

12 September 2001

**Acceptance Speech of H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo,
President of the 56th Session of the General Assembly**

President Holkeri, Secretary-General Annan, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with a most grave and solemn mind that I take this podium, as the horrific events of yesterday cast a pall over our proceedings today. Mere words cannot express the outrage and disgust we doubtless all feel for the vile actions perpetrated in our host country, the United States of America. I condemn in the strongest possible terms these heinous acts of terrorism. I pray for those who lost their lives and on behalf of the UN General Assembly offer our deepest condolences to the families and loved ones of the innocent victims. My most profound feelings of sympathy and solidarity also go out to the people and government of the United States as well as to the citizens of New York City at this time of great distress.

These terrorist crimes were, in effect, acts of war against all the world's peace-loving peoples. Their primary target was, by a vicious twist of fate, located in the very city which is home to the world's foremost institution dedicated to promoting world peace. The opening of this session of the General Assembly has been delayed by a day due to this tragedy. But no terrorists can ever deflect this body from the task to which it has dedicated itself since 1945 – ending the scourge of war in whatever form it may take once and for all.

Now let me share with you my vision of the work of the 56th session of the General Assembly. At the outset, I would like to express sincere gratitude to my distinguished predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Harri Holkeri, whose outstanding leadership was instrumental in making the 55th session highly successful. I wish President Holkeri all the best in his future endeavors. I would also like to pay tribute to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, for his untiring efforts and selfless dedication to the highest ideals of the United Nations. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the Member States, particularly the Asian Group countries, for the confidence they have placed in me.

As I begin my term of office, I have profoundly mixed feelings. While I am overwhelmed by the honor accorded me and my country, I feel at the same time a tremendous burden of responsibility. This is particularly so as I come from a country that has had a long and unique relationship with the United Nations. Indeed, the UN has been closely involved with my country since the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948 through the post-Korean War recovery period and the economic development of later years.

Following the end of the Cold War, the Republic of Korea joined the UN in 1991. I would like to believe that my election to this post, coinciding with the 10th anniversary of Korea's admission to the UN, constitutes a recognition by the Member States of Korea's increased contribution to the international community.

Fifty-six years ago, the United Nations was born amid hopes for a lasting peace in the wake of two devastating world wars. In the Charter, the UN's founding fathers set forth lofty goals and principles aimed at promoting international peace and security as well as the economic and social advancement of all peoples. Success was never easy, and failure often seemed inevitable. However, with its record of both successes and failures, the United Nations has come to be regarded as the sole universal body representing humanity's highest collective aspirations.

When the Cold War ended a decade ago, the international community faced new challenges and opportunities. As the danger of global conflict receded, the world was confronted with new threats to peace and development such as regional and sectarian conflicts and the kinds of terrorist acts that reached a crescendo of violence yesterday.

At the same time, the tide of globalization surges ever onward, bringing both benefits and problems in its wake. While greater interdependence and increased cross-border movement have dramatically enhanced the well being of mankind in many ways, there is a negative side as well: a growing problem of disease and pollution, recurring financial crises, and increasing cross-border crime, especially trafficking of drugs, weapons, and illegal migrants. In several of these areas, various UN agencies have been active for decades. Now, more than ever before, the UN is required to serve as a focal point for coordinating global efforts to address these new challenges.

In this context, I would like to emphasize the importance of the Millennium Summit held in this august chamber last year. The Summit provided a unique opportunity to review the UN's progress, to assess its achievements and shortcomings, and to chart the way forward. The Millennium Declaration adopted at the end of the Summit is surely the definitive statement of the challenges and tasks facing the UN at this stage in its history. As this is the first session of the General Assembly following the Millennium Summit, one of our most important tasks will be follow-up and implementation of the Millennium Declaration.

We all recognize that an important element of the Millennium Declaration is the resolve of the leaders to strengthen the United Nations. I think it is noteworthy that they reaffirmed the central position of the General Assembly as the chief deliberative, policy-making and representative organ of the UN. As President of the 56th session of the General Assembly, I will continue the ongoing initiatives to improve the working methods of the Assembly in close consultation with all Member States. I will also do my best to move forward the discussions on Security Council reform with the goal of having a more representative, transparent, and effective Security Council.

