

9 August 2001

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
on the occasion of the International Day of the World's Indigenous
People**

Today we join the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to celebrate the International Day of the World's Indigenous People as part of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People taking place between 1995-2004.

The challenges facing indigenous societies today are many. They range from human rights, education and the environment to issues of development, health and culture. An important goal of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People is to strengthen international cooperation on these issues. Through special projects and programmes, priority is given to cooperation between indigenous groups and the international community.

The indigenous agenda is indeed expanding, and a manifestation of this development is the creation of a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, whose focal areas include health, environment and human rights. The High Commissioner for Human Rights is the designated leading body for the Permanent Forum.

It is my view that indigenous people can be empowered by harnessing knowledge and information to serve indigenous cultures and concerns. However, this should be done in consultation with the people themselves, because they are the ones who know best their situation and needs. Making consultation an integral part of the planning and implementation processes of programmes would enhance the outcome of such endeavours and create an involvement on the part of the concerned groups - taking into account also the diversity of cultures and forms of social organization.

I believe that contributions to the socio-economic, cultural and environmental advancement of indigenous people will eventually prove to be an enhancement of the entire world. In the spirit of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People - and its theme "Partnership in Action" - I offer my strong support for the cause of indigenous people and commend the efforts made so far by the leading agencies concerned.