

6 March 2015

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,
President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Closing of the High-Level Thematic Debate on Advancing
Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls for a
Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda**

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Speakers and Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would like to thank your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government, distinguished panellists and all of you for your participation and valuable contributions.

As we conclude our debate today, I wish to highlight some of the key messages from our discussions.

Many participants emphasized the critical importance of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in attaining sustainable development.

Indeed, the Sustainable Development Goals, and Goal 5 in particular, were described as an “ideal opportunity” to accelerate efforts to empower women and girls.

However, beyond a stand-alone goal, many emphasized the need to integrate the gender perspective as a crosscutting issue in all dimensions of the new development agenda.

The value of education, including lifelong learning opportunities and vocational training for women, was emphasized. Girls must have access to education and be encouraged to study, including in non-traditional areas, such as science and technology, as one of the ways to “shatter the glass ceiling”. We must also tackle the challenge of violent attacks against girls accessing education to ensure they are able to study, free from fear.

Participants called for an expansion of decent work opportunities for women to improve their livelihoods and contribution to sustainable development. Speakers noted that economies with a high percentage of women in the labour force are ones that use their capacities the best. In this regard, the need to ensure access to affordable credit by women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises was underscored.

Participants stressed the need to take measures to enhance women’s access to and control over economic resources, as well as their full participation in governance and decision-making.

Many speakers noted that the tenuous situation of women, girls and children in conflict areas is of deep concern, as is the notable absence of women in leadership roles in conflict prevention, management and resolution efforts.

The need to protect sexual and reproductive healthcare rights was further highlighted as a fundamental right that must be upheld. In this context, policies that enhance reproductive health education, can contribute to women's empowerment.

Discriminatory laws and practices, social norms, customs, and unequal access to justice are barriers that continue to hold back women. The importance of addressing these structural causes of gender-based inequalities was underscored by many speakers.

Speakers went on to note the unique and cumbersome hurdles faced by poor, less-educated and otherwise marginalized women. The challenges of women in rural settings were highlighted as being especially formidable by many participants, who noted that the time-consuming nature of acquiring basic household necessities often means that rural women are further hindered from participating in political and economic life.

Women are often responsible for a disproportionate amount of the care work done in the home, including raising children. It is essential to recognize the vital importance of unpaid work.

The importance of paid maternity leave, guarantee of employment after childbirth and reliable childcare were emphasized by many participants as being critical to enabling women to meet their full potential outside the home.

Distinguished delegates,

As we conclude our debate today, let me again thank you all for your valuable contributions on this critically important topic. I will transmit a President's Summary containing the key messages and proposals made for advancing gender equality and empowerment of women to Member States and stakeholders in due course.

I thank you for your participation and kind attention.