

11 December 2001

**Statement of H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo,  
President of the 56th Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Launching Ceremony of the United Nations International Year  
of Mountains 2002**

I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations on the occasion of the launching ceremony of the International Year of Mountains. Taking this opportunity, I would like to commend the leadership of the Mountains Focus Group and efforts made by their respective governments as well as the Food and Agricultural Organization and The Mountain Institute in preparing this event. I would also like to thank those governments who have kindly agreed to sponsor the launching ceremony.

The designation of the International Year of Mountains is a result of a long process by which we can also observe the gradual enhancement of our awareness of the importance of mountains in our ecosystems, and in our programs for sustainable economic development. The 1992 Earth Summit and its Agenda 21 Chapter 13 "Managing fragile ecosystems : sustainable mountain development" was a significant turning point. It marked the first time when we took a hard look at the mountain issue. The Global Mountain Forum, created in 1995, played a pivotal role by providing a network of networks for information sharing and mutual support among those active entities and groups interested in this issue. In November 1998, The General Assembly adopted its resolution 53/24 and declared the Year 2002 as International Year of Mountains; and FAO was assigned the lead agency role in collaboration with other agencies and NGOs.

In my capacity as President of the General Assembly as well as a mountain lover, I sincerely hope that the International Year of Mountains will not only move the mountain issues higher on the global agenda, but also will open the door to further concrete actions and initiatives on regional as well as national levels. I also believe that the international community should build on the momentum provided by the International Year of Mountains to achieve genuine sustainable development of mountains.

I also would like to note that the International Year of Mountains 2002 will make an appropriate link with the 10th anniversary of the Earth Summit, and the observance of the Sustainability Summit that will take place in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002. It would thus live up to the objective stated in the Declaration of IYM that "The International year of Mountains 2002 fosters the conservation and the sustainable development of mountain regions, thus assuring the welfare of mountain communities and those in the lowlands."