

26 June 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan,
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly,
on International Day in Support of Victims of Torture**

This is a day on which we pay our respects to those whose basic human rights were abused, who suffer and who are sometimes forgotten. This day is dedicated to remembering and supporting the many victims and survivors of torture around the world. In 1997 the General Assembly adopted its resolution 52/149 on the recommendation of the Economic and Social Council and proclaimed 26 June United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. June 26 was not chosen at random. It was the day, in 1987, on which the Convention against Torture came into force. It was also the day, in 1945, when the fundamental document of the United Nations and the first international instrument to embody obligations for Member States to promote and encourage respect for human rights, the United Nations Charter, was signed.

Since its establishment, the United Nations has worked towards the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms that include the freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Today more than 130 States have ratified the Convention Against Torture. I noted with appreciation, that during the recent General Assembly session, the international community took another step towards the further improvement of the legal framework of prevention of torture by adoption of the text of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. This allows for visits by independent experts to places where people are detained or otherwise deprived of their liberty.

Despite the efforts of the international community and despite the fact that many national constitutions, criminal codes, laws and regulations proclaim the prohibition of torture, cases of torture are still reported all over the world.

On this special day, I would like to encourage States to ratify all the existing international documents on prevention of torture and to implement all the obligations including the immediate punishment of the perpetrators of such crimes. I also stress the importance of assistance that must be rigorously provided to victims and survivors of torture to overcome the consequences of their experiences. In this connection let me express my gratitude to the non-governmental organizations, private and public entities and individuals for continuing effort to prevent torture, to bring public attention to such cases, to relieve the suffering and assist the recovery of torture victims around the world often with the financial support of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture.

I am convinced that the United Nations will always support the efforts aimed at the elimination of torture and its consequences until this atrocious practice has vanished from the face of the Earth.