

1 November 1999

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab,
President of the 554th Session of the General Assembly,
on the cyclone in India**

Thousands of people died, 1.5 million were left homeless and more than a third of the state's 35 million population have been left in a state of anguish and devastation following a powerful cyclone which hit the Indian state of Orissa, in the Bay of Bengal, over the weekend.

Reports describe a grim picture of death, suffering and destruction. The Prime Minister of India, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, has described the devastation as "a national calamity", while the state's Chief Minister has referred to it as the "cyclone of the century". Worst affected were the people who had very little to begin with, and who are now left in a hopeless situation.

Judging from the scale of the destruction, it is obvious that human beings are helpless against forces of nature, such as cyclones, hurricanes or earthquakes. This latest disaster is proof enough that, despite years of persistent international efforts in disaster prevention, their number and cost continue to rise.

Less than two weeks ago, on 13 October, the United Nations observed World Disaster Reduction Day, which highlighted the importance of disaster prevention. I stressed, on that occasion, the need to strengthen and broaden disaster reduction programmes in our efforts to limit the impact and costs of human suffering. I reiterate that disaster reduction must become an essential element of international strategies and national development plans if we are to mitigate – since we cannot prevent -- their devastating effects.

I extend condolences to the Government and the people of India, and in particular those of Orissa state, for the great loss they have sustained. I also call upon the entire international community, including in particular the humanitarian agencies, to respond swiftly and generously to India's urgent appeal for emergency relief assistance for the many thousands of victims.