

27 May 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan,  
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Opening of the 6th International Nonstop Reading Marathon**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me in particular, to open the International Reading Marathon, here, at the United Nations. This is the 6th year, in which we uphold this tradition of the nonstop reading. Its main aim is to promote authors whose work had and or still has a profound impact universally, on the subject of freedom and human rights. This is not the first time I am actively participating in this event that has evolved from a local endeavor to an international one.

The first Nonstop Reading Marathon took place in Prague in 1998 with the theme Nonstop Lawrence Ferlinghetti, an American author whose work had a significant impact on the Czech Literature of the 1960ies. The Nonstop Reading Marathon has become a continuing tradition and has expanded beyond the borders of the Czech Republic. Today we are in day 3 of the four-day Nonstop Reading Marathon, which began in Prague on 25 May. During this period we have seen and heard readers from Prague, Berlin, Bratislava, Brussels, Stockholm and many other cities taking part in this noble effort.

The theme of this year's Nonstop Reading Marathon is: Life in Truth – Homage to Václav Havel. I think that the chosen theme is very symbolic because this year marked the end of the second and last term of Václav Havel as President of the Czech Republic. He is a leading thinker, an author, an artist and was a prominent dissident. Life in Truth is a celebration of the independent spirit of literature so well reflected and articulated in President Havel's writings. And in a broader sense, this rather informal event pays homage to all the authors, whose writings had helped raise awareness in support of the cause of human rights, freedom and free speech.

I am very pleased to see that many of my friends and colleagues are taking part in the reading, also here at the UN, an organization, whose mission among others is to promote human rights, tolerance and understanding. I am also very pleased that many readers will choose to read in their native language, thus illustrating the diversity of cultures, which constitutes the United Nations. Although there is this vast diversity of cultures here, it is interesting to note that the idea of the truth and of a life in truth is shared throughout the different cultures of this multifaceted world.

I think that literature is a very important part of culture and life itself. Therefore it has to be adequately promoted and this event should also be understood and appreciated in this regard. However to see it successfully completed involves the enthusiastic dedication and coordination among several persons around the globe. In conclusion let me thank the organizers of this event,

Jazzová sekce, a Czech cultural organization, which remained dedicated to the aim of supporting free and independent art. My thanks go also to the United Nations for their cooperation in organizing the third day of the 6th International Reading Marathon here in New York.

I hope that you will enjoy the reading marathon and experience the artist in all diplomats – a somewhat different and unusual performance than their normal professional duties.

Thank you.