

18 October 2000

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
at the World Food Day observance**

I am pleased to participate in this year's observance of World Food Day which commemorates the founding of the Food and Agricultural Organization in Quebec City, Canada, in 1945. This Day provides us with the opportunity to re-commit ourselves to the cause of the hungry and poor throughout the world.

Food is a prerequisite for human survival and well-being, and a fundamental human necessity. Yet FAO's recent report on the State of Food Insecurity in the World reveals that over 800 million people continue to suffer from chronic malnutrition and hunger. It is unacceptable that such widespread hunger and poverty should persist in spite of the enormous scientific and technological progress made in the world, including in modernizing food production.

We have the technological know-how to end the problem of hunger. But do we have the political will?

Access to adequate food is a universal human right and involves a collective responsibility of the global community. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for their health and well-being. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states that everyone has a right to adequate food and freedom from hunger.

Fighting hunger, malnutrition and poverty is one of the most fundamental of all challenges to be faced collectively by individual countries and the international community. Last month's Millennium Summit and its Declaration provided a renewed commitment by the world's leaders to implement the global development agenda as defined by the cycle of United Nations world conferences of the 1990s. This Declaration, together with the World Food Summit Declaration and Plan of Action, constitute authoritative mandates for achieving "A Millennium Free from Hunger", the theme of this year's World Food Day.

But now these commitments must be translated into action. One of my priorities is to ensure that this session of the General Assembly - the Millennium Assembly - reflects in its work the political commitments made by the heads of State and Government in the Millennium Declaration. For their part, governments must formulate national policies, plans and programmes targeting the most needy.

At the start of my Presidency, I made a strong appeal for the ideal of multi-lateralism as a means for promoting greater social equity, democracy and human rights, sustainable development and the alleviation of poverty. I also emphasized the need to involve all sectors of civil society, particularly non-governmental organizations and the private sector. Seeking solutions together, identifying resources, mobilizing public opinion and empowering the beneficiaries of development are all part of this approach.

People's participation at all levels - from the smallest communities to the largest international meetings - is the foundation of true partnership. To be effective it must be based on mutual trust, cooperation and dialogue in the service of development.

Today there are many viable global networks of non-governmental development organizations whose work compliments that of the United Nations and its specialized agencies. This goodwill of NGOs must be harnessed in new, creative ways.

We have already seen examples of how the private sector can be successfully mobilized for development efforts. One such example is FAO's experience with its TeleFood campaign where the private sector and others in civil society have come together in the spirit of partnership and solidarity.

In keeping with the millennium spirit, we must not take a business as usual attitude on the issue of hunger and food insecurity. As part of our legacy to our children, we must make every effort to ensure a "millennium free from hunger" at the start of this century. On this World Food Day let us reaffirm our commitment to the cause of the poor and the hungry. The challenge and vision of a millennium free from hunger is attainable.