
President of UN General Assembly: Environment essential for sustainable development

"We cannot have sustainable development without addressing social, development and environmental issues," said Sam Kahamba Kutesa, the President of the United Nations General Assembly, during his visit to the Parliament on 3 June. He was there to discuss new Sustainable Development Goals with the foreign affairs committee. We talked to him about issues such as climate change and migration.

New Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are set to be agreed upon in New York in September and an agreement on global climate action is hoped for in Paris in December. In July, the Third International Conference on Financing for Development will be held in Addis Ababa.

Fifteen years ago the Millennium Development Goals were agreed. What would you describe as their main successes and what's next?

The Millennium Development Goals were a success, but the most important is that for the first time the world came together and financed it. Now we need to build on the conditions of these goals. We cannot have sustainable development without addressing social, development and environmental issues. So that's why in our new set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals we are adding an environmental aspect.

Countries should adopt a new climate change agreement in Paris in December. The EU is making an effort to lead CO2 emissions reduction worldwide, but EU businesses are concerned about their competitiveness. What would you tell them? Why is it important to move to a low carbon economy?

It is very important because sea levels are rising and this poses an existential threat. It is important for mankind to save this planet.

President Barack Obama and President Xi Jinping, the leaders of the world's two most polluting countries, have also said they want to work on it. I think I have never seen a greater appetite for reaching an agreement than now.

Migration has become an important political issue in the EU. What can be done to ensure the safety of people running from conflicts, poverty and climate disasters who are seeking refuge and a better life in the EU?

First of all, people should not be allowed to be in sinking boats and die. Secondly, fight the traffickers. The final and the most important aspect is to deal with the causes. The causes are either conflicts within countries or the lack of opportunities for people.

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Sam Kahamba Kutesa (left) with Linda McAvan, chair of the development committee



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