

25-31 May 2001

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
on the occasion of the observance of the week of solidarity
with the peoples of the non-self-governing territories**

The international community annually observes the week beginning on 25 May, as the Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories.

This year, we begin the Second Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. In this context, the Plan of Action presented by the Secretary-General in 1991 and updated this year, in document A/56/61, constitutes a principled reminder of the work that remains to be done in order to reach the objectives of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples which the General Assembly adopted in December 1960, over four decades ago.

It is thus a time to renew the commitment of the world community to support the aspirations of the peoples of the remaining Territories for the full implementation of resolution 1514 (XV) containing the 1960 Declaration.

The United Nations has made a significant contribution to decolonization. During its existence, many Non-Self-Governing Territories have achieved a self-governing status and many of them have become independent nations. Since 1961, the work of the Organization in the area of decolonization has been carried out by the Special Committee of 24, entrusted by the Assembly with the historic mandate of examining the application of the Declaration and making suggestions and recommendations on the progress and extent of its implementation.

As we observe the Week of Solidarity, the Special Committee of 24, the policy-making organ of the General Assembly on decolonization, is holding its Caribbean Regional Seminar in Havana with the participation of representatives of Member States, the peoples of the Territories, organizations within the United Nations system, experts on the Caribbean as well as representatives of civil society. It should be a unique opportunity to learn more about the current situation in the Territories, particularly those in the Caribbean region, and listen to the views of their inhabitants.

Just a few months ago, I had the privilege of paying a visit to East Timor, a Territory currently administered by the United Nations, which is just emerging into independent life. Although it was a relatively short visit, I was able to experience first hand, the sense of expectation and hope of the East Timorese as they look to the future. The immense challenges a nascent East Timor will face, however, are not greater than the determination with which the Timorese are preparing to assume full responsibility for their destiny as an independent nation.

On this commemorative occasion, we look back with satisfaction at the achievements of the United Nations in the area of decolonization, but more importantly, we look ahead at the concerted work that must be carried out to fulfil the objectives of the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. Obviously, these tasks will require the cooperation of the administering Powers with the Special Committee. There is also much that can be done to assist the Territories, many of which are small islands, by the specialized agencies and United Nations programmes.

In my capacity as President of the General Assembly, I take this opportunity to emphasize the importance of supporting and implementing the decisions of the Assembly on decolonization in order to achieve the ultimate goal of the Second Decade: a world free of colonialism.