

10 September 2001

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Concluding Session of the 55th General Assembly of the
United Nations**

As this 55th session of the General Assembly draws to a close, I feel deeply honored and privileged to have served as its President. That this session was designated the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations - and launched by the largest-ever gathering of world leaders and the adoption of the historic Millennium Declaration - made my task a particular challenge.

A year ago, I set prompt and effective follow-up to the Millennium Summit as one of the key priorities of my term. The Declaration was not to be left without attention worthy of its historic status. In December, the Assembly adopted a resolution outlining the follow-up action. Its emphasis was in calling for maximum use of existing structures and upcoming conferences and events. For once, new mechanisms were not envisaged.

During the past months, the Declaration has helped set the agenda and outcome of a series of major conferences. From the LDC conference through the special sessions on Habitat and HIV/AIDS to the recent conferences on small arms and racism, the Declaration has provided an important backdrop. For my part, I have underlined to each and every conference the importance of the Summit follow-up. I have also advocated an integrated approach in this follow-up. Such an approach should also be reflected in the road map document prepared by the Secretariat, to be issued imminently.

The United Nations is, however, still far from a truly integrated follow-up to the Summit. The same goes for the entire agenda of last decade's global conferences, which is too often approached on a piecemeal basis. Unfortunately, both Member States and the respective entities of the Secretariat seem to be unable to break the habit of viewing and considering different issues in isolation. Proper focus is needed, but in the overall context of the global agenda.

To a great extent, the piecemeal approach results from lack of coordination. To improve coordination, my Office convened a series of meetings for representatives of the bureaus and secretariats of the various events, so as to exchange information and help them learn from one another's experiences. Even then, one was not able to avoid reinventing the wheel on a number of issues. This was particularly clear on the issue of civil society participation, where the Organization would clearly benefit from the adoption of more uniform modalities for major conferences. Having been involved in preparations and discussions, as well as chaired special sessions and participated in different conferences, it has become evident to me that the Organization needs uniform modalities on civil society participation in conferences now that civil society participation is so much part of every day life of the UN.

This brings me to the issue of civil society partnership - another theme which I have kept high on my agenda, in the spirit of the Millennium Declaration. I have advocated strengthened partnerships with civil society, including the private sector, for the Organization to be successful and relevant in the midst of the challenges of globalization. I would like to recognize the valuable work done by civil society, from the field to UN Headquarters, working towards the same universal goals as this Organization.

During my term, civil society took an active and visible part in the work of two special sessions of the General Assembly and the three UN conferences. To help delegations make sense out of the differing modalities for civil society participation in major conferences, my Office put together a compendium of past practices. I also acted as a patron for a highly productive symposium on the issue of civil society partnerships. Responding to numerous requests from Member States, I have asked that both the compendium and the synopsis of that symposium be issued as official documents of the General Assembly.

During this past year, I have attempted to gradually make the work of the General Assembly more effective and efficient. Many of you have come to know this through the small steps that I have taken. I have tried to be consistent and persistent, dispensing unhappiness in equal doses to all.

It is, however, in bigger issues that the work of making the Assembly more relevant must be continued. If we cannot reform its agenda and its working methods, it will continue to fall short of its potential. The Reform Resolution adopted just a few days ago must be seen as only a beginning in this respect. In particular, the work of the plenary must be reinvigorated. Furthermore, Member States must show greater restraint in requesting the inclusion of new items on its agenda; otherwise, the work of the plenary will eventually become clogged and the institution itself irrelevant.

The Office of the President of the General Assembly will also have to be given resources and servicing commensurate with its role. One of the observations that I made early on during my term was the lack of continuity from one Presidency to the next. Even if the General Assembly Secretariat provides services to the President, a core team of political officers called for by last Friday's resolution will be needed. That will ensure substantive backstopping and continuity, as well as a much-needed basis for networking with substantive departments.

