African countries, has experienced many years of conflict, which has left lasting emotional scars on its people.

In partnership with Rwanda's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ICGLR is organized a four-day training in Kigali, Rwanda, starting on February 4, 2025. The goal is to help government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and faith-based groups find ways to address mental health challenges caused by conflict, particularly within families.

The training focuses on strategies to resolve conflicts that stem from the trauma of war. In countries like Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), many people are still suffering from the effects of past wars. This trauma often leads to violence, especially gender-based violence, and ongoing conflict.

Dora Byamukama, an expert with ICGLR and former Ugandan Member of Parliament, stressed that health workers, mental health professionals, and social workers should be vigilant when they see signs of mental health struggles. She explained that trauma from war and conflict can have a lasting impact, whether someone is a refugee or still living in a conflict zone. "Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw similar mental health issues emerge," she added. "Domestic violence also needs our attention if we want to build peace."



Dr. Moses Mukasa Bwesige, another expert involved in the training, said that people who have lived through war often carry emotional wounds that can lead to further conflict. These mental health issues can escalate if not properly addressed through healing and recovery programs.

A 2018 study by Rwanda's Rwanda Biomedical Center (RBC) found that 20.5% of the general population struggles with mental health problems. Among genocide survivors, the figure is much higher, at 52.2%. Claire Nancy Misago, head of RBC's mental health division, explained that victims of violence often experience isolation, depression, and self-hatred. These feelings can harm their relationships with others and make it harder to heal.

Diogène Karangwa, director of the Institute for Community-Based Socio-therapy, shared that they are working on programs across Rwanda to ensure that everyone affected by mental health issues gets the support they need.

The Rwandan Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also informed international partners, including the German aid organization GIZ and the Dutch Embassy, that the country is committed to continuing its efforts to combat gender-based violence, with the support of ICGLR.

This initiative is part of a broader effort to create a more peaceful and resilient region. Through training and community support, the hope is to help those impacted by conflict find healing and contribute to a brighter future.