

25 September 2000

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,  
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,  
at the United Nations Staff Day**

I welcome this opportunity to address the Opening Ceremony of the UN Staff Day.

This Day is always of particular importance for the UN staff and now that we are entering the new Millennium this event needs to underscore the vital role of the UN staff, in furthering the goals of this Organization. While paying tribute to all staff members, I feel compelled to concentrate on the critical issue of safety and security of the United Nations personnel.

I took part in the commemorative march last week to express my personal solidarity and support to this issue. I have since received the list of the names of UN civilian and military personnel who have lost their lives since the last year's ceremony.

The list is too long. In fact no such list should exist. It is for this reason that I, as the President of the General Assembly, make a special appeal to the Member States and the Security Council and the Secretary General to take urgent action to improve the safety and security of the United Nations and associated personnel.

Targeting of humanitarian and peacekeeping personnel has become increasingly organized and intentional. The very people that danger their own lives to help other people in need are being brutally attacked and killed. This is unacceptable and should not be tolerated. If no action is taken in particular by the parties concerned, but also by other states and the international community the respect for impartial humanitarian workers will further deteriorate.

This will restrict the ability of the UN to carry out its tasks in accordance with the Charter. Some have already called for an urgent re-assessment of the security benchmarks that determine when to suspend the operations and when to evacuate staff.

The report on the security and safety of the UN Personnel to be submitted shortly for the consideration of the General Assembly will give a concrete opportunity to show that the membership is willing to put words into action. The protection and safety of the UN personnel can be improved only, if we take concerted action and if we implement our commitments both at home and in the field.

To do this we need political will at the highest level, we need international attention as well as attention and support of the public opinion. What is also required is practical action on the ground by all parties concerned, including non-State- parties. And last but not least we need to

ensure that adequate resources are devoted to the planning and conduct of UN humanitarian and peace operations.

Furthermore, it is imperative that those responsible for the acts against UN personnel are prosecuted. The establishment of individual accountability for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law also contributes to the deterrence of violations, but only if it is effectively implemented.

We need to strengthen also the international humanitarian and human rights standards in this field. As of today only 43 states are Parties to the Convention on the Safety of the United Nations and Associated Personnel. I call on all states that have not yet ratified the Convention to do so. It is also important that that all parties involved in conflicts adhere to the relevant standards of international law related to the protection of civilians.

I agree with those who have called for urgent consideration of the scope of application of the Convention to include locally recruited personnel. This personnel, often critical to the work of many of the humanitarian and peace operations, deserves the protection offered by international standards.

To conclude, I should like to, once again, emphasize the indispensable role the staff members play in the work of this Organization. You should not be discouraged by the recent tragic events, but rather take your share not only from the sorrow, but also from the heroism that your colleagues have shown in risking their own lives for the common good.