

21 March 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan,
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly,
on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
and Solidarity with the Peoples Struggling Against Racism and Racial
Discrimination**

On 21 March 1960, the massacre by police, of 69 civilian demonstrators against apartheid's "pass laws", in the township of Sharpeville, South Africa, is only one illustration of the heroic protest of the people of South Africa against racial discrimination. This day was designated by the United Nations General Assembly, as a landmark to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and we begin the entire week of Solidarity with the Peoples Struggling against Racism and Racial Discrimination.

The world community must be aware of the importance of combating racism in order to ensure a better future for all people without any distinction. In September 2001, delegates from Member States, representatives of NGOs and business community met to express their deep concern and to discuss the speedy and comprehensive elimination of all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance as stated in the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in June 1993. The Durban Declaration and Program of Action adopted in September 2002, constitutes a solid foundation for further action and initiatives towards the goal of total elimination of the scourge of racism. Despite continued efforts, racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and acts of violence persist and have even grown in magnitude, incessantly adopting new forms, including tendencies to establish policies based on racial, religious, ethnic, cultural and national superiority or exclusivity. Poverty, underdevelopment, social exclusion and economic disparities are closely associated with racism, and related intolerance. The persistence of racist attitudes and practices, in turn generate more poverty.

Globalization and technology are ushering in an era of bringing people together as a human family based on equality and dignity of the individual regardless of where in the world he or she is located. We have to learn from history to avert future tragedies attributable to racial discrimination and put into effect "a culture of prevention" rather than a culture of reaction. Furthermore, the vicious cycle of poverty maintained through racial and class segregation has to be ruptured if we are to attain one of the most fundamental of the Millennium Goals, namely the eradication of poverty.

The prohibition of racial discrimination is a peremptory norm of international law from which no derogation is permitted. In practice, this norm is not always respected. Governments should implement and enforce appropriate and effective legislation to prevent acts of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and promote a culture of tolerance. I call upon

all Member States to resolutely bring to justice, the perpetrators of crimes motivated by racism and xenophobia. Today, Member States and international organizations must also be aware of their responsibility to ensure that measures taken in the recent struggle against terrorism do not perpetuate racial discrimination. I urge the leaders of every nation, every community to nurture a society that is tolerant and respecting of all cultures.