

14 May 2001

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
on the Least Developed Countries**

I am deeply honored to address, in my capacity as President of the Millennium Assembly, the opening of the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. This Conference has been convened by the General Assembly, the chief policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations. It is the first major UN conference after last September's Millennium Summit, where our Heads of State and Government adopted the Millennium Declaration and reaffirmed its ambitious development goals.

The Millennium Declaration is one of the most important UN documents of recent time. It brings together the global development agenda of the 1990's. It reflects a unique consensus on the values and principles of the international community. It represents the political will of Member States. That political will must now prevail.

This week's Conference is the first test whether Member States are truly committed to the implementation of the Declaration. Perhaps the most important goal was to halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world's people who live in extreme poverty. Our Heads of State and Government also addressed the special needs of the least developed countries. They took upon themselves to ensure the success of this Conference. They called on the industrialized countries to provide improved market access, debt relief and development assistance to the LDCs.

The Programme of Action that you will adopt is extremely important for the United Nations. If it reflects a determination to implement the goals of the Millennium Declaration, the Programme's significance goes beyond the LDC context. It will strengthen the credibility of the Declaration. It will encourage other major events to follow suit. In the course of the next four months, five more special sessions or major conferences will follow the LDC Conference. Their themes cover human settlements, HIV/AIDS, small arms, racism and children. Next year, we will have international conferences on financing for development and on sustainable development. They all have been requested by the General Assembly to contribute to the implementation of the Millennium Declaration. You can set an example of how our common political will can prevail.

Adoption of an ambitious Programme is not, however, enough. Its adoption must be followed by action by LDC's and development partners alike. It is ultimately the Member States themselves who bear the main responsibility for the implementation of the Millennium Declaration.

In particular, the Programme of Action must be followed by a cohesive response by the industrialized countries. Most of the Ministers in this Hall representing donor countries are

responsible for development cooperation and trade. Ministers of finance are conspicuously absent. As Delegations return home, many of them will face one more hurdle, this time with their fellow cabinet members. I hope those present here will prevail. It would also bode well for next year's International Conference on Financing for Development. Mr. President,

Action by the North must have first priority also because the LDC's themselves have in so many cases already walked the extra mile. They have gone by the book prescribed by the North, too often without tangible rewards. We must maintain the faith of the LDCs and their citizens in the promise of open trade, free markets and fiscal restraint.

To conclude, let me once again emphasize the central role of the United Nations General Assembly in the follow-up to the Millennium Summit. To this end, the Assembly has asked to be kept informed about how each major event and conference contributes to the implementation of the Millennium Declaration. The Assembly, for its part, is ready to endorse the Programme of Action as soon as so requested by the Member States.