

7 April 2002

**Statement of H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo,
President of the 56th Session of the General Assembly,
on World Health Day**

Every year on 7 April we commemorate World Health Day, for which the World Health Organization chooses an annual theme. The theme for 2002 is “Move for Health,” which highlights the importance of exercise and physical movement in maintaining good health and preventing disease. I believe that this theme well complements that of last year, which emphasized the importance of mental health. As almost all cultures have recognized, physical and mental well being cannot be separated from each other, but are two sides of the same coin.

Lack of physical activity is a major contributing factor to such non-communicable diseases as cardiovascular diseases and diabetes. It has been proven that inactivity substantially increases the risk of high blood pressure, obesity, lipid disorders, osteoporosis, depression and anxiety. WHO estimates that lack of physical activity leads to more than two million deaths a year, and by 2002 about 70% of all persons with diseases will be suffering from non-communicable diseases.

Regular physical activity is one of the easiest ways to improve and maintain health. It can lower rates of violence among young people, discourage tobacco consumption and decrease other risky behaviours such as unsafe sex and drug abuse. Furthermore, it can also reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness among the older persons and improve their physical and mental agility.

In order to promote physical activity, we need to change our environment and promote policies that encourage people to be active. Communities should give high priority to developing parks and open spaces and safe and attractive streets, which are highly conducive to a vibrant public life. Clean air and water are equally important to a healthy, active community and should be at the top of the public policy agenda. Policymakers and health practitioners need to recognize that prevention is the most cost-effective approach to dealing with public health issues. As the old saying goes, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

Finally, I hope that World Health Day 2002 will give visibility to ways in which individuals and communities can influence their own health in body and mind. Thank you.