

15 November 2000

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
at the discussion of the General Assembly on the 2001 special session
of the General Assembly on follow-up to the World Summit for
Children**

It is my pleasure to address this Plenary on agenda item of high importance for the General Assembly: its special session on follow-up to the World Summit of Children.

This special session is of personal interest to me. In September 1990, I had the honor of representing my country at the World Summit for Children. On that occasion, an unprecedented dialogue among 71 world leaders led to a universal appeal to ensure a better future for every child. I had the opportunity of being directly involved in helping galvanise political will at the highest level through an action-oriented agenda devoted to the most fragile component of the social fabric: our children.

Ten years after that unique experience, I share with many the feeling that significant progress has been achieved - and yet many challenges remain in front of us.

As a result of the World Declaration and Plan of Action on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s, attention to children has indeed increased. Virtually every country has now ratified the Convention of the Rights of the Child. The needs and rights of children have also been the subject of major United Nations events held during the 1990s, such as the international conferences on population, on women, on social development and on the human settlements.

However, the suffering of millions of children around the world shows that the goals and commitments of the World Summit for Children remain far from fulfilled. More effective policies and programmes in more countries are urgently required to keep the promise made to children in September 1990.

At the beginning of the new Millennium, we are confident that by focusing on our children as the most vulnerable and cherished part of our societies, we can agree on effective actions to ensure their survival, protection, full development and participation.

In the Millennium Declaration, world leaders renewed the global commitment to children by addressing such specific issues as eradicating poverty, reducing child and maternal mortality, ensuring assistance and protection in cases of armed conflict and humanitarian emergencies, as well as the imperative to give all children, including girls, a basic education of good quality.

This Plenary session is an important step towards this global commitment. In considering the process leading to the special session in September 2001, delegations might wish to bear in mind the spirit which prevailed during the Summit in 1990. As world leaders then declared: "There can be no task nobler than giving every child a better future."