

21 April 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 Promoting  
Tolerance and Reconciliation**

**Excellencies,  
Honourable Ministers,  
Mr. Secretary-General,  
Mr. High Representative for the United Nations Alliance  
of Civilizations,  
Religious Leaders  
Distinguished panellists,  
Ladies and gentlemen,**

I am pleased to welcome you to this High-level Thematic Debate on Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation: Fostering Peaceful, Inclusive Societies and Countering Violent Extremism. I thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon and the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser for their partnership and commitment in organizing this event. I welcome the numerous dignitaries here this morning that have travelled from their capitals to participate in today's event. Your presence here attests to the importance and keen interest attached to this debate.

**Excellencies,**

The year 2015 is indeed a year of hope and opportunity as we formulate an ambitious and transformative post-2015 development agenda, which will seek to create a more prosperous, equitable and sustainable future for people around the world.

As we work together to identify ways to put our world on a path toward sustainable development, we would be remiss to neglect the multifaceted challenges threatening international peace and security and creating formidable obstacles to human development.

Around the world, people, communities and nations are grappling with a disquieting rise of radicalization and violent extremism, fuelled by identity-based conflicts and cultural and religious tensions.

With troubling frequency, violent attacks are being carried out against innocent civilians in places of worship, museums, supermarkets, schools and historical sites. These abhorrent crimes claim the lives of men, women and children indiscriminately, leaving devastated families and communities in their wake.

From Paris to Tunis; from Garissa to Yarmouk; from Johannesburg to Peshawar; no person, society or nation is immune from intolerance and the threat of terrorism or violent extremism.

In places like Iraq, Afghanistan and Mali, irreplaceable artefacts of humanity's shared cultural heritage are being destroyed.

The brutal terrorist attacks by ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram; and other groups have put in sharp focus the rising threat of terrorism and extremism. There is no justification for such attacks. We must condemn, without reservation, all manifestations of intolerance; including, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, racism and all other forms of prejudice, incitement, harassment or violence against persons or communities based on race, ethnic origin or religious belief.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Given today's globalized and highly interconnected world, it is incumbent that the international community collectively address the serious challenges posed by intolerance and violent extremism through an integrated and balanced approach.

Divisions within our communities and among nations can create deep fault lines that foster discontent and frustration. Societies that fail to be inclusive can often serve as breeding grounds for radicalisation.

Sustained economic and social development could reduce marginalization, which in some cases propels extremism and the recruitment of terrorists. Addressing the challenges of poverty, as well as the lack of educational and employment opportunities can form the basis of a holistic approach to creating peaceful societies.

Injustice and inequality, lack of rule of law, human rights violations, political exclusion, as well as ethnic, national and religious discrimination can also fuel divisions that contribute to intolerance.

Distinguished participants,

Throughout the history of humanity, we have seen that faith and interfaith collaboration can play a crucial role in helping people of different backgrounds build trusting relationships based on shared values and beliefs. I therefore welcome the participation of religious leaders in today's event and that of tomorrow.

In the face of the recent, troubling events worldwide, many faith-based organizations and religious leaders have emphasized the need for peaceful coexistence, dialogue, tolerance and forgiveness. Their messages of harmony and peace are of great importance and value given the unique and prominent roles of religious leaders.

Concerted efforts should be made to support religious leaders and help spread their messages of peace and hope as we seek to advance mutual respect, tolerance and dialogue as a response to the darkness of intolerance, hatred, hostility, bigotry and discrimination.

### **Excellencies,**

Together, we must strive to create cohesion within our communities and among our nations to address the contributing factors. We must promote dialogue and mutual understanding, while enhancing respect for religious and cultural diversity and strengthening the principles of freedom of thought, belief and expression.

During this debate, we will also explore the powerful role that women, youth and the media can play on relations between peoples and communities. We should take steps to harness the positive power of all of them to communicate actions and words but also take actions that promote understanding and compassion.

Education is an important weapon against prejudice and discrimination. As a global community, we should seek to educate a future generation that is accepting of others and embraces diversity. In classrooms around the world, we should emphasize values that are rooted in the principles of dignity and respect.

Families also have an invaluable role to play, in this regard. Within our families, we not only have the opportunity, but indeed, the obligation to teach our children how to treat each other with kindness and respect.

### **Excellencies,**

Over the next two days we will share ideas and strategies for addressing the rise of intolerance and extremism that we are currently witnessing around the world.

At the very heart of our discussions will be a call for change. Indeed, we must change actions. And we must change attitudes.

To do so, we must all do our part. Leaders around the world, across our communities, inside our schools and within our households have a role to play in this endeavour.

Together we can, and in fact we must, find a way to create a more tolerant, peaceful world.

I thank you for your participation in this event and look forward to your contributions.