

21 December 2001

**Statement of H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo,
President of the 56th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Close of the Main Part of the 56th Session of the General
Assembly**

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The General Assembly is coming to the close of the main part of its 56th session. As this is the last meeting over which I will preside this year, with the understanding that one more meeting will be chaired by an acting President, I would like to share some of my observations and thoughts on what we have achieved so far through our work and deliberations.

As we all know, this has been very busy and unusual three months for all of us. The General Assembly started its session in a most extraordinary situation in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 11 September. Owing to the rescheduling of the general debate, the Special Session on children, and other events, our work was disrupted and had to be reorganized. But I am pleased to say that we have met this challenge and were not deterred by these unexpected constraints in the pursuit of our common goals of global peace and progress. Indeed, we have devoted ourselves to the tasks before us with unflagging dedication and enthusiasm.

We held our general debate in only seven days with the participation of 187 delegations, including 41 Heads of State and Government, 9 Deputy Prime Ministers, and 96 Foreign Ministers, which required extraordinary arrangements such as extended meeting hours and limited speech time. In this regard, I wish to mention that I have received generally favorable responses from Member States about the newly introduced methods of conducting the general debate.

Prior to that, we had five days of plenary meetings devoted to a debate on terrorism as well as a two-day meeting on the theme of "Dialogue among Civilizations." Particularly in the context of our pressing concern with terrorism, this dialogue had special significance in promoting inter-cultural understanding. As we look back on all those events, the magnitude and intensity of our work are reflected in the statistics. Since 12 September by the time of recess, the General Assembly will have considered 143 items out of a total of 177 agenda items and adopted 292 resolutions on them.

Among the many important issues we have addressed, combating terrorism was perhaps the highest priority. The General Assembly reacted swiftly to the events of 11 September by adopting a strong resolution (A/56/1) and reaffirmed its determination to fight international terrorism through the week-long debate on "Measures to eliminate international terrorism," with the participation of a record number of Member States.

Progress has also been made in strengthening the legal framework against international terrorism, through the work of the Sixth Committee. The General Assembly requested the Ad Hoc Committee to elaborate a draft comprehensive convention as a matter of urgency and urged States that have not yet done so to consider, as a matter of priority, and also in accordance with the pertinent Security Council resolution, becoming parties to relevant conventions and protocols.

Being the first session of the General Assembly after the historic Millennium Assembly of last year, our meetings made major advances in carrying out and following up the Millennium Declaration. The Assembly noted with appreciation the road map report of the Secretary-General dated 6 September 2001 and recommended that the road map be considered a useful guide in the implementation of the Declaration by the United Nations system. The Secretary-General has been requested to prepare an annual report and a quinquennial comprehensive report on progress achieved by the United Nations system and Member States towards implementing the Declaration.

In the area of disarmament and international security, the terrorist attacks of 11 September had an important impact on our deliberations. Delegates strengthened their efforts in pursuit of real and substantive disarmament measures aimed at making the world a safer place for all mankind. In the course of the discussions in the nuclear field, a number of Member States continued to stress that nuclear weapons posed a threat to mankind and that the best way to deal with this would be through the total elimination of such weapons. At the same time, Member States called for stricter controls to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons as well as to prevent such weapons from falling into the hands of terrorists. Issues concerning other weapons of mass destruction were also addressed with a renewed sense of urgency and recognition of the danger of proliferation. As for conventional weapons, emphasis was placed on the positive outcome of the 2001 United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

On the economic and social fronts, the Assembly faced a challenging task in dealing with various issues, with much of the global attention focused on the fight against terrorism and the world economy moving perilously close to a global recession. Given these difficult overall conditions, I am pleased with the progress that has been made in a number of important areas.

At the beginning of the session, we placed great hope in the Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organization that was to be held in Doha in November to re-energize global trade as an engine for growth and development. We were not disappointed. The outcome of that meeting should provide a very positive impetus also for the ongoing preparations of both the International Conference on Financing for Development and the World Summit for Sustainable Development. These events, considered together, are critical for the implementation of the Millennium Declaration and the achievement of international development targets. The Assembly has taken a number of necessary steps to keep these processes on track, and in particular, has maintained its focus on the eradication of poverty.

