

5 December 2000

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,  
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,  
on the occasion of International Volunteer Day  
for Economic and Social Development**

The late Mother Teresa once said: "There should be less preaching - preaching does not unite us. What unites us is working together for mutual benefit." I think this thought captures the essence of voluntarism and the values of voluntarism which, not only accomplish concrete achievements, but which also give people a feeling of belonging and a feeling of being valuable. In our present hectic cyber-age, the nearly invisible voluntary work within societies is becoming more and more valuable and acutely essential at a time when government social safety nets are being curtailed or dismantled. We all know, whether we admit it or not, that in the back alleys of this fast-living world there are dropouts. Frequently it is volunteers and volunteer organizations that care for these fellow citizens.

Proclaiming the year 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers was a wise decision by the General Assembly and a good omen for the new millennium. Rekindling the volunteer spirit worldwide is needed. Voluntarism is not only required in the social field. It contributes significantly to cultural, humanitarian and peace-building efforts. In my view, advancement of literacy is one area where voluntarism pays off and helps build national capital.

Voluntarism has always been with us - in every society and civilization. But the value of work of volunteers is not always appreciated. I believe that the International Year of Volunteers will boost recognition and appreciation and help remove obstacles and misconceptions about voluntarism and voluntary organisations.

With the help of modern media and communication tools, voluntary advocacy group networks have become powerful global conscience-builders that can impact business ethics and save pristine environments, cultural heritage sites, endangered species or persecuted people.

I wish to conclude with another thought of the late Mother Teresa: "What can you do? Take a broom and clean your neighbour's house." Voluntarism is simple but significant.