

22 September 2014

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,
President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly,
at the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples**

**Excellencies
Secretary General
Distinguished Elders and Leaders of Tribal Governments
Distinguished Representatives of Indigenous Peoples
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen**

The World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, the first ever convened, is truly a historic event and it is a great privilege and honour to welcome all of you present here today. At the outset, let me pay tribute to the indigenous peoples of this land- the Haudenosaunee (Hodon Oshoni).

I also wish to send a warm embrace to indigenous peoples around the world. I am truly honoured to preside over this conference, which must focus on the challenges facing the indigenous peoples, and renewed commitments of Member States to address them.

The World Conference on Indigenous Peoples is a culmination of the dynamic interface between the United Nations and the indigenous peoples of the world over the last fifty years. The process leading to this Conference has been unprecedented in the history of the Organization, as it has involved active participation of indigenous peoples in its preparation, as well as cooperation between Member States and indigenous peoples in the preparation of the Outcome document. We are indeed heartened by the inclusive nature of the preparatory process, which bodes well for the implementation of post-Conference commitments.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For more than thirty years, indigenous peoples' issues have been a preoccupation at the United Nations. Negotiations between Member States and Indigenous leaders, under the aegis of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations, were indeed long and protracted but they eventually led to the General Assembly's adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007.

Most importantly, the Declaration represents a global consensus on indigenous peoples' rights and affirms their right to self-determination. Furthermore, it accords prominence to collective rights in international human rights law, and serves to galvanize international attention on the protection of both individual and collective rights of indigenous peoples.

It is important to note the valuable contributions of the institutional arrangements which have served to translate the objectives of the Declaration into reality, and fostered specific policies on how the United Nations should engage with, and support the aspirations of indigenous peoples. Particularly, I would like to mention the contributions of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Distinguished Guests,

At national level, there have been many declarations of commitments, policies, and legislative actions to improve the conditions of indigenous peoples. Yet, there continues to be a deep chasm between these commitments and reality. The World Conference should serve as a turning point for translating the Declaration into concrete action.

The Outcome Document, which we will adopt today, is another pact between Indigenous Peoples and Member States which builds on the Declaration. It is carefully crafted, and comprises many action-oriented commitments directed towards addressing the gaps in the implementation of the Declaration. Included among the commitments are a system-wide action plan to ensure coherence in the various efforts towards realization of the provisions of the Declaration, as well as a call for enhancing the participation of indigenous peoples and their representative institutions at the United Nations.

Excellencies,

This World Conference is an opportunity for Member States to engage indigenous peoples in a more strategic and beneficial manner. This will require Member States to make greater efforts to translate this Outcome Document into reality and demonstrate resolve in addressing inequalities that adversely affect indigenous communities. Member States must also follow-through on capacity-building commitments that will allow indigenous peoples to manage their own affairs.

In closing, let me urge Member States, inter-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector to make a renewed commitment towards strategic partnership with indigenous peoples to help in their quest for a sustainable future,

I thank you.