

16 November 2000

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,  
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,  
on the occasion of the luncheon honouring recipients of  
the Global Tolerance Award 2000 on the International Day of  
Tolerance**

Five years ago, the General Assembly adopted a set of principles designed to promote tolerance of human differences and cultural diversity. It also declared November 16th as the International Day for Tolerance as a time for promoting understanding and acceptance of our differences, and for renewing our commitment to action to prevent intolerance, bigotry and hatred.

In September this year, the largest ever gathering of world leaders, meeting here at the United Nations, reminded us that "differences within and between societies should be neither feared nor repressed, but cherished as a precious asset of humanity". In their Millennium Declaration, the heads of State and Government reaffirmed that tolerance is essential to international relations.

As President of the 55th General Assembly, I am conscious of the uniqueness of this session's timing, coming as it does immediately after that historic Summit. I am also conscious of the need for this Millennium Assembly to put into action the commitments made by the world's leaders in that Declaration. In conducting the business of the Assembly, I have emphasized the need to maintain the "millennium spirit" and proceed with a sense of urgency in our work.

Next year we will hold the World Conference against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. This important conference will be another milestone on the path towards the day when we can live together in peace and harmony. For that day to become a reality, we must actively seek ways to erase hate, combat violence, especially against women and children, and cultivate respect for diversity.

Today's recipients of the Global Tolerance Award for 2000 are leaders in the struggle against intolerance. They have been innovators in cultivating understanding, acceptance and mutual respect between people. I congratulate them on their courage and hope that their achievements might serve to inspire all of us to practice tolerance in all our relationships and activities. And not just on this International Day for Tolerance, but every day.

In the final analysis, tolerance is the virtue that makes peace possible.