

6 February 2015

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,  
President of the 69<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Opening of the Special Event on the Occasion of World  
Interfaith Harmony Week**

**Excellencies,  
Ms. Cristina Gallach, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations  
Dr. William Vendley, President of the RNGO Committee at the UN  
Distinguished Delegates,**

It is a pleasure to address this special event on the occasion of World Interfaith Harmony Week. I wish to thank the Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations (RNGO) for their efforts in organizing today's event.

The General Assembly in its resolution 65/5, of 2010, proclaimed the first week of February each year as World Interfaith Harmony Week. In doing so, the Assembly recognized the imperative need for dialogue among different faiths and religions to enhance mutual understanding, harmony and cooperation among people.

Given the nature of our world today, this message of peace and goodwill is as important as ever, particularly in light of the fact that we are witnessing a disturbing rise of intolerance and prejudice in many of our communities.

As intolerance, bigotry and hatred continue to fuel conflicts, violence and extremism in many corners of the world, we need to strengthen our efforts to foster respect and mutual understanding between cultures, religions and ethnic groups. Every time we chose dialogue and reconciliation over confrontation, we take a step forward on our collective path to lasting peace.

Two weeks ago, the Assembly held a meeting to address concerns of a rise in anti-Semitic violence worldwide, during which we heard unequivocal condemnation of all forms of intolerance and prejudice. Member States also called for increased dialogue and understanding among different cultures and religions.

In an effort to promote meaningful exchanges on this important topic, I will convene a high-level thematic debate in April on promoting tolerance and reconciliation. The meeting will be an opportunity to explore how we can enhance dialogue and understanding and counter the threat of extremism and radicalization.

**Excellencies,**

2015 is a year of hope and opportunity. It represents an unprecedented occasion to set our world on a path toward sustainable development and to eradicate poverty and hunger.

As we embark on the historic journey toward the formulation of an inclusive and transformative future development agenda, we must foster the active participation of all stakeholders.

The task ahead of us is momentous and will require profound shifts in how we think and act. To succeed in this ambitious endeavour, we will need to harness resources, knowledge and experiences from all corners of societies.

Religious organisations have long been on the front lines of the fight against poverty, caring for the most vulnerable and fragile amongst us. Such first-hand experience is invaluable and can bring an important contribution to the global partnership we seek to build.

Interfaith collaboration can not only help promote common values shared by all humankind; it can also serve as an important foundational element for the advancement of our post-2015 development objectives.

It is this context, that I convened today's special event, in cooperation with the Committee of Religious NGOs, to bring added focus to the important role religious and inter-religious organizations can play in sustainable development.

Today, Member States and civil society organizations, including religious communities, will engage in valuable, interactive discussions that can inform their future contributions to the post-2015 development agenda.

I look forward to today's discussion and the open exchange of concrete actions, best practices and lessons learned as together, we seek to set our world on a course toward a prosperous future.

Thank you for your attention.