

1 December 2000

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,  
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,  
on the occasion of unveiling of the sculpture of "Arrival" a  
gift from Ireland to the United Nations**

I feel deeply honored for the opportunity to participate in this ceremony. May I also thank you for the kind words addressed to me.

On this occasion, we commemorate the history of Irish emigrants and recognize the valuable contribution of Irish people to the work of the United Nations. I congratulate the Irish Government and in particular the local Irish community for their efforts in making this gift possible. I extend on behalf of the United Nations our sincere thanks for this gift to the Organisation.

I have had an opportunity to familiarize myself with the history of Ireland. I have learned about the crucial role played by Irish communities in European history. During the medieval ages, a great amount of knowledge and culture disappeared or was destroyed. However, thanks to the monks and monasteries in Ireland, the ancient cultural heritage was preserved and maintained and continental Europe Ireland became known as the island of saints and scholars in the continental Europe.

I also learnt of the great famine, which forced hundreds of thousands of Irish to emigrate. Leaving one's home country, family and friends for an unknown destiny was not easy. In those days, travel by sea took months and was extremely demanding, especially for children and the elderly. Life in the new continent required courage and determination. Through all this, the Irish community provided consolation and strength to its members. This is an illustration of true community responsibility valid even today.

It is remarkable how the Irish community has preserved its identity and characteristics. Even more noteworthy is that the Irish community has never been strictly exclusive, but has been inclusive and open. This was important also in the context of the Northern Ireland peace process. It is my experience that when a community seeks reconciliation and peace, the first step is that people have to realize that despite their differences, they share common interests. Individuals and communities have a responsibility to unload the baggage of painful memories and forgive wrongdoings. To achieve peace, mutual trust needs to be restored through small, gradual steps and with lots of patience. It is important to remember that communities play a key role in assisting individuals to forgive and rebuild society.

To conclude, I would like to stress the importance of Ireland, among the family of nations at the United Nations. In our global community, every Member State matters and contributes to

multilateral policy-making and co-operation. I hope the Irish will continue providing us with their example of leadership and sense of community, which has survived through the centuries.