

7 April 2003

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

Fifty years ago the United Nations designated April 7th as World Health Day to raise awareness of issues affecting our health and well-being. The commemoration this year is focused on the most vulnerable segment of our society - our children. "Healthy Environments for Children," the theme for World Health Day this year, is indeed a timely reminder of the world community's responsibility towards our future generations.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there are six groups of environmental health hazards for children that must be tackled as priority issues. These are household water security, lack of hygiene and poor sanitation, air pollution, vector-borne diseases, chemical hazards, and unintentional injuries brought about by accidents. As a result of these six broad hazards, over 5 million children between birth and 14 years of age die annually, mainly in the developing world. These are appalling statistics because most of these deaths are regarded as preventable.

The dire situation facing children in unhealthy environments is intimately linked with issues such as poverty, lack of adequate nutrition, education and poor sanitary conditions. These issues are included in and have priority within the UN Millennium Development Goals. Because of their importance, WHO has continued to make strides in championing the plight of the vulnerable, mainly because they suffer disproportionately from the consequences of polluted environmental conditions. It is obvious that affording children at least the minimum in environmental standards is necessary to empower them for their future. As such, I believe it is imperative that we continue to push for measures at all levels of society that alleviate these worsening conditions.

Currently, an umbrella coalition, born out of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, of various government sectors, civil society groups and NGOs, the private sector and the United Nations, is working together under the Healthy Environments for Children Alliance (HECA). This collaboration allows members of the Alliance to address and tackle the needs in many communities and countries to develop and implement effective policies in a coherent way, and to raise awareness, with the goal of informing and influencing policy and decision-makers on pertinent measures for protecting and promoting healthy environments for children. I earnestly hope that this partnership can press forward with supplying the urgently needed assistance to communities that are affected by environmental degradation.

I would like to commend the World Health Organization for raising awareness on this issue and urge them and other agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and others to continuously campaign to improve the well-being of children at national policy making levels.

In our rapidly globalizing world, with its enormous potential for information sharing, we hope that the national and local authorities together with multilateral organizations, will continue to adopt and promote integrated solutions to children's health. All Member States of the United Nations unanimously adopted the Millennium Development Goals and among these goals they have pledged to try to reduce the infant mortality rate by two thirds by the year 2015. I would like to convey my good wishes to everyone involved in implementing programmes to achieve the Millennium Goals and hope that the necessary inputs will be made available to those in need by the various partners related to this issue.