

27 January 2015

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,
President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Public lecture on the theme: “The United Nations at 70:
towards a transformative socio-economic development agenda”**

**Your Excellency Edward Kiwanuka Sekandi, Vice President of the Republic of Uganda,
Rt. Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, Speaker of Parliament,
Rt. Hon. Ruhakana Rugunda, Prime Minister of the Republic of Uganda,
Hon. Ministers,
Hon. Members of Parliament,
Excellencies Heads of Diplomatic Missions Accredited to Uganda,
Members of the Private Sector and academia,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

Good afternoon to you all.

First and foremost, I thank you all for your good work during the last year, and wish you a happy and prosperous 2015. As I will highlight later, this year carries great promise for our future, at national, regional and international level.

I am delighted to give a lecture to this distinguished audience, on the theme: “The United Nations at 70: Towards a transformative socio-economic development agenda”. The diversity and level of participation this afternoon testifies to the importance we all attach to the work of the United Nations. Thank you all for sparing time off your busy schedules!

In October this year, the international community of nations will celebrate seventy years of the founding of the United Nations Organisation. The theme for this lecture, therefore, gives us an opportunity to look back and reflect on the work and impact of this global organisation since 1945. It also enables us to speak to the promising future for humanity that the United Nations is trying to craft.

Why was the United Nations founded? Has it lived up to our expectations, or those of its founders? What is it doing today in furtherance of its objectives? What are the prospects for the future? These are some of the issues I will try to address this afternoon.

Distinguished participants,

The first half of the 20th century was perhaps one of the most eventful in recorded history.

Politically, the fight for global supremacy among “super powers”, came to a nasty boil and gave us two devastating world wars. Considered to be the most violent conflict among nations, the Second World War is estimated to have left almost 60 million people dead. For the first time in history, words like genocide and holocaust came to our knowledge, and continue to remind us of mankind’s brutal nature against each other.

Characterised by a rise in militarism and political posturing, this period, also witnessed scientific and technological advances and innovation. Tragically, this produced and unleashed the first nuclear weapons to the world. To this day, the effects of these weapons are still visible, and some of the scars are yet to heal.

Thanks to the experiences afforded by the Second World War, and the demystification of colonial master supremacy, a wave of nationalism swept across the globe. Agitation for self-determination was taken to a new level.

On the economic front, the world experienced one of the worst economic depressions in 1929/30. Seen as a failure of the free market economic model, the quest for an alternative socio-economic system precipitated the rise of communism. A cold war later emerged as a result of the clash between the capitalist and communist proponents. Even after its end in 1990, some of its geo-political manifestations are still with us.

Such was the world when the United Nations was founded nearly seventy years ago. It is glaringly clear from the Charter, starting with its preambular pronouncement of “we the people”, that the United Nations was founded to address problems that afflicted and challenged humanity’s progress. At its core, it aims at preserving international peace and security, by saving “succeeding generations from the scourge of war”.

It also sought to enhance economic, social, cultural and humanitarian cooperation among nations. Issues such as protection and promotion of human rights; justice and respect for international law and treaty obligations; as well as developing friendly relations among nations were prioritised in the Charter.

The aspirations and spirit of the founders of the United Nations, was appropriately summed up by President Harry Truman on 26 June, 1945 while addressing the closing session of the United Nations Conference. He observed, and I quote “A just and lasting peace cannot be attained by diplomatic agreement alone, or by military cooperation alone. Experience has shown how deeply the seeds of war are planted by economic rivalry and by social injustice. The Charter recognizes this fact, for it has provided for economic and social cooperation as well. It has provided for this cooperation as part of the very heart of the entire compact. It has set up a machinery of international cooperation which men and nations of good will can use to help correct economic and social causes for conflict”.

Since its founding, the United Nations has had global reach and impact, working to address a whole range of issues affecting the world. Amid a constantly changing world order, and new challenges

emerging by the day, the United Nations has been at the forefront in finding solutions to global issues, across its three pillars, namely: peace and security, development and human rights.

Through its agencies, funds and programmes, the UN continues to strive to improve people's lives across the world. It undertakes mediation, conflict prevention, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. It provides socio-economic services and support, including humanitarian assistance to countries affected by conflict and disasters. It promotes and supports governance, rule of law and human rights protection. It fights diseases across the world and promotes health living. I will now highlight just a few areas of this important United Nations work.

Distinguished participants,

The most visible work of the United Nations has been in the area of decolonisation. Most African countries, as well as many others across Asia and Pacific, were still under firm colonial grip at the United Nations founding. Self-determination has since been achieved by many countries, contributing to the present 193 Members of the United Nations. In Africa, almost the whole continent was under colonial rule and administration in 1945. Today, the African Union Membership comprises 54 countries.

