

30 November 2001

**Statement of H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo,
President of the 56th Session of the General Assembly,
on World AIDS Day**

Madam Deputy-Secretary-General, Distinguished Delegates,

I am greatly honored to join this distinguished gathering to commemorate World AIDS Day. Our theme this year, "I care...Do you?," is especially appropriate, I think, as individual concern must surely be starting point of any program to eliminate the scourge of HIV/AIDS.

More than 20 years after the outbreak of this dread disease, some 40 million people are living with HIV/AIDS, the vast majority of them in sub-Saharan Africa. According to the most recent 2001 AIDS Epidemic Update, about one-third of those currently living with HIV/AIDS are aged 14-24. The many who have already lost their lives to HIV/AIDS have left behind millions of orphaned children. Everyday, about 15,000 people are newly infected with the deadly virus. Moreover, HIV/AIDS threatens development as well as socio-economic and political stability and, indeed, has had a devastating effect on global civilization as a whole.

Perhaps the most tragic fact about this epidemic is that it is young people who are at greatest risk. One in every four people with HIV is a young man under the age of 25. Men's vulnerability arises from various causes, including traditional expectations of masculinity, sexual violence towards women, and inferior health care compared with that available to women. In particular, young men tend to have more sex partners than do women, thus exposing them to greater risk. However, we should also realize that men have a great potential to make a difference in their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS through their own efforts, both individually and collectively. We need to encourage men as fathers, as sons, as brothers and as friends to adopt positive attitudes and behaviors. Of course, such efforts can only achieve their maximum effect in so far as they complement prevention and care programmes for women and girls.

In addressing this ongoing crisis, the role of political leadership is imperative. Following the Declaration at the Millennium Summit last year, world leaders elaborated on their commitments at the Special Session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS last June. Let me take this opportunity to commend the personal dedication of Secretary-General Kofi Annan to the HIV/AIDS campaign. In this regard, we should be especially heartened by the citation of 2001 Nobel Peace Prize, which specifically mentions the United Nations' work on AIDS and human rights.

I also wish to highlight the vital importance of partnership and volunteerism in fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Given the multi-faceted nature of the epidemic, we need to work hand-in-

hand with a wide range of actors, including civil society organizations, the mass media, and individual experts, who can offer invaluable resources, knowledge and experience. Together, we can make real progress toward eliminating the fear, stigma, and discrimination so often associated with HIV/AIDS. Together, we can mobilize new and enhanced financial resources to roll back the epidemic.

In my view, the traditional values of family, community and friendship are required now more than ever in this era of globalization. Home, school and community provide the role models and help shape the attitudes that enable boys and young men to recognize and develop their potential in combating HIV/AIDS. On World AIDS Day 2001, I urge all of you to work together for the prevention, care, and treatment of this devastating disease, with appropriate attention given to the needs of both males and females.

Thank you.