

27 June 2001

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
at the conclusion of the General Assembly special session on
HIV/AIDS**

An historic special session of the General Assembly has come to an end.

Three days ago, we gathered here in New York to unite in a massive global commitment to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic, responding to a global crisis of unprecedented scale. Despite the overwhelming statistics I highlighted on Monday, and the human suffering they represent, there is hope. Speakers in the plenary and in the round tables emphasized that we have clearly reached a turning point - either we will reach out to those who need this hope most, or we will be held responsible for not acting when we have the chance.

This special session is also historic in the sense that it takes place only six months after the General Assembly decided to convene the session to mount an urgent response to this global crisis. An enormous amount of work has been put in by all of us to make this happen.

During these three days Member States, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations agencies, civil society and private sector partners came together in round table discussions, panels, workshops and countless meetings in corridors and cafes to share experiences, make new contacts and explore potential collaboration in mounting an expanded response to the epidemic. This special session gave ample evidence of how the United Nations can benefit from working with partners in civil society and the private sector.

The Declaration of Commitment just adopted by Member States is the first global "battle plan" against AIDS. It contains concrete targets for all of us to implement. It also contains mechanisms to follow-up - how those targets are to be reached. The beauty and significance of this Declaration of Commitment is in its pragmatic and straight-forward approach.

By adopting the Declaration, the world has made a commitment to scale up efforts with specific targets and time frames in all critical areas including prevention, care, treatment and support. The Declaration is a call for leadership and commitment at all levels in all countries; it is a framework for broad partnerships, and a tool for specific strategies, involving communities, young people and people living with HIV/AIDS, to turn the tide of the epidemic.

The Declaration is also a global call for the resources that we so urgently need. In this regard, the establishment of a global fund has been welcomed, and a number of countries have announced pledges both to the fund and to the fight against AIDS.

In closing, I should like to extend, once again, my special thanks to the two facilitators, Ambassador Wensley of Australia and Ambassador Ka of Senegal. Their commitment and non-yielding determination, matched by the tireless efforts of all of you, and your resolve to find a solution to difficult and sensitive issues, brought us to a positive conclusion of this special session. Let me also express my appreciation to the chairmen of the round tables.

I should also like to thank the secretariats, General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, the UNAIDS team for all their hard work, and every other department in this house who worked countless hours to make this special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS indeed very special.

Let me finish by saying that we worked hard, but in fact, the real work only starts now - with new determination and vision.