

26 November 2002

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan,
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly,
on World AIDS Day**

Madam Deputy Secretary General
Excellencies, Distinguished Participants
Ladies and Gentlemen

I have the honour to welcome you all to this Town Hall Meeting, to observe the World Aids Day, with the recognition to the theme of " Live and let live, Stigma and Discrimination."

The deep personal commitment of the Secretary General, and the United Nations General Assembly in engaging the world leaders and society at the Special Session on HIV/AIDS last year, has focused the World's attention to HIV/AIDS and generated a global resolve to effectively fight this epidemic. Many countries that were previously in denial that this epidemic existed in their territories, have now openly acknowledged the problem and are joining the world community to arrest its spread.

There are over 42 million adults and children living with AIDS, of which, some 14 million are orphaned children. These horrific statistics speak for themselves. The stigma attached to HIV/AIDS and the discrimination against those suffering from the disease, are still keeping many nations and communities in denial of acknowledging this epidemic in their midst, contributing to its spread and further loss of life. The disavowal of HIV/AIDS victims by society in these communities, ranges from refusal of health care services to eviction from their homes. The World Aids Day campaign aims to focus on all elements that play a part in effective prevention and care to arrest the spread of the disease. I am convinced that the removal of stigma and discrimination are key elements in this effort.

We wish to thank the distinguished guests who have so generously given their time and who will share with us their thoughts and experiences publicly, thus supporting the work of the Secretary General and the United Nations family to help to lend transparency to this social issue and assist to remove the stigma and shame attached to it.

Thank you.