

22 April 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 Promoting
Tolerance and Reconciliation**

Excellencies,

Your Excellency, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I thank our panellists, speakers and all of you for your participation and valuable contributions throughout this High-level Thematic Debate on “Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation”. I am particularly grateful to the religious leaders who have provided a great deal of insights, perspectives and proposals.

Over the last two days, we have exchanged a wide range of ideas and strategies for countering the troubling rise of intolerance and violent extremism we are witnessing around the world.

Indeed, this debate has allowed us to literally and figuratively stand up and tell our neighbour – “I can not live without you.”

Throughout the event, we have heard resounding calls for an inclusive, inter-religious, inter-cultural dialogue with a view toward building mutual trust and understanding.

There was widespread agreement that no one should be left on the margins; including young people, women, religious minorities or others facing discrimination based on race, ethnic origin or religious belief.

Speakers underscored the urgent need to effectively address the drivers and underlying causes that contribute to intolerance, including injustice, inequality, lack of rule of law, human rights violations, marginalization, exclusion, as well as ethnic, national and religious discrimination.

The need to further promote justice, equality, good governance, equitable institutions and economic and social development was underscored. It was stressed that national and local contexts should be taken into account and that both short-term and long-term interventions are required to address the challenges posed by radicalization and extremism.

Many participants underlined the critical importance of addressing these challenges as the international community moves towards a universal post-2015 development agenda. It was widely noted that in today’s globalized world, the international community should work collectively to counter the spread of radicalization and extremism.

Some participants called for a global preventive action plan to address the recruitment or luring of young people into terrorist organizations. It was noted that youth are vital in creating a more tolerant future generation, with educators and parents, especially mothers, having a particularly important role to play in their upbringing.

Many speakers also recognized the importance of media; both as a recruitment tool for terrorist organizations, as well as a positive means for engaging and educating citizens in a thoughtful, productive fashion. Media was also stressed as an important communications platform for moderate voices. Some speakers emphasized that social media tools need to be creatively and effectively leveraged to counterbalance negative messaging from violent extremist groups.

**Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,**

Today's session on interfaith collaboration featured many powerful and inspirational messages from religious leaders from across a wide range of faiths. The ideas and solutions we have exchanged can help inform our collective response to the rising threat of intolerance and extremism, although as many speakers emphasized, continued dialogue will be needed as we seek to address these evolving threats.

We should individually and collectively redouble our efforts to promote mutual respect, tolerance, dialogue and reconciliation to counter intolerance, hatred, hostility, bigotry and discrimination. We need to go beyond tolerance towards the principles of mutual respect, understanding and acceptance, in full recognition of the individual worth and dignity of every person.

As one speaker said so succinctly – a crime committed in the name of religion is a crime against religion.

Religious leaders have an important role to play, and we should support them in spreading their messages of peace, harmony and hope. Steps should be taken to fully engage religious leaders, including greater collaboration with the United Nations, with a focus on maximizing their respective strengths.

Many participants highlighted the need for a better, more-convincing narrative that focuses on the benefits of pluralism as an alternative to extremist ideology. Such a narrative could have a particularly powerful impact on young people that may otherwise be drawn toward radicalization.

I look forward to the Secretary-General's proposed action plan on preventing violent extremism, as well as the establishment of an advisory panel of faith leaders and others to help guide our efforts.

I will be transmitting a President's summary of this debate to Member States and stakeholders in the weeks ahead.

Once again, thank you for your participation and valuable contribution.