

17 October 2000

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,  
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,  
in support of the World March of Women 2000**

I should like to greet you, distinguished women from all over the world, on this International Day to Eradicate Poverty. You have gathered here at the United Nations to deliver your powerful message to end violence and discrimination against women, be it physical, psychological or lack of opportunities and assets. I congratulate the organizers of the World March of Women 2000, which started on the 8th of March 2000, International Women's Day, for the courageous effort and contribution you are making to advocate the need for action.

The Beijing Platform of Action states that "Violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. Violence against women both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms." Extreme poverty and denial of development opportunities, are severe violations of basic human rights. Women constitute more than 70% of the world's poorest. A key entry point to poverty eradication lies in addressing women's needs, including the necessity to make available economic opportunities, political empowerment and education. The literacy rate of women in developing countries is 39%, against 58% for men. Out of 960 million illiterate adults, two-thirds are women. However, women and girls represent half of the population of the world and should have equal opportunities with men and boys.

Physical abuse and violence is a matter of concern for all of us, no matter whether we come from east, west, north or south. Discrimination and violence against women may be also race and minority-related. Women of minority groups, migrant and refugee women and indigenous women are more vulnerable than other women.

Statistics on physical violence and sexual abuse are chilling. During the time it takes to read this note, hundreds of women and girls are abused, violated, raped, mutilated, humiliated - their human dignity nullified. And only a small proportion of rape and other forms of physical violence are ever reported and get into these statistics. Sexual violence and rape not only damage psychologically, but also endanger women's health. HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases are spreading with alarming speed among women and young girls, including children below 18 years of age. The abuser, most frequently, is someone the woman knows: husband, male companion, uncle, cousin, a friend of the family or someone in the neighbourhood, someone whom the girls and the woman should be able to trust and to turn to for help. Within families, girls are more often victims of family violence than boys.

To accomplish true development we need to end discrimination, denial and violence of women and girls.