

8 March 2001

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
on the occasion of International Women's Day
"Women and Peace: Women Managing Conflict"**

The theme for this year's celebration of International Women's Day is very timely: Women managing conflict.

The theme implies that women are not and should not be seen as mere victims or deliberate targets of armed conflict. However, once they are victims or targets, the perpetrators must be brought to justice. In this connection, I would like to applaud the historic decision by the Hague tribunal last month, ruling that rape is a crime against humanity. Successful prosecution of gender-based violence sets standards and forces us to pay more attention to this problem in all its aspects, and in all cases.

Women and girls continue to bear the greatest burden of armed conflicts, which are in fact most widespread since the II World War. At the same time studies have confirmed that the participation of women in conflict prevention, peace keeping and peace building operations would improve the efficiency of these operations and enhance the impact of the outcomes.

To better manage conflicts it is crucial that we implement fully the commitment, made over five years ago in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, to promote equal participation of women and equal opportunities for women to participate in all forums and peace activities at all levels, particularly at the decision-making level, and to integrate a gender perspective in the conflict resolution.

We need to acknowledge that some progress has been made, for example in enhancing training in gender issues and introducing gender Focal Points or units in some of the UN peace operations. One of them in East Timor (UNTAET), which I visited early this year and where I could see at first hand how important expertise and analyses on a gender perspective is in a complex peace operation. Equality and respect for human rights of women and girls and peace are intertwined, and to achieve sustainable peace it is essential to have a full knowledge and understanding of these issues in transition periods and in nation building.

I would like to pay special tribute to Ms. Angela King, the Special Adviser of the Secretary General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, the Division on Advancement of Women and UNIFEM as well as the numerous NGOs for their efforts in promoting gender equality in this field. However, the overall picture, including appointments of women to key positions in peace operations, remains far from desired and much more needs to be done to fully utilize women's potential. Member States and the UN will have an opportunity to discuss how to

improve the de facto situation, including the possibility of establishing a gender unit, when they continue to consider the implementation of the Brahimi report.

The United Nations cannot any longer afford to ignore the role of women in conflict management.