

21 September 2001

**Statement of H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo,
President of the 56th Session of the General Assembly,
at the High-level Dialogue on Strengthening International Economic
Cooperation for Development through Partnership**

Mr. Secretary-General, distinguished delegates,

At the outset, I extend my appreciation to all of you, whose outstanding efforts have resulted in a successful Dialogue, despite rescheduling of major meetings of the General Assembly. I believe this is a clear manifestation of our strong unity and solidarity in pursuit of world peace and development.

As we are all so sadly aware, this Dialogue was held against the backdrop of the terrorist attacks on our host country on 11 September. These heinous actions serve as a stark reminder that international terrorism constitutes a grave and deadly threat to peace and democracy. In this regard, greater efforts in the context of broader multilateral cooperation are called for to combat international terrorism in all its forms.

The plenary debate provided a unique opportunity for highly productive discussions on the international economic environment from different perspectives. The Dialogue was particularly timely in the context of the current global economic slowdown, enabling us to make major progress in defining a new development strategy. It was a demanding task to do justice to the wide range of views and the wealth of ideas submitted in this plenary. I will therefore prepare a detailed summary in close consultation with delegations and circulate it at a later stage. At this point, I wish to make some observations and underscore main issues.

The view was expressed that the Dialogue could give useful input into upcoming major conferences, which include the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Meeting in Doha, Qatar, the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa. It was also felt that the Dialogue could be viewed as an opportunity to define a strategy to follow-up the Millennium Declaration.

Globalization was widely seen as a reality we must accept. While it could be a formidable multiplier of growth and prosperity, it also risks widening inequalities and disparities within and among countries. Emphasis was placed on the importance of policy choice in order to reap the full benefits of globalization, which is an interactive and comprehensive process. The importance of humanising globalization was also stressed so as to assist developing countries to become smoothly integrated into the world economy by opening world markets and generating new flows of financing for development.

The delegates underscored the unique role of the United Nations in providing the normative policy framework for addressing challenges involved in globalization. This view is based on the belief that the United Nations is also best suited for bringing all stakeholders together in a partnership for sustainable development.

With regard to the sub-theme (a) on financing for development,

The multitude of goals for development and poverty eradication set out in the Millennium Declaration were recognized as the framework for international development co-operation.

It was agreed that a favourable international economic environment is crucial for mobilising financial resources. Attention was also called to the need for improving governance at the national level and creating an environment conducive to investment, both domestic and foreign. Private capital flows are particularly important for increasing productive capacity and the development of infrastructure. Concerns have been expressed about volatility of short-term capital flows, including sudden capital flight, and the delegates called for an appropriate mechanism to deal with them.

It was agreed that the upcoming Financing for Development Conference in Monterrey represented an invaluable opportunity to promote significant improvements in the growth and development prospects of developing countries.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) remains an important source of development funding for some developing countries, particularly the least developed ones. There was broad agreement on the need to reverse the decline in ODA levels and move towards achieving an ODA expenditure target of 0.7% of GNP.

Promoting the effectiveness and efficiency of aid was also emphasized as well as the need to create social safety nets. The view was expressed that vulnerability as well as low per capita income be considered by donors in assessing needs, particularly of the Least Developed Countries, Small Island Developing States, and Africa.

The need was reiterated for deeper, broader and expeditious debt-relief under Heavily-Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) and beyond for effective and coherent debt policies, including Post-HIPC programmes. The delegates affirmed their high expectations for the upcoming WTO meeting in Qatar in providing a renewed opportunity to focus on market access, capacity building in trade and growing protectionism during the global economic slowdown.

It was also stressed that coherence in global policies on development assistance, debt relief and trade should be enhanced in order to increase the effectiveness of each of these policy elements.

Attention was drawn to the need for improving governance of the global economic and financial system and enhanced dialogue of all relevant stakeholders for greater policy coherence, including Governments, UN, Bretton Woods Institutions (BWI), WTO, private sectors and civil society.

With regard to the sub-theme (b) on information and communication technologies for development

The delegates concurred in the view that Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) could play a pivotal role in economic and social development. They further noted that the ICT revolution has led to the creation of the emerging global knowledge-based economy, which in turn has opened up vast new opportunities for economic growth and social development.

However, this “information revolution” presents many challenges and risks. Much of the world continues to live in poverty; many countries have yet to reap the benefits of the ICT revolution because of lack of ICT infrastructure, including electricity, and also high rates of illiteracy. In this regard, concern was expressed about the widening digital divide.

It was felt that narrowing the digital divide was a priority requiring bold policies for developing human resources and the institutional capacity to manage such changes. Comprehensive national action was viewed as a prerequisite for establishing the necessary capacities and infrastructure to successfully reap the benefits of ICT.

Strong support for such programmes by international and multilateral institutions, particularly the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods Institutions, as well as regional banks and others, was seen as vital. In addition, the delegates highlighted the importance of forging partnerships between the public and private sectors. To that end, the establishment of the ICT Task Force was welcomed and it was hoped that its activities would provide tangible results.

It was agreed that the benefits of ICT must be harnessed and directed towards the long-term comprehensive development of developing countries so as to ensure their eventual successful integration into the global economy. In order to achieve this, developing countries were called upon to provide an environment that would attract investment in ICT infrastructure as well as to devise policies to increase local content. Only in this way, it was felt, will developing countries be able to make needed progress towards sustained economic growth, as well as improvements in the areas of health and education and poverty eradication.

Given the diverse conditions and policy objectives, the unique role of the United Nations was recognized in the promotion of public awareness of the wider applications of ICT for development and poverty eradication. The decision of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) to hold the World Summit on Information Society was welcomed, and it was hoped that the General Assembly will explore ways to contribute to the successful preparation of the Summit.

Views were also expressed that policies should be devised to cope with the rising incidence of cyber crimes and other associated illegal activities.

Distinguished delegates,

These were some initial observations on the two-day Dialogue. As I mentioned in the beginning, a more detailed summary of these meetings will be issued as a document of the General Assembly.