

19 May 2002

**Statement of H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo,
President of the 56th Session of the General Assembly,
on the Independence of East Timor**

President-elect Gusmao, Chief Minister Alkatiri, Secretary-General Annan and members of the United Nations System and members of the UN system, distinguished guests, ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the 189 Member States of the United Nations, I take great pleasure in welcoming East Timor to the family of independent nations.

The independence of East Timor represents one of the most dramatic events in the 21st century. The struggle of the East Timorese people was a lonely and seemingly hopeless one for more than 20 years.

But the spirit of the East Timorese people was never cowed, never conquered. The flame of freedom, never extinguished in the hearts of the people, guided the Timorese toward the bright dawn of independence, which we celebrate today.

But the challenges ahead remain daunting. Above all, East Timor is faced with the continuing task of reconstructing its physical and institutional infrastructure based on the firm foundations laid by the UN and the people of East Timor in the past three years.

Let me assure you, that, even as UNTAET passes into history, the international community and the United Nations will continue to assist East Timor's independence, reconstruction, and development. In this process, the General Assembly will do its share through the wide range of social and economic programmes that it coordinates.

East Timor, which commenced its struggle for independence with scant prospects of success, begins its life as an independent state as the recipient of an outpouring of international support unique for a country of its size.

I firmly believe that this massive international humanitarian effort will long be remembered as one of the United Nations' finest achievements.

And so, on this auspicious day I bring the people of East Timor a message of congratulations and welcome from the global family of nations, but more importantly, a solemn pledge of solidarity and support.

I, along with the 189 Member States of the General Assembly, look forward to the day, which is rapidly approaching, when East Timor takes its place in the "Parliament of Humanity", the United Nations General Assembly.

I pray that divine providence, which has enabled the people of East Timor to win their freedom and independence, will further assist their efforts and ours to achieve lasting peace and prosperity in this newest of nations. Thank you.