My attention was caught the other day by an advertisement, which read, "Teamwork is spelled with two letters: W and E". An Organization like the United Nations should be all about teamwork and about a sense of "we". There must be constant interaction between the Charter bodies, each one of them viewing the others as partners. I have had the good fortune of having a very good working relationship with you, Mr. Secretary-General, and have pursued regular meetings with the Presidents of both the Security Council and of ECOSOC. This kind of interaction must be set on a well-established footing. In the spirit of dialogue and openness, I have also established the practice of regular monthly meetings with the chairs of the five regional groups to inform Member States about the work of the Assembly. But to be self-sustaining, this

kind of cooperation needs to include and have the full support of the Secretariat. I believe that an extra effort is needed within the Secretariat to this end.

Pursuing dialogue and openness has also meant full transparency and accessibility. My doors have been open almost 24 hours and I have benefited enormously from the advice and knowledge that you distinguished delegates have given to me. And maybe, now that the President's Office has been listed at my request in the UN phone directory, though only on page 243, the Office will become even more accessible to Member States in the future.

In pursuing transparency, I have tried to make maximum use of my Web site. In addition to my statements and messages, a summary of my daily activities has been posted on the Web site without delay. Coming from a small open society, whose success can in great part be attributed to its openness, I am a great believer in the positive-sum effects of maximum openness - in any Organization.

On the other reform issue, namely that of the Security Council, I have tried to pursue comprehensive reform on different fronts. On day-to-day business I have tried to enhance cooperation and coordination on common issues between the two presidents through our monthly meetings. As President, I have also taken the step of addressing the Security Council on East Timor, a shared responsibility of both bodies. In the context of the Open-ended Working Group, as Chairman of that group I have tried, together with my two able vice-chairs, to make progress in identifying the key aspects of the reform process.

As President of the Assembly I have been mandated to follow up the implementation of the Summit Declaration and I believe that the Declaration implied that there is a renewed willingness to move forward on the reform.

I approached the Ministers for foreign affairs of Member States for their help in exploring the best ways to meet the mandate of the Millennium Declaration to intensify efforts to achieve a comprehensive reform of the Security Council in all its aspects. Based on the responses I have received from the ministers, I should like to make the following observations.

All replies stressed the importance of Security Council reform while recognizing its great sensitivity. In light of the Summit outcome, many expressed their concern at the slow progress. There is a common recognition that the Council needs to reflect the realities of the 21st century to better serve the interests of peace and security. The Foreign Ministers also, of course, drew attention to specific aspects which they considered of particular importance.

The main question, however, is how to fulfill the Summit mandate and move forward after 8 years of discussion to a stage of negotiations. The response I received in this respect was multifaceted. There is a general agreement that the Working Group has made some progress, and has had an effect on the working methods of the Security Council. But the main issues of the reform are still open. Many ministers stressed that while the Working Group has worked well as

an initial discussion forum, the time may have come to consider other avenues that would advance this process.

In this respect three suggestions raised in the replies become critical. Firstly, the suggestion that discussion should be moved to a higher political level, be it a Special Session or High Level meeting, to enable us to generate sufficient political will to reach general agreement on this complex issue. Secondly, the suggestion that whilst the goal must remain a comprehensive reform of the Security Council in all its aspects, Governments may want to consider approaching this goal with a focused approach and by moving forward step by step - as we have done in the context of General Assembly reform. In any organization, reform can never be final. It is a continuous process aiming to adapt to changing circumstances. Thirdly, the scope of reform as defined in the Working Group's agenda is gathering overwhelming support, hence the question of veto needs to be part of these discussions.

Finally, all replies stressed that efforts on Security Council reform should continue. To sustain the impetus of the Millennium Summit and to resolve the stalemate, I urge all Member States to engage more actively in this process in order to move from discussions into negotiations. It should have a high priority on the agenda of the United Nations and its Member States, if we are to maintain the United Nations as the main actor in the maintenance and restoration of international peace and security.

The elements are all discussed in the Open-ended working group, and the political will was demonstrated by the Millennium Declaration. We just have to bring them together. It is now up to the representatives of those very same Member States to turn that political will into reality and results. The UN cannot afford to fail in the reform of the Security Council.

