

21 March 2002

**Statement of H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo,
President of the 56th Session of the General Assembly,
on the International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination**

In 1966, the UN General Assembly called on the international community to redouble its efforts to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination and to observe March 21 as part of the global awareness-raising process. The United Nations has so far devoted three decades and three World Conferences to the topic of elimination of racism and racial discrimination, which is a central theme of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

However, despite the efforts of the international community during the past 35 years, we still see the persistence of racism and racial discrimination in much of the world. Even more, the modern boon of information technology has meant that racist ideas can be spread faster and without censorship over the internet.

Fortunately, however, we have also recently witnessed a most encouraging development in combating racism and racial discrimination. The World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR) was held successfully last year in South Africa and presented a unique opportunity to create a new world vision for the fight against racism in the twenty-first century. The Conference focused on practical steps to eradicate racism and adopted the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. Furthermore, the 56th Session of the General Assembly provided a powerful impetus for the implementation of the Declaration and Programme of Action by endorsing them by consensus in its resolution of 26 February 2002.

We now have a legal and practical framework in place to assist us in dealing with the problem of racial discrimination. The greatest challenge we face is for the international community to live up to its commitment expressed at the Durban Conference. This requires a strong and enduring commitment to implement the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action in order to fulfil the high hopes of all people still suffering from racism and racial discrimination.

In this regard, I would like to underline the importance of the establishment of an anti-discrimination unit within the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to follow-up and monitor the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. I sincerely urge states, civil society and non-governmental organizations to carry out effectively and promptly the strategies set forth in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.