

18 January 2005

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jean Ping,  
President of the 59th Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Reopening of the Proceedings of the Session**

The Assembly is today resuming its work in an atmosphere of sorrow following the earthquake and the resulting tsunami that struck South and South-East Asia and part of the coast of Africa along the Indian Ocean on 26 December. According to figures that unfortunately remain provisional, over 175,000 people were killed - half of whom were children - and 1 million persons have been displaced, with 5 million injured and immeasurable ecological damage. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate my most sincere condolences to the families of the victims, Governments and peoples of the States so tragically affected.

The frequency and scope of catastrophes in recent years - from the Mediterranean to the Caribbean, and from Africa to Asia - now more than ever call upon us to provide assistance, as well as once again attesting to the need to coordinate humanitarian assistance and establish a worldwide early warning mechanism. We should welcome the exceptional manner in which the international community has mobilized itself to deal with the tragedy in the Indian Ocean. I hope that all pledges made will be honoured, with a view to assisting affected countries as they endeavour to recover.

I would once again like to welcome the decisive role being played daily by the United Nations to coordinate and manage international humanitarian assistance.

Although it is true that we cannot always predict how nature will change, we can nevertheless today adopt the necessary measures to anticipate changes and manage their destructive effects. In that connection, the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which opened today in Kobe, Japan, is a timely event.

I am pleased that the draft resolution put forth by the Lao People's Democratic Republic on behalf of the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations emphasizes in particular the need to step up our efforts to provide the United Nations with an efficient mechanism to coordinate efforts by the international community to provide emergency humanitarian assistance as well as disaster-related early warning, prevention and mitigation. I am convinced that, by adopting the draft resolution, we will be taking a decisive step towards achieving that essential goal.