When the 12th Ordinary Summit of the EAC Heads of State meeting at the Ngurdoto Mountain Lodge adopted the EAC Anthem, Wimbo wa Jumuiya ya Afrika Mashariki, on 3 December 2010, Victoria Hall was instantly consumed by a hotchpotch of emotions. There was relief—almost palpable. And there was joy—unbridled and immeasurable. It is not difficult to see why. The journey to this latest landmark in the integration of East Africa had been long and arduous. The search for a song that East Africans would call their own involved a process dating back to 2001, with various revisions to the Anthem proposals made along the way. Relief, therefore, derived from the confirmation that their Excellencies were well pleased with this latest version of musical mastery. The joy was borne of the recognition that in the Anthem, an already closely connected people had found yet another symbol to fortify this togetherness. Wimbo wa Jumuiya ya Afrika Mashariki is a melodious three-stanza composition that exhorts East Africans to pursue the virtues of unity, patriotism and hard work, while cultivating a spirit of comradeship at the same time. Like a good anthem should be, the song is an expression of devotion to and pride in a cause—that of oneness under the auspices of the East African Community. It is celebrative and vibrant, its inspiring words delivered against the backdrop of a catchy tune.

Written in Kiswahili, the EAC Anthem opens in a prayer for God’s protection and for peace in the first stanza; a call to patriotism and vigilance in order to sustain our independence, culture and traditions in the second; while the final stanza implores East Africans to work hard, fully dedicating themselves to the construction of a prosperous Community. A chorus that invokes commitment, pride and good tidings provides the necessary intermissions.

When the Summit first mooted the idea of an EAC Anthem, it envisioned it as a useful tool in enhancing an East African identity. It will do that and more: it will provide a crucial springboard to achieving the other milestones in the journey of integration, not least the Political Federation, to which the EAC ultimately aspires.

The next step is to grant the Anthem legal protection for its operation and usage, and the East African Legislative Assembly is due to legislate on the Anthem in April this year. The EAC Ministers responsible for Education and Culture have, meanwhile, already assented to a programme for the popularisation of the Anthem. Efforts in this regard will be undertaken at national and regional levels, including official launches planned for March 2011. It is celebrative and vibrant, its inspiring words delivered against the backdrop of a catchy tune.

Jumuiya Yetu sote tulinde
Tuwajibike tuimarike
Umoja wetu ni nguzo yetu
Idumu Jumuiya yetu.

1. Ee Mungu twakuomba ulinde
Jumuiya Afrika Mashariki
Tuwezeshe kuishi kwa amani
Tutimize na malengo yetu.

2. Uzalendo pia mshikamano
Vive msingi wa Umoja wetu
Natulinde Uhuru na Amani
Mila zetu na desturi zetu.

3. Viwandani na hata mashambani
Tufanye kazi sote kwa makini
Tujitoe kwa hali na mali
Tujenge Jumuiya bora.