

6 October 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,  
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,  
on World Habitat Day**

With more than one billion of the world's people living in slums, World Habitat Day should not only compel us to reflect on their plight, but should also give added impetus to our goal of providing adequate shelter for all.

The urban poor is the focus of this year's World Habitat Day. The theme, "Water and Sanitation in the World's Cities" reminds us that so many of the world's people live without adequate shelter or basic services such as clean water or sanitation. According to the latest report from the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, "The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements 2003", the population of urban slum dwellers could double to two billion within the next thirty years. This is a alarming prospect. It is equally alarming that 40 per cent of the urban population in developing countries live in slums.

The Millennium Declaration, signed by world leaders, commits all member states to take specific action to address issues such as poverty, hunger and shelter. It is fitting, therefore, that the theme for World Habitat Day reinforces the Millennium Development Goals, which aim to achieve, "significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020". The theme provides the context within which we may all work to implement the specific Millennium Development Goal to halve the number of poor people living without clean water or adequate sanitation by 2015.

Access to safe drinking water, proper sanitation and adequate shelter is taken for granted in many countries. But for tens of millions of slum dwellers, a majority of whom live in developing countries, the reality is very different. They are denied the dignity of having a roof over their heads, clean water to drink and proper sanitation. In an age of great leaps in scientific and technological advancement, it is unacceptable that so many people should be so disadvantaged. The world's knowledge and resources would surely best be utilized to improve the quality of life of human beings.

I have placed development at the top of my list of priorities for the fifty-eighth session. I have done so not only to emphasize the imperative of sustainable development but also because global problems such as poverty, hunger and shelter belong to all of us. Therefore, we must all work together - governments, international organizations, civil society and individuals - to ensure that people are given the means to lift themselves out of the morass of poverty and to improve the quality of their lives. We should not wait for our projected statistics about how many will be living in slums, or how many will not have access to clean water and sanitation to become a self-

fulfilling prophecy. We must commit the necessary resources and exercise the political will to fulfill our obligations to the people of the world now.

On this World Habitat Day, let us consider how each of us can work together effectively to meet our goal of providing adequate shelter for all, and to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities. Improving sanitation and water is a key element of meeting the habitat challenge.