

28 May 2015

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,
President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly,
at the General Assembly Plenary with Resolution on Protection of
Iraqi Cultural Heritage**

*Delivered by H.E. Alvaro José De Mendonça E Moura, Permanent Representative of Portugal on behalf of
President Kutesa*

**Her Excellency, Maria Böhmer, Honourable Minister of State of Germany,
Excellencies,
His Excellency, Mr. Jan Eliasson, Deputy Secretary-General
of the United Nations,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

In April, we gathered here at the United Nations as I convened a High-level Thematic Debate on Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation. The debate brought together political and religious leaders representing diverse nations, geographies and faith communities to express their support for dialogue and mutual understanding in the face of a disquieting rise of extremism and violence worldwide.

Over the course of two days, speakers emphasized the importance of enhancing respect for religious and cultural diversity. Many also stressed the urgent need to protect artifacts of cultural heritage from destructive attacks at the hands of violent extremists.

As was highlighted during that debate, we must collectively uphold the principles of tolerance and respect, while promoting diversity and fostering inclusiveness. We must also work together to uphold respect for human rights and freedom of thought, belief and expression.

Excellencies,

It is deeply concerning to witness the destruction of irreplaceable artefacts of humanity's shared cultural heritage. Such barbaric and senseless attacks are taking place with alarming frequency not only in Iraq, but also in Afghanistan, Syria, Mali and elsewhere.

By destroying invaluable cultural icons found in museums, libraries, archives, archaeological sites and places of worship, extremists are exacerbating conflicts, instigating hostilities and perpetuating fear among societies.

Such attempts to obliterate humankind's collective history must be stopped immediately, by all necessary means, in accordance with applicable international law.

Cultural heritage is of exceptional value and interest to all peoples of the world and must be preserved. In this context, it is incumbent that the international community work together to protect elements of cultural heritage in Iraq and elsewhere.

In this regard, I thank UNESCO for its contribution and its work in particular, in the conservation of heritage, and taking measures to protect cultural property at risk.

I welcome the draft resolution before us today as an important step forward in saving our shared histories and thank the delegations of Germany and Iraq for this initiative.

I thank you.