

16 November 2000

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
to the UN World TV Forum "The General Assembly and the Digital
Divide"**

I am very pleased to be able to address this opening session of the United Nations World Television Forum. The issue before us, "the challenge of the digital divide", is one that perhaps more than any other, epitomizes our times. The information and technology revolution that the world has undergone in the last few years offers us possibilities as never before, possibilities for development and prosperity that some are already experiencing.

But for the majority of the world, the divide remains huge. Technology has not yet benefited everyone and we face the prospect that it is becoming yet another issue that creates fences between rich and poor nations.

We know that the digital divide is real: my own country Finland has more internet hosts than all of Africa and, despite the ubiquitous cell phone, half the world's population has yet to use a telephone.

Coming from Finland, one of the world's most "wired" nations, I know the impact that education has on the technological prospects of a country. Education is crucial if people are to be able to take advantage of technological opportunities. That is why I have been emphasizing the importance of education, especially for girls. Along with information and communication technology, education is one of the priorities that I spoke about in my acceptance speech on 5 September when I was elected President of the UN General Assembly. I have continued to emphasize these inter-linked issues ever since.

Technology can improve knowledge: in Africa where one in 4 adults is HIV positive and 40 per cent cannot read or write, technology, including through television, radio and the internet, could spread knowledge about the AIDS virus and help reduce illness or death.

Your Forum is a very timely: it offers a possibility of exploring ways that the television industry can help ensure that technology will not speed further divergence between the rich and poor of our world. I wish you every success in this endeavor.