

3 September 2001

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
at a Reception hosted by H.E. Mr. Sefhiri Motanyane, Acting
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Lesotho**

First of all, I wish to thank the Minister for his kind words and, above all, for the hospitality extended to my party and me during our stay in Lesotho. I was deeply honoured to have the opportunity to address the Parliament today, as well as for the meetings with Prime Minister Mosisili and His Majesty King Letsie. In our discussions last night and this morning, Mr. Minister, we had a very interesting exchange of views and experiences. This visit, which is now only halfway over, will certainly remain as one of the most memorable and pleasant experiences of my Presidency.

As I told all my interlocutors today, I wanted to visit Lesotho, not only to encourage the courageous steps being taken to strengthen the democratic process but also to show appreciation of the UN for small Member States who are among the Organization's strongest supporters. I also wished to thank your Government for its incentive to build, at its own cost, the UN House in Maseru and donating it for use by all UN Agencies. I visited the House this afternoon and met with representatives of the UN system. Let me once again say that your Government's unprecedented gesture is much appreciated.

I also wished to congratulate your country's leadership, also in the light of this past June's General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS, in the fight against the pandemic in Lesotho.

As to the general elections, which should take place next year, I congratulated the King, the Prime Minister and the political parties of Lesotho - and let me also congratulate its people - on having reached the necessary agreements for these elections to go forward. I wish to again note the enormous achievement of a negotiated end to previous difficulties and encourage continued political dialogue among the political parties to ensure free and fair elections.

I am certain that the UN will lend its continued support to your efforts in this regard. The Organization needs success stories of political reconciliation and social and economic development. Lesotho being a member of the group of Least Developed Countries, LDSs, must also get the support that the international community has committed itself to, most recently at the Third UN Conference on LDSs in Brussels in May. I sincerely hope that the Programme of Action adopted at the conference will be duly followed up and implemented by the donor community. The LDCs themselves have on many instances already walked the extra mile to earn that support.

Both Lesotho and Finland where I come from are small countries. We cannot afford to have resident Ambassadors in each other's capitals. Our new Ambassador shall shortly present her credentials, and you continue to be accredited to Helsinki from Copenhagen. At the same time, the United Nations, home to all 189 Member States, can serve as an important venue for bilateral contacts. As for my part, I have had the privilege of working closely with your Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Mangoaela, and I know that the same goes for the Finnish Permanent Representative as well. I wish to extend my gratitude to him for having supported me during this past year.