In this regard, I am pleased to note the action taken by the Assembly, in fulfillment of a commitment undertaken by the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries last May, to create an Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Countries and Small Islands Developing States. Encouraged by the very positive reception by the Assembly of the New Partnership for Africa's Development and the review of UN NADAF next year, the High Representative will, I believe, be in an excellent position to advocate the cause of all LDCs, so many of which are in Africa.

Sustainable development concerns will be addressed in a comprehensive fashion at the Summit in Johannesburg next year. Now that the Assembly has determined the new date for the event, I encourage all Member States to ensure participation in the Summit at the highest level. The Assembly's work on various environmental conventions as well as the positive outcome of the Marrakesh meeting on climate change are welcome contributions to the preparations for the Summit.

In the field of humanitarian assistance, the Assembly reaffirmed the crucial importance of continuing to strengthen humanitarian coordination and to ensure that such coordination evolves in light of the changing humanitarian environment. In order to deal with perennial natural disasters, Member States underscored the need for strengthening international cooperation to enhance the national and regional capacities of developing countries for disaster preparedness and response.

Regarding the situation in Afghanistan, this year marked a turning point in our debate on this issue that has been on the agenda of the General Assembly since 1980. In response to the rapidly changing situation in Afghanistan, the General Assembly and the Security Council have taken coordinated measures to restore peace and security and to reconstruct the war-ravaged nation. Member States particularly welcomed the establishment of an interim authority, which will lead to the formation of a new Afghanistan government at a later stage. The efforts of the Secretary-General and his Special Representative to promote peace and security in that country were also warmly appreciated by Member States. It is especially commendable that the United Nations has responded promptly and concretely to the massive needs of the Afghan people for humanitarian assistance. I would like to note, in particular, that the Assembly called on the international community to provide all possible humanitarian assistance as well as post-conflict reconstruction assistance for the Afghan population.

The preparations for the upcoming second World Assembly on Ageing were also given an impetus. Member States are now considering the draft International Strategy to result from that meeting. I am also very pleased with the Assembly's growing recognition, in many different areas, of the critical contribution of NGOs and of civil society in general to the search for solutions to the many challenges we continue to face in the economic, social and related fields. The role of the global women's movement has long been highly valued as a driving force behind the United Nations' efforts to promote equality and empowerment of women. Multi-stakeholder participation has also become established practice in areas as diverse as health and immunization, the well-being of children, and harnessing the potential of information and communications

technologies for development. It is noteworthy, therefore, that the Assembly has made good progress this year towards forging global partnerships. I also look forward to the Assembly's contribution to bridging the digital divide.

As we have striven to deal with the many challenges facing this session, I think we were all especially gratified to learn of the award of the Nobel Peace Prize jointly to the United Nations and to its Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. Various UN agencies have received the prize before, but this was the first time that the United Nations as a whole was thus honoured. Let me reiterate that I believe this award should be viewed as both a recognition of past achievements and a summons to move forward toward our goals with renewed energy and dedication. Every member of the UN "family" has a share in this unique honor as well as a share of the added responsibility that comes with it. This is something I felt very keenly when I accepted the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the United Nations earlier this month in Oslo.

If the past 100 days have taught us anything, it is that even the most universal of human values must never be taken for granted. The global community must be constantly alert to the threat posed to those values from whatever source it may come. If, as has been said, "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance," the price of a civilized and humane international order is no less.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all delegates for their constructive participation in the meetings despite the constraints that we faced. Without their resolute determination to achieve our goals in the true spirit of cooperation, the General Assembly would never have come this far. I wish to thank in particular the Vice-Presidents, who have kindly taken my place on many occasions, and the Chairmen, Vice-Chairmen and Rapporteurs of the Main Committees, who did excellent work within an extremely tight time frame.

My heartfelt appreciation also goes to our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, whose guidance and advice were indispensable in conducting the business of this Assembly. Mr. Chen Jian and his dedicated staff of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services as well as my own office staff have consistently provided top-quality, professional assistance. I am immensely grateful to them and all other members of the Secretariat, including the security officers and interpreters, and also to many others whom I have not mentioned.

Let me offer you, in conclusion, my very best wishes for the holiday season and for the coming New Year. I look forward to meeting you again, revived and refreshed, when we resume our work in 2002.

Thank you.