

28 June 2001

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
at the 4th Annual Summit on Staff Security**

It is my pleasure to address this fourth annual Summit on Staff Security, as we need to maintain high visibility of our discussion on the issue of protection, safety and security of UN staff.

It is a serious concern that the number of incidents and casualties increased in the 1990s: there were over 200 deaths in the past ten years. I would like to emphasize that every death, injury, detention and assault against international and national humanitarian personnel is a violation against international humanitarian law.

The international humanitarian and human rights standards must be strengthened in this field. We already have two important legal tools at our disposal. According to the statute of the International Criminal Court, attacking humanitarian or peacekeeping personnel working under the UN Charter is a war crime. The Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel was established in 1994 and it entered into force in January 1999. I strongly urge all Member States who have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Convention.

I appeal to all member States to fully implement these two international agreements. We should signal a clear message that humanitarian workers cannot be attacked with impunity.

The training of personnel at high-risk duty stations has become an important dimension of our field operations. The training aims to raise awareness about security matters, to recognize the signs of circumstances that may lead to ambush or being in the wrong place at the wrong time. It is necessary to train staff to react and behave in a dangerous situation in a manner, which would help them to protect themselves.

Besides these precautionary measures, stress management and counseling may be needed. Also the General Assembly special session on HIV/AIDS, which concluded yesterday has relevance for the personnel. Training programmes at the field should include an element of increasing awareness on HIV/AIDS.

Staff on assignment in difficult and dangerous situations frequently risk their lives and health. I am happy to note that these risks are being addressed by agencies and through coordination and co-operation among them. The agencies have joined efforts within the Administrative Committee on Coordination giving a high priority to the issue. Staff security is under constant review and appraisal. The Administrative Committee on Coordination has also called upon organizations to ensure that their staff fully participate in security training programmes.

The UN has responsibility for the safety and security of its staff, "to protect the protectors". As President of the General Assembly, I appeal to the Security Council and the Secretary-General to continue to take action to improve the safety and security of United Nations and associated personnel.

Host Governments have the primary duty to protect humanitarian personnel under their jurisdiction. As it may be difficult at times to maintain law and order, the international community must strive to reach political settlement of conflicts and instabilities. In conflict situations. Therefore, we should not forget our co-workers who are UN partners in the field and who face the same dangers. It is as important to recognize the casualties of locally recruited personnel, as for international staff.

I would like to pay tribute to all staff members who have lost their lives, been injured or are held captive, as well as to those missing whose fate remains unknown. Family members and friends of these victims and staff members need our support

I would like to express my gratitude to personnel currently working in an insecure and sometimes violent and hostile environment. They follow the call of duty, which makes this organization so invaluable to people in need. Without their courage the UN could not fulfil some of its main goals of peace and development. We should do everything within our power to guarantee respect for the principles and rules of international humanitarian law.