

20 March 2015

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,
President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Commemorative Plenary to Mark the International Day for the
Elimination of Racial Discrimination**

Statement delivered by Mr. Mahmamin Mahmadaminov, Permanent Representative of Tajikistan, on behalf of President Kutesa

**Excellencies,
The Chef de Cabinet to the Secretary General, Ms Susana Malcorra
Professor Verene Sheperd,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

I am pleased to join you today to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and deliver this statement on behalf of the President of the General Assembly.

The theme of this year's commemoration, "Learning from historical tragedies to combat racial discrimination today", not only draws our attention to the tragedies of the past, but also calls upon each of us to act decisively to combat all forms of racism and racial discrimination.

As you may recall, this international day of action against racism was established in remembrance of the 69 unarmed and peaceful South African protestors killed in Sharpeville, South Africa, on 21 March 1960.

This tragedy was just one of the many racially influenced events in South Africa at the time. This horror resonated in many parts of the world and pushed people, nations, organizations, to act to end the racist apartheid regime.

In its resolution 2142, the General Assembly proclaimed each 21 March as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Through this annual commemoration, the international community joins together and vows to preserve the historical memory of past tragedies, as well as draw lessons from them to protect humanity and prevent their reoccurrence.

Excellencies,

This year also marks the launch of the International Decade for People of African Descent. Through today's event and many others that will take place in the context of the International Decade, we will acknowledge the profound and lasting impacts of historical human rights tragedies; including, slavery, slave trade and the transatlantic slave trade. We should draw important lessons from these past tragedies, so that we may use this knowledge to address contemporary manifestations of racism and racial discrimination.

In my opening statement at the 28th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, I deplored recent violent attacks on innocent people around the world motivated by discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or religion. Today, I reiterate that message in saying that such prejudice must not be allowed to take root in our societies.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. We must therefore continue to reject and prevent discrimination in all form, including, xenophobia, stereotyping, hatred, marginalization and other related intolerance. We must prevent the manifestation of such acts, which have the potential to compromise peace, stability and development around the world.

Esteemed colleagues,

On 21-22 April 2015, I will convene, in conjunction with the Secretary-General and the Alliance of Civilizations a High-level Thematic Debate on Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation. This Debate will provide an opportunity to share experiences and develop strategies how we can foster peaceful, inclusive societies and counter violent extremism.

It is my hope that this debate will add further credence to our efforts to combat racial discrimination. Indeed, countering racial discrimination and promoting tolerance and reconciliation are mutually reinforcing.

Together, we must use this Debate, and all other available platforms to condemn, unequivocally, all manifestations of racism, prejudice and intolerance.

I thank you for your attention.