

28 September 2014

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,
President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly,
at a worship service commemorating the Opening of the 69th Session**

**Reverend Kowalski,
Members of the Clergy and Congregants,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

Good morning to you all!

It is both a pleasure and an honour to join you this morning, at this annual tradition. I am delighted to address this congregation at this celebratory worship service dedicated to the United Nations. I am especially happy to share with you some thoughts on how the United Nations can play a role in addressing some of the biggest challenges facing the world today.

As you are probably all aware, I hail from Uganda in East Africa. I was educated as a lawyer and went on to serve in my country's Parliament for more than three decades. I have served as Attorney General; Minister of State for Finance, Planning and Economic Development; and most recently, as Minister of Foreign Affairs. This is the path I have travelled to where I am today: President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly.

Dear congregants,

As I view the landscape of international relations at this challenging time in human history, I harken back to a passage from the Book of Genesis that carries with it particular meaning for me.

Genesis, 1, Verse 26 tells us:

“Then God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our own image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground’”

Verse 27 goes on to state:

“So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

These passages speak to me in a very special way. I view them through the lens of our world today, particularly when reflecting on the most pressing challenges of our time: climate change, violence and conflict, terrorism and man-made natural disasters.

It seems to me that human beings, as custodians of this Earth, have not done a very good job of protecting God's creation. Although we were commanded to rule over the Earth, we have not done so in a kindly manner. Collectively, we have not ruled the earth with a sense of responsibility. We have failed to take care in protecting the earth and have instead spoiled the gift we were given.

Having been created in his own image, we must strive to uphold this sense of responsibility to all of God's creatures. We must endeavour to manage the earth in a caring and loving manner. Failure to do so could result in catastrophic consequences, some of which we are already seeing today. Sea levels are rising. Deserts are spreading. Irreplaceable wildlife is dying. The future existence of Small Island States is in serious doubt. Entire villages are being swept away by floods and landslides, which are increasing, both in frequency and intensity. We can no longer turn a blind eye to the devastating reality that planet Earth is suffering at our hands. It would seem an understatement to say that time is running out.

For this reason, the climate change issue figures prominently on my agenda of the 69th session. I intend to work tirelessly to provide appropriate support to on-going processes, to maintain momentum on this issue over the next 12 months. This is required as the United Nations and the global community hopes to reach a new global agreement on climate change in 2015.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I am sure you are all sadly aware, beyond climate change, the world is experiencing an unprecedented period of conflict, tension and disillusion. The grim reality is that, violence and conflict have become far too pervasive in our everyday lives. One needs to look no further than the headlines to get a sense of just how depressingly volatile our world is these days.

On a near daily basis, we hear stories about violent fanaticism forcing hundreds of thousands from their homes, unprecedented health emergencies ravaging unchecked, and humanitarian catastrophes that threaten entire countries and regions, just to name a few.

Given these grim realities, it would be quite easy to fall into a sense of deep despair when looking at such a daunting background and contemplating the many ways in which the peoples of the world are suffering.

From the rural villages of Uganda, to the skyscrapers here in Manhattan; the longing for peace and hopes of a better tomorrow are universal. These are desires that we as human beings can all relate to. At the end of the day, the peoples that inhabit this earth are not all that different. We all seek the same basic needs; the love of family, the comfort of home, the enjoyment of a warm meal.

Yet, in so many places in our world, these simple necessities are consistently inaccessible due to problems of mankind's own creation. Natural disasters are an unfortunate reality of life on Earth; but it is the preventable, man-made calamities that I find most troubling.

It seems to me that in such difficult times, the world needs to remember the words I referenced earlier, namely, the need to look after one another with respect and compassion. The world is truly an uneasy

place in these uneasy times, but if all look inside our hearts and find our shared sense of humanity, we could create a better world.

Beyond a greater dedication to the teachings of the Bible, in today's current world, humanity needs the United Nations to play its critical role in bringing people of all faiths, ethnicities and cultures together. The strength and resolve of the United Nations is being called into action, and world leaders need to redouble their efforts to help humanity peacefully resolve its differences.

Quite simply, this is what this Organization was created for – to establish a place and an environment where the leaders of the world can gather, on neutral territory, to find solutions to the many problems that plague our citizens. For whatever shortcoming there might be, there is no other organization on Earth that can do what the United Nations does, and it is my sincere hope that we will rise to the occasion.

Fellow worshippers,

The global community continues to be challenged by other issues, many of which the United Nations can have a leading role in resolving. These include: poverty and hunger; maternal health and child mortality; inadequate health and education systems; poor infrastructure; gender inequality; and unemployment, amongst many others.

If all this sounds like a tall order, you're right – it is a tall order. But progress is achievable if leaders approach these challenges with a sense of unity and common purpose. Countries and their leaders may have differing and often competing priorities. But I firmly believe that we are also united by the core belief that our citizens deserve to enjoy peaceful and prosperous lives. I am fairly certain that if you ask nearly any world leader what pulled him or her into the fray of public life, you will hear the common refrain of a shared desire to make the world a better place for its inhabitants.

It is my sincere hope that world leaders will find the strength to resolve our differences for the betterment of the world, while always recalling the important gifts and responsibilities that were bestowed upon all of mankind.

I thank you for the privilege of worshipping with you today. May God bless us all.