

6 June 2001

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,  
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,  
for an Overall Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the  
Habitat Agenda**

I am delighted to welcome you all to the twenty-fifth Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly. First of all, I wish to thank H.E. Mr. Kimmo Sasi, Minister for Foreign Trade of the Republic of Finland, for presiding over the opening of this meeting, prior to my election to this position. I am most grateful, and pledge to superintend the session to a successful conclusion.

We live in an urbanizing world - we may say that we are at the beginning of an Urban Millennium. Less than a year ago the leaders of the world gathered here in this same hall at the Millennium Summit and expressed their firm commitment to achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million urban slum dwellers by the year 2020. They also resolved to halve poverty by the year 2015. Slums and poverty go together. Therefore, in working for better urban housing, we work towards reducing poverty.

Five years ago in Istanbul, at the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, the world community assembled and deliberated on how to cope with the increasing physical, economic, social and environmental demands of the rapidly urbanizing world. The collective wisdom of that conference constitutes the Habitat Agenda - a global call to action, at all levels, to improve the conditions and quality of life in the world's cities, towns and villages. The crux of the Habitat Agenda is to ensure adequate shelter for all and to make human settlements safer, healthier, more pleasant to live in, equitable, and productive. The Habitat Agenda also pays attention to the promotion of gender equality and to the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate sustainable development and the well-being of people.

In its resolution 52/190 the General Assembly decided to hold this Special Session of the General Assembly to review and appraise progress made to implement the Habitat Agenda - what have we accomplished in the five years since Istanbul, at local, regional, and international levels, and what will need to be done in the future. In the preceding months, during the preparatory phase of this session, many important and innovative ideas have surfaced through the regional preparatory process.

This special session is innovative in its structure. For the first time we are having a Thematic Committee, to share experiences from different corners of the world and to learn from each other. In the programme of this committee we will have the opportunity to listen to examples of implementation of many important issues and aspects pertaining to shelter, social development

and eradication of poverty, environmental management, governance, effective city development strategies and financing for urban development.

In the development of human settlements the local government, civil society, trade unions, academia, various community groups, and also the parliamentarians, are important partners for governments and the international community - I am referring here to the Habitat Agenda Partners. I am happy to say that many of those partners are participating in this special session. I believe that people and partnerships constitute an important resource for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

With these few introductory words let me now call on the Secretary General of the United Nations, His Excellency, Mr. Kofi Annan.