

2 April 2015

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,
President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly,
on the Occasion of World Autism Day**

Delivered by H.E. Mr. Einar Gunnarsson, Permanent Representative of Iceland on behalf of President Kutesa

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

It is my pleasure to join you and deliver this statement on behalf of the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency, Sam Kutesa. I would like to commend the Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar, Her Excellency Sheikha Alya Bint Ahmed Bin Saif Al Thani, and the Missions of Bangladesh, India, Nigeria, the Republic of Korea and the United States, as well as “Autism Speaks”, for organizing this important Event, as we mark World Autism Awareness Day.

This morning, I participated in a Special Event on World Autism Awareness Day co-organized by the Missions of Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Denmark, Israel, Peru, Poland, the Republic of Korea and Sri Lanka, the Departments of Public Information (DPI) and of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Global Compact and the Specialist People Foundation.

It is encouraging to note that efforts are being intensified to create greater awareness that autism is a growing global health crisis and that we need to act together.

The statistics are clear: one in 68 people has an autism spectrum disorder, amounting to an estimated 1% of the world’s population. The vast majority of those affected are children, and the prevalence figures are growing.

Autism is both a public health issue and a national and global development concern, which should be taken into account as we formulate an inclusive and transformative post-2015 development agenda.

We should use the observance of this day to increase and develop world knowledge of autism and impart information on the importance of early diagnosis and early intervention. We also need to celebrate the unique talents and abilities of persons with autism; they are valued members of our society who should be treated with dignity and provided opportunities for advancement.

We need to translate this growing awareness into action and work together to take concrete steps to address the many challenges posed by autism.

As I stated earlier today, the World Health Assembly designated autism as a global health priority. A clear set of actions have been laid out to facilitate a comprehensive, intersectoral response to the needs of persons with autism and other developmental disorders. Furthermore, Member States are urged to increase the capacity of health and social care systems to provide services for these individuals.

We must all do our part in inspiring compassion, empowerment and hope. Each and every one of us should join this effort to increase and improve understanding, in our communities but also at the global level, of the challenges of autism. I call on Member States and other stakeholders to take all necessary measures to raise awareness of autism and provide those affected with support and opportunities to realize their full potential.

I thank you for your attention.