

17 November 2014

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,
President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Opening of the Exhibition: Friar Francis, signs, words, and
images**

**Excellencies,
Mr. Jan Eliasson, Deputy Secretary-General
Excellency Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United
Nations
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great pleasure to join you this evening for the opening of this remarkable exhibition dedicated to the life and legacy of Saint Francis.

Let me begin by thanking the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations, as well as the Associazione Culturale Antigua, the Franciscan Documentation Centre and the Italian Academy Foundation, for allowing the United Nations community to discover these exceptional and rare manuscripts.

It is indeed fitting for this exhibition to be hosted at the United Nations for the messages of Saint Francis echo in many ways the values enshrined in our UN Charter. Although Saint Francis walked this earth eight centuries ago, the modernity and relevance of his messages still resonate with us today.

A man of peace, he dedicated his life in the service of God. His empathy for the poor and most vulnerable is an inspiration for us all. The world today is experiencing unprecedented times of tension, violence and conflict, affecting communities, entire countries and regions. More than ever, we need to come together as a community of nations to uphold and promote the universal values of solidarity, respect and tolerance. We should also redouble our collective efforts in helping humanity peacefully resolve differences.

A Christian humanist, it could also be said that Saint Francis was one of the first environmentalists. His love and profound respect for nature and all animals, as beautifully expressed in the Canticles of Creatures, is an invitation to reflect on the troubled relationship of mankind with our environment.

Indeed, we can no longer ignore the devastating effects of climate change, our dwindling natural resources and the overall degradation of our ecosystems. The extinction of an estimated 200 species of animals and plants every day is not only a tragedy for Mother Nature; these losses threaten livelihoods, disrupt food systems, and undermine our cultural heritage. It is urgent that we address the threat to our climate and restore the balance and harmony between human existence and the environment.

If we want to secure a future where both people and the planet can thrive and prosper, we have no choice but to bring about profound and lasting changes: changes to the ways we produce, consume, do business and relate with one another. These transformations are at the very heart of the new development agenda that will succeed the Millennium Development Goals in 2015.

It is my hope that, next September, Member States will agree on a transformative and inclusive agenda; a new agenda inspired by the values and legacy of Saint Francis, which will open a new era of peace and prosperity for our planet and all its inhabitants.

I thank you.