This success did not come easy. Indeed, there is still some work to be done to attain self-determination for all remaining territories under external control. Previously through the Special Committee on Decolonisation, and currently through the Special Political and Decolonisation Committee, the General Assembly continues to advocate for the decolonization of all territories.

As implied in the Charter, the United Nations has spent a great deal of effort, and resources, towards the maintenance of international peace and security.

Regrettably, violence and the use of force across the world did not stop with the founding of the United Nations. Across the sixty nine years of its existence, the organisation has been saddled with one conflict after another. The "never again" aspiration has not saved us from the scourge of wars, and humankind's propensity to self-destruct, through violent conflicts, shows no sign of ending. No doubt, this comes with a great cost to our countries, as it continues to divert human and financial resources away from development.

According to latest data by the United Nations' Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the United Nations has deployed sixty nine (69) peacekeeping operations since 1948. There are currently sixteen peacekeeping operations, with nine of them sadly in Africa –which takes up 70% of the issues on the agenda of the Security Council. For the financial year 2014-15 alone, a colossal amount US\$ 7 billion was approved by the General Assembly to support peacekeeping operations.

The United Nations has applied several other tools to preserve peace, including through preventive diplomacy and mediation. It also continues to experience and adapt to new paradigms to peacekeeping. In countries like Burundi, Somalia, Sierra Leone and Liberia enhanced cooperation between the national governments, the African Union and sub-regional organisations and the United Nations has

yielded impressive results. Hybrid AU-UN and integrated Missions have become common. And recently, a regional-led Force Intervention Brigade was deployed to deal with negative forces in Eastern DRC.

As you may be aware, during Uganda's two year tenure in the Security Council, one of our key priorities was strengthening of cooperation and partnership between the UN, the AU and sub-regional organizations. We succeeded in mobilizing greater support for region-led efforts and solutions to conflicts under the aegis of the AU, ICGLR, IGAD, SADC, ECOWAS and others arrangements.

The United Nations efforts to preserve peace in many parts of the world, has remained challenging in the face of increasing proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons. Disarmament has thus become central to the work of the United Nations. Over the years, there seems to be an increasing proliferation of biological and chemical weapons, which have reportedly been used in some recent conflict situations. The worst fear, however, remains the remote possibility that nuclear weapons could be used in conventional wars.

The danger these weapons pose is not lost on any of us. Indeed, we have adopted a number of United Nations instruments to control and regulate their usage. In 1970, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear weapons came into force. The Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention came into being in 1975 and 1997, respectively. Most recently, the Arms Trade Treaty came into force on 24 December, 2014.

Distinguished participants,

As I pointed out earlier, the United Nations stands for much more than peace and security. As part of its other two pillars – human rights and development – the United Nations has been instrumental, and continues to be a champion of justice for all. At the 2005 World Summit, our leaders unanimously embraced “the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity”, through the use of appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means. The onus remains with us all to ensure effective and balanced application of its principles. Libya has set a tragic example of what can go wrong. The collapse of state institutions has led to violence and illicit flow of arms some of which have ended up in the hands of terrorist groups.

Regrettably, our conscience for action was only awakened by the catastrophic 1994 genocide in Rwanda, as well as the 1995 ethnic cleansing in Srebrenica. The prosecution and conviction of a number of perpetrators of these crimes by the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda Tribunals have healed some wounds. United Nations' inaction at the most critical moment, however, will remain a major dark spot in this organisation's history.

The United Nations continues to deal with a number of socio-economic issues, including those that transcend borders. It has protected and fed refugees and the internally displaced. It has provided much needed humanitarian assistance and relief to those distressed and affected by natural disasters. It has fed the hungry and supported education through school feeding programmes. It has promoted gender equality and empowerment of women. It has contributed to the eradication of some of the most

infectious diseases, such as polio and smallpox, and galvanized international efforts towards combatting the HIV/AIDS and caring for the affected. And most recently, it is working with the affected countries, the AU and other partners to address the Ebola outbreak afflicting West Africa.

The Global Fund has supported many countries, including Uganda, to fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. It has made generic antiretroviral drugs not only accessible, but also affordable to many people.

Distinguished participants,

This year three important Summits will take place. The Third Financing for Development Conference will be held in July in Addis Ababa, the Summit for the adoption of the Post-2015 development agenda is scheduled for September in New York, and the Summit to adopt a legally binding agreement on climate change will be held in December in Paris.

In 2000, World leaders adopted the Millennium Declaration with eight Millennium Development Goals, aimed at: eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; and ensuring environmental sustainability.

2015 is the target date for achieving the MDGs. A week ago, Member States of the United Nations commenced negotiations on a successor framework – the Post-2015 Development Agenda to be adopted at a Summit of Heads of State and Government in September this year.

