

24 September 2014

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,
President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Opening of the General Debate**

**Excellencies,
Heads of State and Government,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am honoured and humbled by the trust and confidence you have bestowed on me, and my country Uganda, to serve as President of this august General Assembly during its sixty-ninth Session.

My thanks go to my President who nominated me, my Continent which endorsed me, and to you all, the General Assembly, who elected me by acclamation.

Your Excellencies,

This Session and the coming year will be momentous. We will commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the United Nations. We will also commemorate twenty years since the ground-breaking Beijing Conference on Women, we will reach the target date for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and we will formulate and adopt the post-2015 development agenda.

When the United Nations was founded nearly sixty-nine years ago, it was an untested vision, preoccupied with efforts to heal a world that had been ravaged by the scourge of war. It comprised only 51 countries, a fraction of the 193 Member States that make up its membership today.

It is therefore befitting that the Charter stresses the determination by the peoples of the United Nations to “reaffirm faith in faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small... and promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom..”

We have collectively achieved a lot as member states over the last six decades in maintaining peace and security, promoting human rights and fostering development. But a lot more remains to be done.

The world today is vastly different from what it was in 1945, but one thing remains constant – the need to work together to harness opportunities for prosperity and to find solutions to the global challenges

confronting humanity. We need to strengthen further this cooperation among member states and to promote peace, tolerance and compromise.

Excellencies,

We are gathered here today at a time of unprecedented historic opportunity to improve the livelihoods of all people and set the world on a path of achieving sustainable development in its economic social and environmental dimensions. I am reminded of the wise saying of Mahatma Ghandi exhorting all of us to “be the change that you want to see in the world.” It will take our collective efforts and action to attain this goal.

Since the adoption of the Millennium Declaration nearly fifteen years ago, the lives of millions of people worldwide have undoubtedly improved. A number of MDGs targets have been met, others are on course to be met, while a number are likely not be met by the target date.

We must continue to build on the foundation laid by the MDGs with nearly 1 billion people lifted out of extreme poverty, increased universal primary education, maternal and infant mortality reduction by nearly fifty percent, and increased access to clean drinking water, to mention some of the significant achievements. Yet, a lot remains to be done – the sanitation target lags far behind, too many women still die in labour and inequalities within and among countries remain high.

With less than 470 days to the MDG target date, we must intensify our efforts to accelerate progress and achieve as many MDG targets as possible in the remaining period.

In the coming months we will be preoccupied with formulating the new agenda, which should be ambitious, transformative, and produce tangible benefits and improved livelihoods for all. With the eradication of poverty and hunger at its core, the new agenda should promote sustained and inclusive economic growth, safeguard the future of our planet, and lead to achievement of sustainable development.

We will use the outcomes of the intergovernmental processes, namely the proposal on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the report of Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing; the recommendations from the Structured Dialogues on a technology facilitation mechanism, as well as the forthcoming Secretary-General’s synthesis report. The outcome for the 3rd Conference on Financing for Development, which will be held in July 2015 in Addis Ababa, will be another vital point.

Excellencies,

Our greatest responsibility will be to ensure that adequate means for implementing the post-2015 development agenda, in terms of finances, technology development and transfer and capacity-building are mobilized and effectively utilized. This is why I chose the theme of the General Debate of this Session to be, and I quote, “Delivering on and implementing a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda.”

One of the key issues that we must particular attention to is infrastructure development. It will be pivotal in accelerating economic growth and development, expanding opportunities and improving lives. It is therefore essential to prioritize investment in infrastructure especially energy, roads, railways, waterways, airports, ports, border crossing facilities and information and communications technology. Significant infrastructure deficits in many developing countries, particularly countries in special situations: Africa, LDCs, LLDCs, SIDs result in increased production and transaction costs, and reduce their competitiveness.

I call upon all Member States and all stakeholders to work tirelessly over the next twelve months to formulate and agree on a truly transformative agenda to be adopted in September next year. Let us always remember that we carry the expectations of millions and millions of people who yearn for a better future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many issues and challenges will require our attention and efforts during this Session. Allow me to highlight a few.

While a lot of progress has been made towards eradication of extreme poverty, we still have nearly a billion people trapped in poverty. We must therefore put poverty eradication at the forefront of this development agenda.

We need to address the rising inequality within and between countries, which continue to pose formidable challenges to our efforts to improve the lives every human being.

For many developing countries, improved market access, debt sustainability and access to essential medicines for the poor remain persistent challenges.

We must continue to advance gender equality and empowerment of women. We must do more to increase access of girls to education, increase women participation in leadership and decision-making positions, and enhance their economic empowerment. I will be convening a High-Level thematic debate on this topic in March next year.

On health, we need to step up efforts to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other communicable and non-communicable diseases.

We have seen in recent months, the loss of lives and dire effects caused by the Ebola outbreak in some West African countries whose health systems have been overwhelmed. I also thank the Secretary-General and you, members of the United Nations for the Mission that has been set up to combat this epidemic outbreak.

Globally, hundreds of thousands of women continue to die from pregnancy and childbirth-related causes. In many developing countries, preventable medical conditions are still the main killer for children under the age of five.

The outlook for education is equally mixed. While under MDGs primary school enrolment increased exponentially, there is need to address the issue of quality. For tertiary education, skills development needs greater attention.

One of the most pressing challenges we are facing is the increasing level of unemployment. The rate of unemployed youth is almost three times higher than adult unemployment, and in some cases exceeds 50 per cent. This puts in sharp focus the need to ensure that the post-2015 development agenda is truly transformative and leads to increased job opportunities.

As yesterday's Climate Summit highlighted, climate change is a defining challenge of our times. We are witnessing the adverse effects of climate change, including rising sea levels, land degradation, desertification and changing weather patterns, among others.

As demonstrated during the recent Small Island Developing States (SIDs) Conference held in Samoa, SIDs and Least Developed Countries are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

It is my intention to convene a High-level Event on combatting Climate Change in June 2015 to further galvanize political support for efforts to reach a global agreement in 2015 under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Excellencies,

We have witnessed, in recent times, an alarming increase in the number of violent conflicts and new threats posed by terrorist activities, extremism and intolerance. We need to intensify efforts towards peaceful settlement of conflicts. In this context, strengthening the cooperation between the UN and regional organizations is essential, and I will be convening a High-Level thematic debate on this important issue.

The international community must stand united and resolve to combat these challenges that threaten the stability of not only individual States, but entire regions. We must speak with one voice to reiterate that the killing of innocent civilians under any pretext is unacceptable.

We should continue to focus on the revitalisation of the General Assembly and the reform of the Security Council. While some progress towards making the General Assembly more effective and efficient has been made, we need to do more. The need to reform the Security Council is urgent, as reflected in the 2005 World Summit Outcome.

As I said, the organs of this United Nations were set up soon after the war by only 51 countries. We are now 193 countries. Clearly the need to change things is very imminent.

We need to find a way of making progress in the intergovernmental negotiation process, and I call upon member states to redouble efforts in this session.

Thank you for your attention.