The year 2002 brought new hopes and challenges for the United Nations. The world celebrated as East Timor achieved independence and the Organization handed over authority to the country's first democratically elected President in May. Timor-Leste joined the United Nations in September, as did Switzerland. Progress was seen in Kosovo, where some powers were transferred from the United Nations interim administration to a democratically elected assembly, and in Sierra Leone, where elections were held in May. These strides towards peace and democracy were even more remarkable in view of the destruction those societies had suffered just a few years earlier. Gains were made in other areas as well, most notably with the entry into force of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, an unprecedented step forward for world order, human rights, justice and accountability.

At the same time, however, there were setbacks. The situation deteriorated in the Middle East, and violence increased in Liberia. And with the threat of terrorism on the rise, the world seemed to have become a more dangerous place.

Although security challenges demanded a great deal of attention, the Organization continued its work to combat poverty, meet humanitarian needs and promote development. Landmark conferences on financing for development and on the environment were held in Monterrey and Johannesburg, while the needs of the most vulnerable were addressed at a summit on food security, a world assembly on ageing and a General Assembly special session on children.

This edition of the Yearbook of the United Nations presents a comprehensive review of a year that reflected the changing nature and growing complexity of international affairs, and the Organization's efforts to improve the lives of people everywhere.

KOFI A. ANNAN

Secretary-General of the United Nations
New York, May 2004