

Statement by

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President of the Republic of Uganda

At the

United Nations  
General Assembly

*New York  
23<sup>rd</sup> September 2008*

Mr. President,

The Secretary General,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Allow me, on the outset, to congratulate you on your election to the Presidency of the United Nations General Assembly. Uganda is convinced that with your experience and well-known diplomatic skills, we shall have a successful session. I wish to pay tribute to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim, for the excellent manner in which he presided over the 62<sup>nd</sup> Session. I also would like to pay tribute to the Secretary General for his leadership and efforts to reform our organization.

Mr. President,

The founding fathers of the United Nations had a dream, of creating an organization whose purpose, among others, was:

I, Quote:

*“To achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character .....*” Un Quote.

Today the world is facing a multitude of problems, many of which the United Nations was meant to address. It is encouraging that the theme chosen for this session is “The Impact of the Global Food Crisis on Poverty and Hunger in the World as well as the need to Democratize the United Nations”.

The view of some of us in Uganda is that, that so-called “food crisis” is actually good for Equatorial Africa. It is certainly good for Uganda’s farmers. Over the years we have been growing a lot of food -- maize, bananas, Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, cassava, rice, wheat; and producing animal products like milk, beef, etc. The problem has always been the market for this food. This was on account of two problems:

- (i) protectionism in the USA, EU, Japan, China, etc; and
- (ii) lack of factories to process this food so that it could reach distant markets.

Apart from these two, there are other factors in some African countries, including poor transport infrastructure, lack of electricity, lack of seeds, etc.

These, however, do not apply to Uganda. In Uganda's case, it has been lack of markets and low processing capacity (value-addition). The rest we have or can have.

The high food and commodity prices have arisen on account of the hundreds of millions of Chinese and Indians that have, in the last 20 years, entered the opulent middle class. That means they need better food, better houses that require cement and steel bars, better means of locomotion (cars) etc. That is why the food and commodity prices have gone up. It is for the same reason that petroleum prices have gone up; if only 200 people were driving cars previously, the number has now risen to 400. This means more demand for petroleum. Following the continuously rising petroleum prices, some Western countries started talking of bio-fuels – using plants to produce diesel.

Uganda, however, welcomes all this. It is an opportunity as far as we are concerned. It is not a bottleneck. In fact farmers in Uganda are reaping high. That is why our economy last year grew by 9% per annum. Once we solve the problem of energy, our economy will grow in double digits.

It is good that the USA, EU, India, Japan and China have opened their markets to African products – tariff-free, quota-free. However, there is still the issue of subsidies. These should be removed. We farm in Uganda without subsidies. Why shouldn't the farmers in these countries with better infrastructure, lower interest rates, abundant electricity, etc, do the same? Why do they need protection? Protectionism interferes with those that can produce food easily, such as Uganda. This is not correct.

We have been producing too much milk without capacity to process it. Recently (*commissioned May 2008*), an Indian-owned company, Sameer Agriculture and Livestock Ltd., a high-tech, integrated milk-processing plant, started processing powdered milk as well as producing a whole range of finished milk products: pasteurized milk, Ultra Heat Treated milk UHT – long life milk, yoghurt, butter, ghee, etc. This milk is now being exported all over the World.

Another example has been bananas. Uganda produces 10 million metric tonnes of bananas per annum. These are high quality bananas (*'enyamwonyo'* in one of the local dialects) with rare food ingredients (quite different from the bananas known in other parts of the world). 40% of these bananas have been rotting in the gardens and market places.

Our scientists, funded by the Government, are now converting them into processed foods (flour, bread, snacks, etc).

High fuel prices are a real problem for countries that do not have petroleum. Maximizing the use of other forms of energy (hydro; geothermal -- effectively used in countries like Iceland; solar; wind; bio-fuels, etc) is part of the answer. All this, however, depends on developing the human resource through education. An educated population has got more capacity to look for answers than the one that is not educated.

As far as Uganda is concerned, apart from the lazy ones, the only groups that are adversely affected are salary earners in towns. Unlike the farmers, they cannot benefit from the higher food prices. Yet they must buy food.



Fortunately, however, all these families in Uganda have a dual capacity. Apart from being salary earners, they also own land in the rural areas or their relatives do. They can, therefore, subsidize themselves through growing food using this land. Africa and other agriculture-based economies should rise up, utilize their full potential and take advantage of the high food prices.

Regarding the statement that I have heard repeated so many times since the General Assembly opened, that “*all African countries cannot meet the MDGs by 2015*”, I would like to make two positions clear.

1. First of all, this confirms what I said yesterday in the High-Level Meeting on Africa's Development needs. Talking of sustainable development without talking of socio-economic transformation has not been correct. We have repeatedly pointed this one out. I have often used the example of pregnancy. You cannot endlessly, talk of "*sustainable pregnancy*". Yes, the "pregnancy" should be sustainable until it transitions into a baby.

Like Europe did and other societies in Asia have done recently, Africa must, therefore, metamorphose socially, economically and technologically from a pre-industrial, sometimes feudal, society into a middle class, skilled working class society. Period. Meeting all the MDGs is a consequence of this metamorphosis.

You cannot maintain a pre-industrial society and, then, somehow, meet these MDGs. That is what Uganda has been working for in the last twenty years. This means that Africa must industrialize, develop modern services sector and commercialize agriculture. That means that emphasis must be put on “market access”. This means that we should not only access the big markets of the World, but also rationalize our own African markets through regional and continental integration. It also means that in order to lower costs of doing business in Africa, we should deal with energy, transport, especially rail; and education (primary and high-level). The MDGs are consequences of these. They are not precursors or autonomous phenomena to these.

2. The second position I would like to point out under MDGs is that Uganda is on course to meet all of them except maternal and child mortality. I see no reason why these goals should not be achievable. Other than HIV/AIDS which is behaviour-related, I am sure all the others are achievable if in Uganda we do enough, political-led sensitization and investment.

I do not associate myself with the pessimists on Africa or those who *put the cart before the horse*. Why, for instance, were industrialization and value-addition not made one of the MDGs? The export of the raw-materials is one of the cardinal 'sins' that causes Africa to contribute only 2% of World Trade. If value was added to these raw materials, the share of Africa's World trade would go up even today.

Moreover, this would create jobs for the Africans and, therefore, contribute structurally to poverty eradication. How were we supposed to eradicate poverty without creating jobs other than using ‘*witchcraft*? We have repeatedly pointed out these issues in several fora, to no avail. It is the Africans themselves who can and should resolve this issue.

I thank you.

*New York,*

*September 23, 2008*