

13 September 2001

**Statement of H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo,
President of the 56th Session of the General Assembly,
on the Occasion of Interfaith Services**

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I take great pleasure in joining you today on this occasion that is both joyous and somber. In committing ourselves to the work of the United Nations, we celebrate the enormous diversity of human cultures and societies. Yet this very diversity is sustained and illumined by the unifying and reconciling power of the human spirit – which is, I believe, one of God's greatest gifts to mankind.

At the same time, we gather here in a somber mood following the heinous terrorists acts perpetrated two days ago. I pray for the victims, their families, and loved ones. I also pray that God's will be done as He, in his infinite wisdom and mercy, judges both the innocent and the guilty.

It would be an error to identify God's work with that of any man-made institution. Still, I would like to think that the work of the United Nations and its servants finds inspiration in the religious traditions of the vast majority of the human race. Throughout history, the great religious thinkers have affirmed the fundamental unity of humankind and the spiritual duty of all men and women to give assistance and succor to one another. Over vast stretches of time, the circle of mutual obligation has slowly expanded from the rural village to the global village. And so today, we gather here, representatives of many of the world's faiths, to reaffirm the solemn duty of mutual assistance laid down in both sacred texts and oral traditions.

This is indeed a solemn duty, but it should also be a joyful one. For in helping our fellow man, we celebrate our own humanity and, indeed, for many believers, experience the greatest joy that we can know on earth.

I had planned to use this occasion to draw your attention to the General Assembly Special Session on Children scheduled for next week, which 80 heads of state were expected to attend. However, in view of the terrible events of two days ago, the General Assembly has decided to postpone the session. I nonetheless wish to take this occasion to emphasize the UN's strong commitment to protecting the rights and well-being of the world's children, who are the most vulnerable of human beings. Though the Special Session has been postponed, the work of the United Nations in behalf of children continues unabated, and I ask you to support these efforts.

As summer turns to autumn, we are reminded anew of the natural cycle through which God's creation passes. It is sometimes said that the only constant in history is change. But I believe, that, like the change of seasons, there is a divinely-ordered pattern in human development, that we can only glimpse "as through a glass darkly." I also feel strongly that a central motif of this pattern is the gradual coming together of the world's peoples in harmony, reconciliation, and mutual support. We cannot know for certain what are the instruments of such a purpose. Nevertheless, we have gathered here today in the implicit belief that the United Nations may be counted among them. I share that belief as I share with you my hopes, expectations, and prayers for the work of the UN in the crucial year ahead.

Thank you.