

21 November 2002

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan,
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly,
on Universal Children's Day**

Every year, on 20th November, we celebrate the Universal Children's Day. Children are the hope of mankind. They are the continuity of human species. They are our most precious resource and our future. Children are extremely vulnerable. Children are born as totally dependent beings needing special protection and help of the society in order to develop fully. They particularly need to be protected from degrading living conditions, from violence, from prostitution, from trafficking, from involvement in armed conflicts, from child labour and other abuses.

All the basic human rights conventions guarantee fundamental rights and freedoms to everyone, adults and children, without any distinction. Recognition of equal status of children as individuals in enjoying their fundamental rights and freedoms is vital. I particularly welcome the fact that 191 Member States have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This Convention reflects consensus amongst all nations that it is important to guarantee fundamental rights and freedoms to children. I concur with Mrs. Mary Robinson, the former High Commissioner for Human Rights, when she stated that "The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 reflected the international consensus on a new vision of children - no longer as mere objects of protection who have "needs", but human beings who enjoy rights."

Eleven years ago, at the World Summit for Children, world leaders made a joint commitment and issued an urgent, universal appeal to give every child a better future. Since then, much progress has been made, as documented in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "We the Children". However much remains to be done, many obstacles to be overcome, particularly in developing countries.

In May 2002, United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children was unprecedented in bringing together one of the largest meetings of Heads of State and delegations, NGOs and child advocates to the United Nations who dedicated themselves to children and adolescents of the world. Children and young people themselves participated in this event at the United Nations and requested to create "A world fit for them." The General Assembly adopted the document entitled "A World Fit For Children" which defined the goals, strategies and actions to improve the lives of children.

I urge all Member States and other actors involved with children to accord their priority to the needs of children. We all share the responsibility for our children. Let us do our best to guarantee a better future for them.