

3 May 2002

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

Every year on the 3rd of May, the world observes World Press Freedom Day. Established by the General Assembly in 1993, this is the day we celebrate a cornerstone of human interaction and inter-communal understanding.

The day was one of the results of a Seminar on Promoting an Independent and Pluralist African Press, which was held in Namibia in 1991. Other regional seminars have been held since, each emphasizing the importance of a free press but also pointing out the responsibilities attached to this freedom. Press freedom is a basic human right which, if exercised professionally, independently and without bias, can help build democratic practices, educate the general public and curb abuse, corruption and mismanagement in both the private and public sector. However, the freedom of expression has sometimes been used as a foil for inciting hatred, prejudice and even genocide, as has been so horrifically demonstrated in the last decade.

The theme for this year's observance of World Press Freedom Day is Terrorism and Media. Since September 11, we have seen the world struggle to find a balance between the need to fight terrorism and the need to preserve the freedom of expression, a right for which so many have fought so hard for so many years. Terrorism, targeting innocent civilians in general and often journalists in particular, is abhorrent and, to me, illogical as it is alienating the very institution whose obligation it is to reflect the diversity of views. Likewise, curbing press freedom in the name of fighting terrorism could generate a degree of sympathy for the perpetrators. As the American poet and essayist Henry David Thoreau said, "It takes two to speak the truth – one to speak and another to hear."

Finally, the third of May is the day we pay tribute to the far too many journalists who have lost their lives trying to inform us of what is going on in almost every corner of the world, but particularly in zones of conflict or crisis. Every day, these dedicated professionals subject themselves to the dangers represented by accidents, natural disasters, landmines and, increasingly, to the deliberate targeting by the parties to a conflict. The latter hazard is totally unacceptable, and I would like to take this opportunity to urge state and non-state actors alike to take all measures possible to make the media profession a less dangerous one.