

24 July 2015

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,  
President of the 69<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Nelson Mandela International Day and Award of Inaugural  
Prize**

**Right Honourable Dr. Rukahana Rugunda, Prime Minister of the Republic of Uganda,  
Excellencies,  
Ms. Susana Malcorra, Under-Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet, representing the  
Secretary-General,  
The Reverend Jesse Jackson,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,**

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this annual General Assembly observance of the Nelson Mandela International Day. I wish to extend a special welcome to my Prime Minister, Right Honourable Dr. Rukahana Rugunda, and the Reverend Jesse Jackson, Founder and President of the Rainbow PUSH Coalition.

I also warmly welcome the two Laureates of the first United Nations Nelson Mandela Prize, Dr. Helena Ndume and H.E. Jorge Sampaio as well as other distinguished guests.

**Excellencies,**

The General Assembly in 2009, proclaimed 18 July as Nelson Mandela International Day, to be observed annually. Since 2010, we have gathered here at the United Nations, and elsewhere around the world, to celebrate the remarkable life and contributions of Nelson Mandela.

Nelson Mandela International Day is a global call to action for all citizens of the world, to take up the challenge and follow in the formidable footsteps of Madiba; a man who transformed his life, served his country and freed his people.

The objective of the Day is to inspire individuals to take action to help change the world for the better in diverse ways; and in so doing, to build a global movement for good.

Though former President Mandela passed on, on December 5, 2013, his legacy and inspiration remains as important today as ever. It is for this reason that we must continue to do our part to honour his legacy through both our words and deeds.

This annual observance also provides a unique opportunity to pay tribute to Mr. Mandela as a global icon, and acknowledge his commitment to the service of humanity, particularly in the three pillars of the United Nations – peace and security, development and human rights.

On this Day, we are reminded of the personal sacrifices that Mr. Mandela made in the collective struggle of his people. His unwavering and tireless efforts paved the way for the liberation and democratisation process in South Africa.

This illustrious son of Africa dedicated 67 years of his life to public service in his country. His struggle and commitment inspired people around the globe, far beyond his own country, South Africa.

Today, the late Nelson Mandela remains an international symbol of hope and humility; spanning across generations, races and religions.

**Excellencies,  
Distinguished participants,**

In his last address to the General Assembly on 21 September 1998, President Mandela expressed his hope for a better world thus, and I quote:

“As I sit in Qunu, and grow as ancient as its hills, I will continue to entertain the hope that there has emerged a cadre of leaders in my own country and region, on my Continent and in the world, which will not allow that any should be denied their freedom as we were; that any should be turned into refugees as we were; that any should be condemned to go hungry as we were; that any should be stripped of their human dignity as we were.” End quote.

As we reflect on Madiba’s legacy, leadership and life, we must also commit to making a difference through individual and collective actions that promote positive change in our communities and our world.

Since assuming office as President of the General Assembly for the 69th session, I have underscored the importance of putting people at the centre of everything we do. Together, Member States, Observers and stakeholders are formulating an ambitious post-2015 development agenda, which seeks to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development, to be adopted by world leaders in September.

Last week, we adopted the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, which will support the implementation of the new agenda. And in December, a new universally binding agreement on climate change should be concluded in Paris to preserve our planet.

We can all be proud of what we have accomplished so far, and should continue to be inspired by the spirit and legacy of Nelson Mandela, as we address the many challenges facing humanity.

This year's Nelson Mandela Day observance is indeed a special occasion. For the first time here at the United Nations, we are bestowing the inaugural Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela Prize.

The Prize was designed to honour and recognize the outstanding achievements of two distinguished individuals, one female and one male, who have dedicated their lives to the service to humanity, particularly in the promotion of reconciliation, social cohesion and community development.

The efforts of the awardees ought to have made a significant difference to the lives of others as inspired by the life and values of Mr. Nelson Mandela. Such efforts should also be in line with the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

This unique Prize will serve as an inspiration to all who work tirelessly to contribute to and improve the well-being of others, and in so doing, promote the values of the United Nations.

It is therefore my great pleasure to welcome Dr. Helena Ndume of Namibia and H.E. Jorge Fernando Branco Sampaio of Portugal as the inaugural Laureates of the first ever United Nations Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela Prize. Both laureates have been influential leaders in their communities.

In her work as an ophthalmologist, Dr. Ndume has treated tens of thousands suffering from blindness and eye-related illness. To date, she has helped treat more than 30,000 Namibians with eye surgery and intraocular lens implants to address blindness, cataracts and myopia, at no cost to the patients.

H.E. Jorge Sampaio has shown a longstanding commitment to freedom, human rights, democracy and peace.

He worked throughout the 1960s and 70s to defend political prisoners, and later served as a member of the European Human Rights Commission of the Council of Europe, among many responsibilities he has held. From 1996 to 2006 he served as President of Portugal, during which he focused on several international issues, including HIV-AIDS, drugs and children's rights.

On behalf of the General Assembly, I congratulate both Laureates on their well-deserved selection as the first recipients of the Nelson Mandela Prize. I thank the Members of the Selection Committee, the distinguished Permanent Representatives of Algeria, Latvia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Sweden and South Africa, in ex-officio capacity, for a job well done. I also convey my appreciation to the Department of Public Information for their support throughout the selection process.

The United Nations Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela Prize that the Laureates will shortly receive should inspire them, and all of us, to make our contribution, in different ways, in the service of humanity.

Let us continue to be inspired and guided by Nelson Mandela's poignant and powerful message when he said: "We can change the world and make it a better place. It is in your hands to make a difference".

I thank you for your attention.