

8 March 2002

**Statement of H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo,
President of the 56th Session of the General Assembly,
on International Women's Day**

Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Mrs. Laura Bush, Your Majesty Queen Noor Al-Hussein,
Distinguished guests:

I am very honoured to join you in this most meaningful event, this year's International Women's Day. Our gathering here today demonstrates the firm commitment of the United Nations to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women on all fronts and the realization of women's human rights. At the outset, I would like to highly commend the initiatives and leadership taken by Mrs. Laura Bush, the First Lady of the United States, for the promotion of women's rights and equal opportunity.

The focus of this year's International Women's Day is the women of Afghanistan. During more than 20 years of armed conflict, Afghan women have demonstrated boundless patience, perseverance and courage. They survived years of suffering and deprivations, which were exacerbated by the gender apartheid of a most brutal regime.

I strongly believe that, in post-Taliban Afghanistan, women should become primary stakeholders, who will identify their own needs and priorities in all sectors of society. The international community should continue to encourage the new leadership of the Interim Authority to empower the Afghan women as full partners in the post-conflict reconstruction of the country. The donor countries for Afghanistan should place high priority on promoting and protecting the human rights of women and girls in Afghanistan. In particular, girls should be guaranteed equal access to education.

As we venture to work together to advance the empowerment of women and gender equality all around the world, the improvement of the lives of Afghan women is one of our most pressing challenges. Let today, March 8th, International Women's Day become once again the day of renewing our determination to advance the goals of equality, and the full enjoyment of all human rights by women everywhere, which can only be in the best interest of all humanity.

Thank you.