

17 June 2001

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
on the occasion of the World Day to Combat Desertification and
Drought**

On the occasion of World World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought is an occasion to acknowledge the importance of this development challenge that so many of the world's regions are facing.

The distribution of fertile soils and favourable growing conditions does not always coincide with that of population. Unless effective preventive action is taken, the new millennium will see increasing problems of global food insecurity, coupled with an increasing number of refugees, internally displaced people, instability and conflicts. Financial, human and technological resources will need to be made available for the poor. I believe that the solution to the challenge is about partnerships, and enabling the poor to help themselves. In other words - empowering the poor.

However, poverty cannot be addressed by charity. At the very heart of the matter is the principle of sustainable development, which at the local level, leads to concrete action enabling the poor to live within the limits of the carrying capacity of fragile ecosystems. Indeed, the only way to address poverty is through creating sustainable livelihoods and tackling the root causes of poverty - the unequal distribution of productive assets, access to resources, landownership and tenure.

I am pleased that more than thirty National Action Programmes have already been prepared by the affected countries, involving the private sector, local communities, women's groups and non-governmental organisations. National Focal Points of the Ministries of Environment or Agriculture have been the driving forces in preparing these programmes. Now these programmes need to be turned into action, and to become an integral part of the development plans of the countries concerned.

In the commitments and goals of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, we resolved to give priority to eradicating the poverty that affects the lives of more than 1.2 billion of our fellow citizens. The livelihoods of many of these people are eked out of arid and semi-arid ecosystems. The Millennium Summit outcome offers new stewardship for the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.