

25 November 2000

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
on the occasion of International Day to Eliminate Violence Against
Women**

Violence against women is a crime against humanity, be it in times of peace or in times of war. There are no excuses to make violence tolerable, be it physical, psychological, sexual abuse, slavery or traditional practices that violate the physical integrity of girls and women.

During the times of war and conflict sexual abuse and rape has become a systematic means of intimidation and fighting strategy. I am proud to note that in the Statute of the International Criminal Court rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization and other forms of sexual violence constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. At this point, I want to commend also the Security Council for the groundbreaking discussion and resolution passed last month during the Namibian Presidency, on Women and Peace and Security. It is time that gender perspective is given due consideration in situations of war and conflict, and their impact on women and girls be assessed. In peace-building and national healing processes women constitute an invaluable but scarcely recognized resource. In this respect, I am pleased to note that in the reform of the peacekeeping operations of the United Nations, gender aspect and the necessity of it, has been recognized.

I wish to extend my thanks and admiration to the many organizations, both within the United Nations family, and also outside, the myriads of large and small women's advocacy and help-groups and non-governmental organizations who are addressing this devastating phenomenon, violence against women, in particular, the domestic violence. In addition to grass-roots level advocacy, also the key institutions such as the judiciary, law enforcement, health care, media and educational systems need to change and become more sensitive to girls' and women's issues, including their fight against violence and abuse. Role models are learned in young age, and therefore, school curricula should be geared towards non-violence and harmony in the society.

There is no shortage of international legal instruments to protect the integrity of every member of the mankind, be it man or woman. What we need is action and commitment to implement these instruments. I would like to highlight here, in particular, the work of UNIFEM, UNFPA, DAW, UNICEF and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and its special rapporteur, to mention a few, for their tireless work and effort to address violence.

A world free of violence should be our goal. May the first milestone be the eradication of violence against women and children.