

2 October 2000

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
on the occasion of World Habitat Day**

This year's World Habitat Day is focusing on ways to improve the role of women in urban governance.

To illustrate the need to address this issue, look at the statistics. In my own region, the Nordic countries, women constitute close to 40% of all parliamentarians. But in many other industrial countries the figure is much lower as it is in other regions of the world. World-wide, only about 7% of all ministers are women, and most of them are in the social areas, not in the economic development or finance areas of decision-making. At the local government level the situation is slightly better, but we are far from reaching equal representation in governance structures and decision-making. We only need to look at the agenda of the work of the United Nations 55th General Assembly, its committees, commissions and other expert bodies, to recognise how much still needs to be done.

In my acceptance speech I spoke of the special need to further girls' education. To work towards more education for girls is one crucial way to promote development and to fight against poverty. Furthering the economic, social and learning opportunities for women and girls needs the full involvement of women in governance and decision-making.

The theme of this year's World Habitat Day is a very acute, important and timely one. Women's perspective in urban governance is a much-needed reality-check for decision-making.