Building on the progress attained in the implementation of the MDGs, the international community aspires for a Post-2015 Development Agenda that is ambitious, universal and transformative. While the overarching objective remains poverty eradication, the new agenda will cover all three dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental.

In a spirit of leaving no one behind, the agenda should focus on putting people at the centre, through promoting inclusive economic growth and development. But above all, mobilizing adequate means for implementing the new agenda in terms of financial resources, technology development and transfer as well as capacity building will be critical. Increasing market access especially for developing countries through fair trading regimes will be essential.

The financing needs for sustainable development are large in developing and developed countries.

For instance, estimates of additional financing needed to eradicate extreme poverty are in the range of US\$ 135 billion to 195 billion per year, while investments required in critical infrastructure are estimated to cost between US\$ 5 – 7 trillion annually. The unmet credit needs for SMEs are estimated to be around US\$ 2.5 trillion in developing countries and about US\$ 3.5 trillion globally.

The level of partnership for development will have to be expanded to tap into resources in sovereign wealth funds and pension funds, among other sources, to finance long-term strategic investments

particularly infrastructure. It will also be essential to mainstream private sector and civil society participation, and establish partnerships with philanthropic organizations.

All these important issues will be considered by Member States and stakeholders over the coming months in the negotiations on the new development agenda. As I have stressed before, our ultimate objective should be to create a transformative agenda that supports global solutions, guides national development efforts and empowers people to improve their livelihoods and determine their own future.

Our collective endeavour and resolve for a new sustainable development agenda will count for less if we do not address climate change. We now have incontrovertible scientific evidence to the effect that, mostly as a result of human activity, our planet earth is warming up at an alarming rate. Indeed, our own very existence is under threat. Snow and ice across the globe is diminishing. Sea levels are rising, and small island states are facing increasing threats of being submerged and getting swept away. Many countries are faced with frequent and prolonged droughts, threatening food security. Floods and landslides have also become common.

Many developing countries, including Uganda are already experiencing these effects. The landslides and floods that swept through Buduuda in Eastern Uganda in 2010, for example, left over 300 people dead and destroyed a lot of property. Dry periods have become increasingly hotter, affecting crop and livestock farming.

And most visibly, the snow-capped glaciers on Mountain Rwenzori's highest peaks, which had a combined area of around 2.7 square miles at the start of last century, now occupy less than 0.4 square miles. It is estimated that if the current trend caused by warming of the atmosphere continues, there may be no snow glaciers on the mountain in the next two decades.

While addressing the High Level segment of the Climate Change meeting, known as the Conference of the Parties (COP20) in Lima, Peru on 9th December year, I called upon Member States and the international community to summon its collective political will to address climate change. As we build up to a legally binding agreement on climate change at COP21 in Paris, our resolve towards mitigation and adaptation measures should not waver. Increasing financing for climate change technologies, including investment in renewable clean technologies will be critical for many developing countries.

I have often pointed out that, a mother will spare no forest if the only source of fuel for cooking food to feed her children is wood. Investments in rural electrification and energy saving stoves, for example, would go a long way in saving the environment, and by extension combatting climate change.

At institutional level, addressing the above issues requires more than the United Nations. That is why I chose strengthening cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations as one of the priorities for the 69th Session. This cooperation has recently made a positive contribution to development, and maintenance of peace and security. The case of Somalia ably testifies to this. The African Union; the European Union; bilateral partners and the United Nations have cooperated to pull Somalia from the brink.

While it is still a work in progress, there is enough evidence to demonstrate that this cooperation works, and that there is room to strengthen it.

This endeavour also requires strengthening the cooperation of the peace and security architecture institutions. From 1945 to-date, the world has vastly changed, necessitating adjustments to reflect the new realities.

The reform the United Nations Security Council to reflect the changed geopolitical realities is long overdue. In particular, the need to correct the historical injustice that Africa continues to suffer as the only region without permanent representation on the Council is urgent. I have made reform of the Council one of my priorities during the 69th Session of the General Assembly and urged Member States to move the intergovernmental process towards text-based negotiations.

Distinguished participants,

The impetus for socio-economic development and transformation is clear. It is also clear that, development cannot effectively take place in a world of intermittent anarchy and conflict. The United Nations has over the years exerted greater efforts and initiatives towards peaceful settlement of disputes, as envisaged in Article 33 of the Charter.

We all recognize that conflict prevention is cheaper and more sustainable. In post-conflict situations, peacebuilding efforts, and support to countries to build effective national institutions is vitally essential, to avoid potential relapse.

