

17 October 2000

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
on the occasion of International Day for the Eradication of Poverty**

The world does not lack good intentions to eradicate poverty. A firm commitment to halve the proportion of people living in poverty by the year 2015, was made by the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 and reiterated this September by the 144 world leaders attending the Millennium Summit. I note the many efforts and programmes carried out by the United Nations, its specialized agencies, governments and civil society actors. But as yet we have not done enough. The number of poor people is increasing, not decreasing.

Globalization has been identified as a new cause of poverty - we need to mitigate its impact on those who are threatened by marginalization, in every society. Poverty is linked to fluctuations in world economic development, to the cycle of recessions and periods of economic growth. Likewise, chronic poverty is linked to conflicts, to the lack of the rule of law, to the lack of protection against arbitrary violence, and to the lack of possibility for civil society at large to interact positively with the public sector.

This year's Poverty Report of the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank's Development Report, among other recent publications, give striking examples of the impact of healthy governance practices in reducing poverty. Improving governance requires countries to adopt a culture of accountability and to build the regulatory capacity of the public sector. It also requires the eradication of corruption, for it is the poor who pay the highest price for corrupt governance. Empowerment of the poor means democratization and decentralization of power - giving a voice to poor people. Fortunately, there are positive trends with the spread of democratic governance throughout the world.

Poverty is the lack of economic assets, such as land or secure tenure to the land and its produce. It is also the lack of opportunities, skills and knowledge. These factors impact in particular on women who constitute about 70% of the poor. That is why I believe that education of girls must be one of the main priorities of every government.