

6 March 2015

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

**Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government,  
Honourable Ministers,  
Excellencies,  
Mr. Secretary-General,  
Esteemed panellists,  
Ladies and gentlemen,**

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the opening session of this High-level Thematic Debate on “Advancing Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls for a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda”.

I am particularly heartened to welcome the numerous dignitaries here this morning that have travelled from their capitals to participate in today’s event. I welcome Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia, Her Excellency Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, President of Croatia, His Excellency Ahmet Davutoglu, Prime Minister of Turkey, His Excellency Igor Luksic, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Montenegro, Rt Hon Michaëlle Jean, Secretary-General, La Francophonie and former Governor General of Canada, and the Speaker of Parliament of Uganda, Rt. Honourable Rebecca Kadaga.

This is also the first time that the Office of the President of the General Assembly has hosted the global observance of International Women’s Day and we are proud to do so jointly with UN Women, under the leadership of Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the Executive Director.

**Honourable guests,**

As we look back on twenty years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, we can see many accomplishments in the areas of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

Nevertheless, despite these successes, many challenges remain.

If we are to address the persistent issues of gender inequality and reach our future sustainable development goals, we must not shy away from having frank conversations and taking bold decisions on prevailing issues that inhibit the realisation of the commitments made at Beijing.

The deep-seated norms, beliefs and practices that contribute to gender-based discrimination must be confronted and changed. We must support a zero tolerance policy on the structural causes of discrimination against women and eliminate the laws and practices that perpetuate gender inequalities.

Sustained vigilance is needed to address critical areas such as eliminating violence against women and girls and ensuring equal pay for work of equal value.

Continued commitments must also be made to eradicate maternal and child mortality; early and forced marriages; and the unequal distribution of resources within the household, based on gender.

This brings me to the story of one, Nabanja, who I met just before assuming this Office and mentioned in my acceptance speech last June. Nabanja is a married woman and mother of four children from the Kashongi village in Uganda, who acquired land with her husband some years ago.

Not long before I met her, Nabanja's husband sold that land without her knowledge; leaving her and her children with no home or means for survival. Such examples emphasize the need to put legislation into place which empowers women and guarantees their land-ownership and inheritance rights.

Access to lines of credit is another area which is of critical importance for women, particularly with regard to their engagement in entrepreneurship and non-land-based enterprises. Time and again we have seen that with access to credit, women thrive as owners of small and medium-sized businesses; such those that provide weaving, tailoring, grain milling and bakery services.

Furthermore, we must address the gender inequality that persists with regard to access to education, employment training and job opportunities and technology. We must also heed the calls for equality in women's participation, in public and private institutions, particularly with regard to decision-making roles.

**Esteemed participants,**

Today's event will cover a great deal of ground on topics that are of great interest to us all. In that context, I encourage speakers to share succinct remarks to foster an interactive discussion with as many participants as possible.

It is my hope that at the end of this debate we will have renewed commitment from all actors, with tangible expressions of support for the way forward in advancing gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. Such commitments will be critical to realizing a truly people-centred and transformative post-2015 development agenda.

There is no shortage of evidence that when we support the fundamental freedoms of women and girls, they are able to realize their full potential to engage in, contribute to and benefit from sustainable development. In doing so, we will all reap the benefits; in our homes, throughout our communities, and across our nations.

Thank you for your attention.