

17 June 2002

**Statement of H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo,
President of the 56th Session of the General Assembly,
at a Dinner in Honor of H.E. Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the
Republic of Senegal**

President Wade, Secretary-General Annan, Distinguished Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman:

It is a great pleasure to welcome one of Africa's most distinguished statesmen and leaders, President Abdoulaye Wade, along with my other guests this evening. I am also very pleased that Secretary-General Kofi Annan could join us tonight.

I had the honor of first meeting President Wade in Dakar last April on the occasion of the African summit meeting. That was also my first visit to Senegal, and I could not have been more impressed by the warmth and hospitality of the reception I received. If I were to go to Senegal now, not as President of the General Assembly, but rather as a citizen of the country in which the World Cup is being held and where Senegal has done so well, I have no doubt my reception would be nothing less than tumultuous.

As a result of my visit, I could well understand why Senegal has gained a reputation as one of Africa's most stable and successful democracies.

As you may know, President Wade is one of the "founding fathers" of NEPAD -- the New Partnership for Africa's Development. The great strength of NEPAD is that it is an initiative by and for Africans themselves. But it is also outward-looking and aims at building partnerships with governments, private sectors, and NGOs throughout the world. I am hopeful that the United Nations can act as both a facilitator of such partnerships and as an active partner of NEPAD in its own right.

Let me also take this opportunity to congratulate my guest of honor on Senegal's excellent performance in the World Cup finals.

Here at the UN, and especially this week, we will have much discussion of the "digital divide" and how to close it. On the world's soccer fields, there has long been a "World Cup divide" which has put Africa and Asia at a disadvantage. Senegal is now showing us, in the most dramatic way, how to bridge that gap. I hope that when Korea and Japan meet their respective opponents tomorrow, they will follow Senegal's example by showing how Asian countries are also able to bridge the World Cup divide.

Finally, let me propose a toast to the health of President Wade, to the prosperity of the Republic of Senegal and its people, and to the closing of all invidious gaps among the nations of the world, whether in technology or sport.

Thank you.