Given the fundamental changes in the international environment, the UN's role in maintaining peace and security has expanded and become more complex. I, therefore, attach great importance to improving the UN's capacity to respond to conflicts in a more effective manner, including

consideration of the recommendations contained in the Brahimi Report. If it is to do its job of maintaining international peace and security, the United Nations needs to be given the necessary tools and resources for carrying out peace operations.

Also at the Millennium Summit, the world's leaders pledged their best efforts to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law and to expand protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Freedom and human rights are truly the birthright of all humanity. This Assembly has to work continuously to promote the human rights of all people. But some categories of human beings are more vulnerable than others and hence more likely to suffer the loss of this precious birthright. Perhaps the most vulnerable are children, women, and displaced persons, who need our special concern and protection.

The United Nations should also strengthen and expand its efforts to prevent and suppress terrorism. All forms of terrorism – whatever their motivation – are an assault on human decency and threaten democratic values and, thus, cannot be justified under any circumstances. Yesterday's terrorist attacks not only compel our attention, but underscore anew the urgency of action by the international community, particularly by the United Nations, against this deadly menace. I pledge my best efforts to this end.

In view of the accelerating process of globalization and the uneven sharing of its benefits, the issue of development is receiving renewed attention and is being considered from fresh perspectives. More specifically, the question of how to ensure that the developing countries share in the benefits of globalization in general, and of information and communication technology in particular, requires our urgent consideration and action. In this regard, I would like to call your attention to a couple of the most important issues to command our attention during my presidency of the General Assembly. They are bridging the digital divide and the development of Africa.

The explosive growth of information and communication technologies (ICT) is opening up boundless new possibilities for accelerated economic and social development. But the capacity of individual countries to take advantage of the digital revolution varies greatly. Indeed, the least developed countries that could gain so much from ICT are the very ones that lack the capacity to translate this potential into reality.

In my view, the General Assembly can make useful contributions by calling global attention to the need for bridging the digital divide. Such efforts by the General Assembly would be especially timely and constructive in the run-up to the World Summits on Information Society in 2003 and 2005 planned by the International Telecommunication Union.

In their Millennium Declaration, the world's leaders expressed their deep concern and highlighted the need to bring Africa into the mainstream of world economic development in the common interest of all humanity. The governments and peoples of Africa, together with the United Nations system and the donor community, have striven for decades to eradicate poverty and generate sustainable development. Yet all too often their best efforts have met with setbacks

caused by political strife, armed conflict and, since the 1980s, the devastating spread of HIV/AIDS.

Fortunately, the recent OAU Summit Meeting held in Lusaka, Zambia, gave a clear political lead on this issue through the New African Initiative. I urge that all Member States continue to work together to explore more effective ways and means of assisting African countries in their pursuit of sustainable development.

Having outlined my agenda, I am confident that, working together, we can accomplish what we set out to do. My personal contribution will necessarily be a modest one. All these endeavors, to which I will devote myself, will be difficult to bring to fruition without the full support and cooperation of all of you. Thus, I humbly ask you to give me your invaluable support and guidance in discharging my duty as President of the General Assembly.

Finally, allow me to suggest that at this point in history, we should harken back to the original spirit and principles of the United Nations. Let us place first, before anything else, the transcendent vision enshrined in the Charter: namely, the constant and untiring pursuit of peace, security, equality, human rights, fundamental freedoms, and economic and social advancement for all the people on this planet. While respecting the sovereign rights and legitimate national interests of all nations, let us strive to make our common future a worthy legacy for succeeding generations. Let us, moreover, seek harmony through diversity, peace through dialogue, and mutual prosperity through cooperation. And so, as we assemble here in the world's greatest parliament, let us rededicate ourselves to the founding principles of the United Nations and renew our commitment to complete the unfinished tasks that lie before us.

Thank you.