

22 May 2001

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,  
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,  
on the occasion of the International Day for Biological Diversity**

Conservation of biological diversity is one of the great challenges of today. The International Day for Biological Diversity this year addresses a very important theme: Biodiversity and Management of Invasive Alien Species. This has become an issue demanding wisdom, knowledge and concrete action. When invading species - whether they are exotic weeds, pests or diseases - adapt to the environment, a competitive situation is created with the original species that is left with a narrowing margin of survival. As a result, entire ecosystems are changing and being threatened.

The fast spread of exotic species is one of the most serious threats to biological diversity, yet it might be the least acknowledged and most controversial one, because many alien species are economically important. While it is a fact that non-native animal species may be harmful to lands and crops, there are still controversies and differences of opinion. Genetically engineered species are another cause for concern. Today we already know of examples where genetically engineered species pollute the germplasm of the indigenous ones with dire consequences. The inability of some of the crossbreeds of indigenous and genetically modified species to multiply and produce offspring is already a fact today and some species are threatened by extinction due to this phenomenon.

We must address the issues of invasive alien species taking into account the principle of sustainability and the evidence of science. In my view, we should also make decisions regarding management of these environmental risks, which balance the need for economic return with ethics and the desirability of every species to exist.