In our great lakes region, our development efforts have stagnated for long as a result of repetitive conflicts. Only now is there a glimmer of hope for a brighter future. The Force Intervention Brigade promises to eliminate negative forces in Eastern DRC. There is also potential for AMISOM to stabilize Somalia. IGAD also has a huge responsibility to resolve the South Sudan situation. Our region deserves better, and we should all be dedicated to resolve these conflict situations and give our people opportunities for improved livelihoods and development.

Unfortunately, our efforts, and those of the international community have not gone unchallenged. Terrorism and extremism have become a major new challenge. As recent events demonstrate, no place is too safe anymore. From Australia to Canada, France and Pakistan to Nigeria, terrorist attacks have caused loss of lives. Here in East Africa – Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, we have suffered these attacks perpetrated by Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab. Many innocent lives have been lost and property destroyed.

The international community must come up with a holistic approach to this problem. Understanding and addressing socio-economic issues that contribute to vulnerability, especially of the youth will be critical. Together with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, I will be convening a high level event on tolerance and reconciliation in April, to exchange views on possible measures.

With women constituting half of the world's population, they must be central and mainstreamed into all sustainable development efforts. In June last year I talked about the plight of one Nabbanja in Kashongi

village, whose property rights were taken away by her husband, despite having four children to feed. In conflict situations, women are more vulnerable than men. Despite being drivers of development, the scourge of gender violence, inequality and discrimination continues to hinder the promise of better life for many of them across the globe. This is why I selected gender equality and women empowerment as one on the priorities for my Presidency.

To realize socio-economic transformation, we must continue to address all issues that curtail progress for women and girls. Economic empowerment, education, increased political participation and decision making are all vital.

Distinguished participants,

Realising the transformative socio-economic development agenda that today's theme speaks to, will not be done at the United Nations in New York. Rather, implementation will be done mainly in our villages and communities. It will be done at national and regional levels.

Fortunately, requisite steps are already being taken at national and continental level. As part of the African renaissance agenda, our Heads of State are due to adopt a fifty-year development framework for Africa: Vision 2063. All the 54 countries of the African Union, must embrace and implement this Vision, and mainstream it into our national development plans.

We need to deepen social cohesion, democracy and economic growth on the continent. We need strong and visionary leadership. We need peace and security and an enterprising and skilled work force. We need a large but economically empowered population that can support production and consumption.

I have previously highlighted in other fora that business as usual will not be good enough. A paradigm shift requires that we must add value to our natural resources. We must address the root causes of conflicts among us. We must deepen regional integration and cooperation. We must develop our productive capacity, through infrastructure and energy development. We need policies that can stimulate our economies and support private sector investment and growth. But above all, we must gradually be ready to finance our strategic priorities.

At national level, we share a similar transformative vision and aspiration as both the African Union and the United Nations. Our Vision 2040 carries with it an ambitious promise of transforming Uganda from a peasant to a modern country.

The vision is emphatic in what needs to be done at a strategic level, including: Agricultural mechanisation. Improved transport infrastructure, especially roads and railway. Investment in skills development, especially in science, technology and innovation. Investment in harnessing our natural resources, such as oil and gas. Accelerated industrialization and a peaceful and secure country.

Uganda being a landlocked country, regional integration within the East African Community is both strategic and inevitable. On-going efforts to fast track development of linkage infrastructure, such as

the standard gauge railway are critical. We need to fast track a lot more of these projects, including the Central Corridor, to spur growth, productivity and trade among us.

The role of the private sector has increasingly become important. While cognisant of the importance of the bottom line and shareholder value, we need to find a way to incentivize the private sector to meaningfully contribute to growth and development. In addition to creating jobs and paying taxes, private-public partnerships must be established in strategic areas of the economy. I believe there should also be a discussion on lowering the cost of commercial loans, to support cottage industries and SMEs.

All levels of government, including sub-counties, municipal and city council will have a major role to play in ensuring the transformation. The representatives of the people – Members of Parliament and District Councils will equally be key players in appropriating requisite resources, as well as monitoring implementation of Government programmes at the grassroots.

Distinguished participants,

From the foregoing, the primacy of the United Nations in dealing with global challenges – old and new – is evident. Yes, it has been challenged along the way in the delivery of its promise for better and secure world, but the United Nations has achieved a lot.

Greater effort has been, and continues to be exerted towards mediation and peaceful resolution of disputes. Substantial resources are spent annually to end conflicts, through a multitude of peacekeeping operations, peacebuilding and Special Political Missions. The United Nations is also calling the international community's attention to end gender-based violence in conflict. Our collective support in these endeavors remains critical.

The success achieved since the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals points to the United Nations resolve to deal with socio-economic challenges to human progress.

As we begin the journey to formulate the Post-2015 Development Agenda, we have to constantly remind ourselves that its successful implementation will largely depend on mobilizing adequate resources and mainstreaming the agenda in our national development plans.

I thank you for your attention.