

31 October 2014

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,
President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly,
at the High-level Event on World Cities Day**

**Excellencies,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

I am pleased to participate in this high-level event commemorating the first ever “World Cities Day”. I extend my appreciation to the Permanent Missions of China and Italy, UN-Habitat and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations for organizing this important discussion.

Our world is rapidly urbanizing. Currently, half of the world’s population lives in urban areas; with projections showing that number could increase to three-quarters of the world’s inhabitants in a matter of decades. Given these shifting dynamics, the need to create inclusive, sustainable and resilient cities is both imperative and urgent.

Although the international community should feel heartened by the progress achieved, since Habitat II took place nearly 20 years ago, many challenges remain. This is particularly true in many developing countries where urbanization is leading to poor living conditions, food shortages, increased poverty and inequality.

Once predominantly considered a rural issue, the challenges of poverty are now permeating urban centres, as well. In part, this shift is the result of inadequate planning and ineffective policies.

Socially and environmentally, sustainable towns and cities must be the way of the future. The consequences of the lack of forward planning and leadership can be seen in far too many of our cities around the world; including the exponential growth of slums, the escalation of crime and an intensification of climate change and environmental degradation.

Furthermore, in the absence of effective planning and policies, existing economic, social and environmental vulnerabilities have been exacerbated, with entire communities pushed to the brink of despair.

Excellencies,

As we formulate the post 2015-development agenda, we must ensure that the dynamics of urbanization are harnessed in a way that promotes, not hinders, sustainable development. With cities contributing up

to 70 per cent of total greenhouse gas emissions, the challenges of urbanization and their impact on our environment simply cannot be ignored.

Already, we are seeing evidence that the principles of sustainable urbanization are gaining ground. The proposal of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals includes a goal on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, demonstrating the rising importance of urbanization issues on the global agenda.

The world has come to the realization that although urbanization poses serious challenges, if managed properly, it could also be a powerful driving force for sustainable development. In this context, the success of Habitat III will be critical for ensuring the world finds ways to use the creative energies and resources of cities in a positive and productive fashion.

Excellencies,

The theme of today's high-level event, "People-Centred Urbanization", highlights the important role citizens have to play as partners and problem-solvers. Public participation in decision-making must be a vital component of cities' and towns' sustainable urban development planning. An inclusive approach to urban development must take into account the needs of all, particularly, those who are too often left without a voice; including migrants, slum dwellers and youth. Such marginalized groups must be engaged and empowered to ensure that their needs are addressed in our future urban development planning.

The story of urbanization can have a happy ending, but only if its opportunities are accessible to all. Access to adequate health and education systems, decent jobs, basic infrastructure, and leisure activities will ensure urban settlements and the people living within them reach their full potential.

Urbanization can be a driving force for social and cultural transformation by allowing peoples with diverse backgrounds, experience and knowledge to coexist and interact. Cities can be fertile ground for new ideas, vibrant economic activity and cultural exchanges. With adequate planning and inclusion, the challenges of urbanization can be translated into opportunities for growth.

As we commence consultations and negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda, now is the best opportunity to ensure that the dynamics of urbanization are taken into account for the greater good.

We have an exceptional opportunity to change how the world's people live and interact in the future. The progression toward urbanization is already underway. Let us take advantage of this unique moment in history to ensure our cities and towns are on a productive and inclusive path toward sustainable development.

I thank you for your kind attention.