

5 June 2001

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
at the opening of the Exhibition "Urban Millennium"**

I should like to congratulate United Nations Centre for Human Settlements for organizing this exhibition and for the very pertinent name to it "Urban Millennium".

Indeed, in view of the fact that soon half of the world's population will live in cities or other types of urban settlements, we are experiencing the millennium of urbanization. Therefore, problems of the urbanized world need our focused and urgent attention.

In this context, I think this whole afternoon, the panel and now this exhibition, demonstrate the importance of local governance in the development of urban settlements. I am particularly pleased that so many Mayors of major cities of the world are here and that so many countries are participating in this exhibition to share experiences and to learn from each other.

In fact, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements - Habitat, is the only entity of the United Nations with a specific mandate to address local governance. The importance of this issue is reflected in the structure of the special session itself, in that it has a thematic committee - never seen before in connection with the special sessions of the United Nations. This committee will bring in the debate the central issues and experiences of the local level.

To complement the debate during the next three days on the 5-year review of the Habitat agenda, this exhibition gives a valuable visual dimension to the whole special session and to the true implementation of the Habitat Agenda and its important partners - the people of the world.