

8 December 2000

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
on the occasion of 40th Anniversary of the Adoption of the
Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries
and Peoples**

The General Assembly is today observing the 40th anniversary of the adoption the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. This Declaration together with the Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have laid the basis for the role and responsibility of the United Nations in upholding the principle of the right to self-determination.

In December 1960 the representative of Cambodia introducing the draft resolution containing the Declaration, pointed out that the sponsors of the draft were anxious that the Declaration should be yet another step forward in the process of the emancipation of peoples. He also stressed the need by all countries concerned to support the Declaration in order to ensure the peaceful development and freedom for all peoples who had not yet gained independence.

The General Assembly, composed at the time of 99 Member States, adopted the Declaration by an overwhelming majority. Within a year, the Assembly established a Committee to monitor the implementation of the Declaration, and in 1962, it issued a preliminary list of some 64 Non-Self-Governing Territories to which the Declaration applied.

The Declaration proclaimed the necessity of bringing colonialism in all its forms and manifestations to a speedy and unconditional end. The Assembly declared that all peoples have the right to self-determination and that by virtue of that right they may freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. Year after year, the Assembly has reaffirmed the principles enshrined in the Charter and has reiterated that the administering Powers have a special responsibility to promote to the utmost, within the system of international peace and security, the well-being of the inhabitants of the Non-Self-Governing Territories under their responsibility.

The membership of the United Nations has more than doubled since the adoption of the Declaration. 189 Member States, many of them former Non-Self-Governing Territories, are now called to observe the anniversary of the historic document and acknowledge the urgency of realizing its goal: to eradicate colonialism. At the Millennium Summit three months ago Member States reiterated the right to self-determination of Peoples.

Today there are still seventeen (17) Non-Self-governing Territories to which the Declaration applies and which the Assembly will continue to give its full attention. Of these, however, East Timor has exercised its right to self-determination and chosen the path to independence. Just over

a year ago the people of East Timor, in a free and fair referendum voted for independence. Since then, the process towards national reconciliation and nation- building has been carried out with the support of the United Nations. The Territory is currently under the administration of the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), and it is making strides in preparing the necessary conditions for independence.

The international community has followed closely these historic developments in East Timor and the important role the United Nations has played. I am, therefore, very pleased to be able to announce that, at the invitation of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello of UNTAET, I will be visiting East Timor early next year. The purpose of my visit is to familiarize myself with the situation in East Timor and with the work of UNTAET at first hand. In the light of the Millennium Summit and the current discussions on the reform of peacekeeping the visit should also be particularly interesting given the complex and multidimensional nature of the UNTAET peacekeeping operation.

To conclude, I should like to stress that the 40th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration at the dawn of the Millennium offers us an opportunity to look back at the successes the United Nations has achieved in the field of decolonisation, but more importantly, to look ahead and reiterate our commitment to fulfill its objectives and redouble our efforts to that end.