

1 December 2002

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

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is the most devastating and challenging of epidemics faced by mankind. Its rapid spread across the globe and the stigma and discrimination accompanying the disease, has already taken a major toll in human lives. It is the fourth largest global killer. Its impact on entire households, on the economy, on health workers, on education, on enterprises and development, is potentially catastrophic. It is not an epidemic that seems to have a natural course of coming to an end. United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) has categorized this status of the epidemic as an "early stage". We therefore need to work together globally at all levels and across all sectors to control this epidemic and bring it to an end.

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. The current projections estimate that an additional 45 million persons could become infected with HIV in the next 8 years if the pandemic is unchecked. 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.

The Declaration of Commitment that emanated from the UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS, provides specific guidelines for Governments to follow and act upon. There is a determined commitment amongst the United Nations family, including through the work of Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), to enhance coordination and transparency and mobilize the world community to this challenge.

I would like to thank the many workers, distinguished personalities around the world who have so generously given their time, as advocates, as counsellors, as care givers, and who have shared with us their thoughts and experiences publicly, thus supporting the work of the Secretary

General and the United Nations in our determination to fight this pandemic, and have helped to lend transparency to this social issue thereby assisting to remove the stigma and shame attached to it.