

21 June 2002

**Statement of H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo,
President of the 56th Session of the General Assembly,
at a Reception for United Nations officials**

Director General Costa, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am very pleased to meet with you this evening here in the wonderful city of Vienna. Since assuming the Presidency, I have visited Geneva twice, and I am delighted to finally visit the other great UN center in Europe. I wish to commend and thank the Director-General of the United Nations Office, Mr. Antonio Maria Costa, and other staff members for their devotion to the work of the United Nations.

In the era of globalization, the UN is faced with unprecedented demands and challenges. Environmental degradation, the spread of diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, and drugs, illicit trafficking of weapons, and illegal migration are just a few of them. However, after September 11, the issue of international terrorism has made the most compelling demands on our time and attention.

The United Nations has been playing a critical role in combating the scourge of international terrorism. When the 56th Session of the General Assembly began the next day of the terrorist attacks on the US, the first order of business, after my election as president, was to pass a strongly-worded resolution condemning global terrorism.

In addition to the General Assembly resolution condemning terrorism, the Security Council also took decisive action, through resolution 1373, by, among other things, freezing the source of funding for terrorist activities.

Furthermore, the Organization and its agencies have developed a wide range of international legal agreements aimed at suppressing terrorism and bringing its perpetrators to justice. A comprehensive convention on terrorism will be discussed more in the next Session of the General Assembly. The recent UN symposium on combating international terrorism held here in Vienna further demonstrates the depth of our commitment. This new trend has been contributing to the strengthening of the General Assembly within the framework of the United Nations.

Being the highest UN body where all Member States are represented, the General Assembly is the right place to deal with issues of global scale that affect each and every one of the membership.

Currently, efforts are underway to better adapt the UN to changing world conditions through reform of the Security Council and revitalization of the General Assembly. I recently conducted a series of open-ended informal consultations and Working Group meetings on these topics. One of the many suggested measures for revitalization of the General Assembly is to elect a President, the Chairmen of the Main Committees, and the 21 Vice-Presidents, at least 3 months before the opening of the new session so that they could be better prepared for the work of the General Assembly.

I am confident that when these reform and revitalization measures are adopted by the Member States, it will greatly enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the work of the United Nations, enabling it to better contribute to the promotion of world peace and prosperity.

Distinguished colleagues,

During the month of May, the world witnessed two encouraging UN "success stories"-one in Sierra Leone, and the other in East Timor. In Sierra Leone, a Presidential election judged to be "free and fair" was held with the full cooperation of UNAMSIL, giving that country real hope of peace and stability after years of devastating civil war. Then on May 20, I had the opportunity to observe a similar accomplishment, the independence of East Timor. The United Nations was able to greatly assist the East Timorese in rebuilding their ravaged country. We are now looking forward to welcoming East Timor to the United Nations family.

The independence of East Timor, and the success of UNAMSIL in maintaining peace and stability in Sierra Leone are excellent examples of how the world body is responding to the needs and demands of a rapidly changing global environment.

The UN has often been subject to criticism, both fair and unfair. But in recent years, I think that the contribution of the UN to global well-being is being recognized more properly. This recognition culminated in the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the United Nations and its Secretary-General on December 10. I had the unique honour to receive the Prize in Oslo on behalf of the world body, along with Secretary-General Annan, who accepted the award in his own right. All of you here, as members of the UN family, share in the award and, I hope, take pride in what it signifies.

I am sure this was a factor that encouraged Switzerland, which for decades stayed outside the UN, to decide in a national plebiscite to join the world body.

How efficiently the UN can continue to adapt itself to new challenges very much depends on the degree of commitment and support of Member States and of each and every one of you present this evening. I, as President of the General Assembly, will continue to fulfil my responsibilities, and hope to count on your continued dedication and cooperation in the years to come.

Thank you.