

1 June 2015

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,
President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Opening of the High-Level Event on the Demographic Dividend
and Youth Employment**

**His Excellency, Mr. Prosper Bazombanza, First Vice-President of the Republic of Burundi,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Mr. Secretary- General,
Distinguished delegates and participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

I am pleased to welcome you to this High-level Event on the Demographic Dividend and Youth Employment. We are grateful to His Excellency, Mr. Prosper Bazombanza, First Vice-President of Burundi, and the many Honourable Ministers who travelled from their capitals to join us today.

My appreciation also goes to the United Nations Population Fund and the International Labour Organization for their partnership in organizing this event.

Excellencies,

Over the last two decades, the world has given greater attention to the interplay between changes in population structures, economic growth and development.

As we know, changes in the age structures of populations have economic, social, and at times even political implications. For instance, labour supply and savings tend to be higher among working age adults than dependent ones.

Countries with large populations of young people and declining fertility rates stand poised to benefit the most from the demographic dividend. The more young people grow into well-educated adults with fewer dependents and new opportunities to acquire wealth, savings and purchasing power, the more they will be able to accelerate economic growth and development.

To harness the demographic dividend, right policies and interventions are needed in order to get a higher proportion of the youthful population into economically productive adults. Already, we have witnessed this trend in East Asia and Latin America. For example, Asia experienced a seven-fold increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita by harnessing their demographic dividend, while Latin America experienced a two-fold increase.

Similar opportunities exist elsewhere, particularly in Africa. Of the 1.8 billion young people worldwide, nine out of ten of them live in Least Developed Countries, many of them in Africa. This trend is projected to continue; with the number of young Africans aged 15-24 set to double by 2045.

By harnessing its demographic dividend, it is estimated that the African continent could add up to US \$500 billion per year to its economy, for as many as 30 years. This potential windfall could significantly transform the economies of many African countries. It would result in more resources being available for investment in critical infrastructure for socio-economic growth and development.

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

In countries where young people represent a large portion of the population, there is urgent need to create enough jobs for the working-age population.

Indeed, during the High-level event for the commemoration of the World Programme of Action on Youth held on Friday last week, addressing the challenge of rising levels of youth unemployment was highlighted.

It is essential, in the context of the new development agenda, to take measures in support of national policies to provide an enabling environment for attraction of domestic and foreign investments, promotion of entrepreneurship, greater access to capital, increased access to energy, among other areas.

With many developing countries' economies still being driven by commodity production and export of agricultural and mining products, adding value to their large reservoir of natural resources through processing and manufacturing will transform economies and create more employment opportunities. Accelerating regional integration will also create larger markets for trade and investment and in turn increase employment opportunities.

Policies are also needed that deliberately target investments in young people, including through education. We need to expand access to quality education and skills development at vocational and tertiary levels. Through vocational training, specialised and practical job-related skills can be developed that prepare young people for work in occupations more in-line with the job market needs. There is need to target new jobs in the growing sectors such as services and ICT. Greater investments are required in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) to advance innovation. Giving attention to local content requirements can also ensure that investment projects generate employment and business opportunities for nationals especially the youth.

Furthermore, the empowerment of women and girls, particularly with regard to educational opportunities and universal access to quality reproductive health knowledge and services is also critical. It is strongly linked to their professional advancement, entrepreneurship and political participation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This High-level Event comes at an opportune moment when intergovernmental negotiations on an ambitious, universal and transformative post-2015 development agenda are underway. We have to ensure that the youth are recognized as important contributors to the achievement of sustainable development and that they benefit from the new agenda.

The needs of countries with large youth populations should be considered in the context of our sustainable development objectives. In this regard, we will need partnerships between governments, the private sector, and other stakeholders to make the necessary investments in education, skills development, health, among other areas, in order to empower the youth and expand their opportunities. We also need greater cooperation as well as sharing of experiences on initiatives and strategies that work at national, regional and international levels.

Excellencies,

Let us seize the opportunity of the new development framework we are formulating to ensure that young people worldwide can fully utilize their talents and energy to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. In doing so, we will be laying the foundation for a more prosperous future not only for ourselves, but for generations to come.

I thank you for your attention.