

17 May 2001

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
on the occasion of the World Telecommunication Day**

World Telecommunication Day of the International Telecommunication Union provides an occasion to acknowledge the important role that telecommunication plays in our lives. The Internet epitomizes today's globalized world, but we should be reminded that it is available only to a minority: 5% of the world's population - and of that figure, only 15% are in developing countries.

The Internet impacts many areas - from employment to environmental protection, health and education. It has changed the way people work and look for information. The Internet and E-commerce facilitate the trading of goods and help businesses develop. The Internet may help build a global conscience: improving business ethics through pressure from global public opinion, via Internet communication.

By combining new and old technologies - such as Internet and satellite communication at one end and village radios at the other - and by seeking complementarities between them, the Internet can serve development. In this way, not only are technologies connected, but so are people. In many parts of the world radio still remains the most powerful and practical way of receiving and transmitting information. For example, village radios are invaluable in awareness building and disease prevention campaigns for HIV, TB and other epidemics.

To overcome the obvious disparities between people's access to the information superhighway, countries need to develop solid basic infrastructures and the political will to support investment in new technologies. The Internet could help in providing some of the services of traditional infrastructures. The principles of coherence, complementarity and cooperation between old and new technologies should be observed in designing integrated approaches to telecommunications in the globalized world.