

14 June 2001

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
at a seminar on girls' education under the theme
"I missed it but give me another chance"**

I have the pleasure to welcome you all to this seminar on an extremely important topic: girls' education. My warm welcome particularly to our speakers today, who come from different corners of the world to elucidate how girls' education is addressed in their particular situations, and how my own country, Finland, is contributing towards girls' education.

We all know that in the Millennium Declaration we resolved to ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, would be able to complete a full course of primary schooling, and that girls and boys would have equal access to all levels of education. This commitment reconfirms the Dakar Framework of Action, "Education for All" of April 2000, which by the same time frame, seeks to ensure that in particular girls, children in difficult circumstances, and those belonging to ethnic minorities, would have access to completely free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

The United Nations provides a framework for many international instruments. However, I am saddened by the fact that in spite of all these international agreements, commitments and conferences to promote universal education for all, more than 110 million children, most of them in the developing world, are denied a basic right - the right to education. Two thirds of these 110 million children are girls. They also constitute the majority of school dropouts.

I want to be optimistic. There has been some progress: since the 1960s, school enrolment and the literacy rate of girls and women has improved in many parts of the world.

I strongly believe that when the right to education becomes the norm, the whole world gains. When women and girls, future mothers, are educated, whole nations are educated. This conviction of mine has undisputedly been proven true by statistics.

I wish you well in your interesting deliberations on this important issue: the education of girls, with particular emphasis on giving them a second chance.