

10 December 2002

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

On December 10, 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The preamble to the Declaration states: "...the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of man and woman and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom...Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms.."

Unfortunately today, fifty-four years since the adoption of the Declaration, there are many people whose human rights and fundamental freedoms are not respected. People still suffer from discrimination and torture. They are deprived of their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. They live in poverty and hunger, and suffer from the consequences of armed conflict. As the High Commissioner for Human Rights stated in his message for this special day: "...for millions of victims of armed conflict, war represents the daily reality. Men and women are killed, maimed, raped, displaced, detained, tortured, and denied basic humanitarian assistance, and their property destroyed because of war. Children are abducted, forcibly recruited into arms, separated from their families, sexually-exploited, suffer hunger, disease and malnutrition, and are unable to go to school."

Recovery from armed conflict is a long and demanding process, and often not completely successful. The best way to protect the human rights of people in armed conflict is to prevent the conflict in the first place. To be successful, conflict prevention must include preventive diplomacy, preventive deployment, as well as, preventive disarmament. It is crucial for the United Nations to prevent conflicts rather than react to them. The recommendations of the Secretary-General's report on the Prevention of armed Conflict serve as a guide. The United Nations and other international organizations working with world leaders, civil society, NGOs and other stakeholders must do their best to prevent armed conflict in all parts of the world. While the world community is united in its struggle against terrorism, it must find a way to reconcile this with prevention of armed conflict and respect for human rights. Breaching this principle would be an unacceptably high price for our security.

To respect and observe human rights and fundamental freedoms is an ethical imperative. Let us work together towards the full realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.