The Millennium Declaration is a manifestation by world leaders of global consensus and a shared vision and shared responsibility for the future of humankind. Our responsibility is a key dimension of globalization, which in my opinion has been too often overlooked. One of the most important Millennium targets is to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty - on less than one dollar a day - by the year 2015. Several other Millennium targets are intertwined with poverty and underline its cross-sectoral nature.

To tackle poverty, we need to understand its multidimensional character and address all its root causes in a holistic manner. This cannot be left to markets and macroeconomics alone, neither should the speed of change force us to overemphasize the short-term objectives. Attaining the Millennium targets and eradicating poverty requires a long-term vision to build human capital and sustainable people-centered development in communities and societies.

The national governments have the main responsibility for implementing the Declaration, but they cannot be left to handle this enormous task alone: the international community and the United Nations system must assist country-driven processes. In this regard, national and international policies and actions are mutually supportive. At all levels, people's needs should guide our policy-making and discussions.

The Millennium agenda on peace and development present a major policy challenge for both developed and developing countries. These goals are realistic and within our range through partnerships and cooperation. The global community has massive human, technical, technological, and financial resources. Our awareness of the policies required is more advanced than ever. In this regard, the issue of development finance is critical and requires the participation of all Ministers of Finance in next year's conference. We need to put into effect our strong political will and commitment, as demonstrated by the Heads of State and Government at the Millennium Summit.

It is my hope that this commitment will also guide the discussion when issues related to Africa are considered during the next session. Having visited the African continent twice during my tenure, and as chairperson of the open-ended Working Group on Africa, I feel a special responsibility for development in Africa.

Since its adoption, I considered last December's agreement on the new scale of assessments one of the highlights of the Assembly's work this session. From several Delegations, it required painstaking efforts and a unique sense of vision about what would be in the best interest of the Organization. It was to put the Organization on a sounder financial footing.

Lately, this optimism has become somewhat tempered. We are no longer sure whether the historic agreement will become reality in all its aspects. It would be catastrophic for the Organization if it were not. I therefore call on the largest contributor to act without delay in accordance with what was agreed upon, and to which its Government has committed itself. Other key issues on our agenda that we were able to consider successfully included the important report by the Brahimi panel on peacekeeping, and the subsequent comprehensive review of peacekeeping. We have also launched consideration of the Conflict Prevention report in all relevant organs of the UN as well as by civil society and the Assembly will come back on this issue some time next year. The consideration of these reports has reflected a high degree of willingness by Member States to help maintain the relevance of the UN. I truly hope that a most important mandate of the Organization, maintenance of international peace and security, will continue to be high on the agenda of Member States. The many promises made during the Millennium Summit must be kept, so that the Organization can meet the challenges it is facing with added resources and improved planning and preparedness.

In all, I wish to extend my sincerest gratitude to Member States for their constructive and pro-UN efforts during my term. Without your support, my agenda would have remained unfulfilled. I am convinced that this Organization remains, in the eyes of the vast majority of Member States, indispensable.

My thanks also go to all of you individually. Both at the professional and at the personal level, I have been privileged by the support and friendship of some of the finest people in the diplomatic service. I want to express my special thanks to members of the General Committee, chairpersons of the six main committees as well as the Vice-Presidents of the Assembly, many of whom have presided over the plenary meetings in my absence. I also wish to give special recognition to the

vice-chairmen of the open-ended working groups, as well as to my facilitators for various issues, in particular the revitalization of the General Assembly.

I also wish to extend my thanks to the Secretariat, from top to bottom. You, Mr. Secretary-General, provide us with inspiration and encouragement, and give a human face to this Organization. Your deputy, a position created by the previous reform round, Mme. Frechette, is indispensable to you in running this Organization and she has shown great leadership even in difficult moments. Among the Under-Secretaries-General, a special tribute goes to Mr. Yongjiang Jin, who retired just a few weeks ago to return to his native China. He and all of his team lent me invaluable support during these past twelve months.

Finally, I wish to extend my very best wishes for success to my most esteemed successor, President designate of the 56th session of the General Assembly, H.E. Han Seung-soo, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Korea. I have no doubt that he will make an excellent President of the Assembly. I wish him well.