

5 February 2001

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
at the 2nd Meeting of the Preparatory Committee on the Third
United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries**

I would like to express my gratitude to the Committee for giving me this opportunity to share some of my views as you proceed with the preparations for the Third United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries.

Your work in this Committee is not a simple technical exercise of agreeing on a common text. Your task goes beyond that. Your collective work must engender a sense of hope for a better future in the minds of seven hundred million people living in LDCs. This preparatory process must culminate in concrete actions at the Conference that will help free these millions of people from poverty and deprivation.

As President of the General Assembly, I have been entrusted by Member States with the responsibility to follow-up the implementation of the Millennium Declaration. The Third Conference on LDCs, which will be the first major conference to take place after the Summit, together with other upcoming conferences, is a major mechanism at the disposal of the General Assembly in implementing the commitments of the Declaration.

The Millennium Declaration successfully articulated actions in three critical areas concerning development in LDCs, namely trade, ODA and debt, where external support could make a major difference. The world leaders agreed upon the target of reducing by half the number of people living in extreme poverty by 2015. The other commitments in the Declaration concerning human rights, democracy, good governance, peace and security and protection of the vulnerable, are equally important in accelerating development and eradicating poverty. I am pleased that the draft Programme of Action that you are considering captures all these dimensions of the Millennium Declaration by following a holistic and multi-stakeholder approach. The comprehensive scope of the Millennium Declaration reinforces the need for an integrated and coordinated approach within the UN in the implementation of its commitments.

There is an urgency to take concrete action in LDCs. The primary responsibility in meeting the Millennium development targets rests on the shoulders of the LDC-governments themselves. They must strengthen a range of national policies, by putting people at the center of these policies, improving good governance involving all stakeholders, and in the process taking charge of their own destiny. On the other hand, the international community, the United Nations system and Member States must be prepared to assist in order to achieve our goals.

To create a meaningful dialogue, reciprocal cooperation, and a more just world we all need to walk an extra mile. We need to go beyond rigid positions, to transcend the status quo. Remember, we are doing this for the poorest of the poor - women, men and children living at the margin of existence.

I would like to echo the strong emphasis made in the draft Programme of Action on the importance of involving all stakeholders, nationally and internationally. Development can no longer be viewed as the business of governments alone. It is the collective business of, in the words of the UN Charter, the peoples of the United Nations. Unless we are able to effectively involve civil society, the private sector, the media, lawmakers and academia in the process, we will deprive ourselves of the enormous potential offered by these entities. Your non-governmental partners are also present during this preparatory meeting, if not in this very room. I urge you to bring them in to your midst throughout the process. A broad based dialogue among all the stakeholders will give the outcome a stronger foundation and a broader ownership.

The international community, in particular the industrialized countries, must make stronger efforts to ensure the success of national policies of least developed countries. The fact that this is the first UN Conference hosted by the European Union signals the willingness of development partners to remain collectively engaged in the development of LDCs.

It is particularly noteworthy that the policies and actions contained in the draft Programme of Action are based on the set of universal values enshrined in the Millennium Declaration, namely: solidarity, shared responsibility, freedom, democracy, equality, common concern for world peace and security, and the well being of next generations.

Many of the recommendations in the draft Programme of Action are derived from the outcomes of major UN Conferences and Summits. All of these linkages provide an opportunity to an integrated approach, where the Millennium Declaration is an overarching theme.

Achieving the targets of the Millennium Declaration will make our world safer, more stable and more prosperous. Translating this hope into reality will require, among other things, efficient mechanisms for implementation and follow-up of the Programme of Action at all levels. The United Nations system will have an important part in this. Playing this role will require us to refuse to accept business as usual, and insist on harnessing the strength of the entire system at global, regional and national levels. As you approach this particular task, let me assure you of my full support.