



INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM ON: “ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND SOCIAL COHESION IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION”

CALL FOR PAPERS

Background

The last four decades in the Great Lakes region have been marked by armed conflicts. With the periodic recurrence of armed conflicts, the region has recorded serious human rights violations, vicious destruction, and systematic violations of international humanitarian law. Among these armed conflicts, there are the 1993 war in Burundi, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and the so-called wars of liberation that have ravaged the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) since 1996 with the *Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour le Libération du Congo* (AFDL), the *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie* (RCD), and other armed groups such as the *Alliance des Patriotes pour un Congo Libre et Souverain* (APCLS), the *Union des Patriotes Congolais* (UPC), the *Mai Mai groups*, the *Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple* (CNDP), the *Mouvement du 23 Mars* (M23), the *Alliance Fleuve Congo* (AFC), the *Covention pour la Révolution Populaire* (CRP), etc.

These conflicts have become cyclical and continue to affect social relations between cross-border communities in the Nord-Kivu and Sud-Kivu provinces of the DRC, and Rusizi and Rubavu in Rwanda, breeding injustice and discrimination among people living in these areas. In this regard, problems related to migration documents, land issues, smuggling and commercial or administrative disputes are among the most frequently highlighted in the context of cross-border trafficking. Furthermore, the porosity of borders along the countries of the Great Lakes region facilitates some criminals and other offenders to evade the law, making easy cross-border movements and activities, leaving victims without legal assistance.

In addition, being arrested in a foreign country creates a vulnerable situation, with limited legal assistance. This might be due to the insufficient knowledge of the foreign country's judicial procedures and legal framework. The latter differs from one country to another, making the legal procedures inaccessible to people in need. This also characterizes issues related to judicial services, which can be highly costed, as well as cases of corruption that undermine the legitimacy and trust between the judiciary and the litigants.



In such context, improving access to justice is an opportunity for social cohesion, peaceful coexistence and promising regional integration, as well as a challenge to be addressed. It is in this light, for the improvement of access to justice and the promotion of social cohesion among the cross-border communities, that Pole Institute is organizing an international colloquium on **access to justice and social cohesion in the Great Lakes region**.

The colloquium is part of the project "Improving Access to Justice in the Great Lakes Region/Uhaki Bila Mipaka" implemented by the consortium of Pole Institute, iPeace and International Alert. The colloquium, organized by Pole Institute, will bring together researchers, legal professionals, national and international experts, representatives of public and private institutions, civil society organizations and partners to draw up an overview of the challenges and opportunities related to improving access to justice and strengthening social cohesion.

General objective

The general objective of the colloquium is to raise a debate on improving access to justice for cross-border people, considered as a means of reducing tensions and strengthening stability in the Great Lakes region in general, and particularly along the border separating the DRC and Rwanda.

Specific objectives

In order to address the above general objective, the colloquium will:

- Assess the state of access to justice in cross-border areas of the African Great Lakes region;
- Identify socio-structural barriers to access to justice in the African Great Lakes region;
- Explore mechanisms for strengthening access to justice and legal assistance for cross-border populations;
- Analyze the impact of persistent armed conflicts in the Great Lakes region on access to justice and coexistence among cross-border populations;
- Identify and analyze the impact of cross-border judicial and administrative cooperation frameworks on coexistence in the Great Lakes region and/or elsewhere;
- Identify and analyze cross-border conflicts in the African Great Lakes region;
- Capitalize on experiences of conflict management by community structures on both sides of the borders;



- Capitalize on the experiences of border users and formulate appropriate operational recommendations.
- Provide pragmatic recommendations for improving access to justice in the cross-border areas of the African Great Lakes region.

Key thematic areas

Contributors to the colloquium are invited to focus their analyses on the following sub-themes:

- Current status of access to justice in cross-border areas of the African Great Lakes region;
- Socio-structural barriers to access to justice in the African Great Lakes region;
- Mechanisms for strengthening access to justice and legal assistance for cross-border populations;
- Impact of persistent armed conflicts in the Great Lakes region on access to justice and coexistence among cross-border populations;
- Impact of cross-border judicial and administrative cooperation frameworks on coexistence in the Great Lakes region and/or elsewhere;
- Identification and analysis of cross-border conflicts in the African Great Lakes region;
- Experiences of conflict management by community structures in border areas of the African Great Lakes region;
- Experiences of border users and formulation of appropriate operational recommendations.

Submit a contribution

Interested people, both from academic and non-academic circles, may submit their contributions (3,000 to 4,000 words maximum), in English or French, to the following addresses: publications@pole-institute.org & eugene.lubula@pole-institute.org.

Contributions should be submitted in Word format, 1.5-line spacing, Times New Roman font, and should include:

- The title of the proposed contribution, related to at least one of the above sub-themes;
- The author's full name and field of expertise;
- The author's email address;



- The full text (draft).

Important dates

- The colloquium will take place in Nairobi (Kenya) from July 28 to 30, 2026.
- The deadline for submitting contributions is April 15, 2026. After the evaluation of the submitted papers, authors will receive feedback on their contributions by May 30, 2026, at the latest.

Contacts

If you have any questions about the colloquium, please contact the organizing team at: publications@pole-institute.org, copying eugene.lubula@pole-institute.org.

For Pole Institute,

Professor Nene Morisho Mwana Biningo

