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Statement by Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of the
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I am very glad to welcome all of you to this, our third Executive Board gathering of 1997. Ordinarily, my statement at our annual session is aimed at reviewing the work of the past year and addressing the entire range of issues facing UNICEF.

But today I have decided to dispense with the usual format to focus on a single issue that is of over-arching importance for all aspects of UNICEF work. That issue is, of course, United Nations reform - what has happened to date, what is currently under way and what we may expect; what we have accomplished and how we can do even more in the future.

Before we go any further, it should be clearly understood that UNICEF strongly supports the current reform process. We recognize the need for it, we have seen the benefits of it, we know how speedily it must be achieved - and we are active participants.

As Executive Director, I am deeply committed to the reform process both within UNICEF and in the United Nations system as a whole. UNICEF strongly supports the Secretary-General's view that reform must transform the Secretariat, the funds and programmes and all the component parts of the system. Our experience to date - with the harmonization of budgets, with the common country assessment - has revealed a United Nations system that is hungry for good ideas. A system where proposals for reform, if properly conceived and carefully considered, will enjoy widespread support, including the support of the specialized agencies.

Our management excellence programme is only the most obvious evidence of UNICEF commitment to the goals of reform. As a result of management excellence, UNICEF has developed a clear set of principles and professional standards for all of its staff. We have clarified accountability and overall interrelationships among country and regional offices and headquarters. We have streamlined oversight of UNICEF programmes; increased effective field management through the use of management teams; and developed new programme and financial-management information systems. We have integrated the supply function as a key programme strategy for building national capacities. Management excellence is helping UNICEF create a new internal management

culture, one that reflects enhanced standards of performance and accountability. And all of this has made it possible for UNICEF to coordinate its work more effectively with other parts of the United Nations system.

As part of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP), the chair of which UNICEF assumed in April, we have joined in several significant achievements with the core grouping of United Nations field-based operational bodies: the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

A common budget format has been approved by the Executive Boards of UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF. Policy guidelines have been developed for payments to national project personnel and for the mainstreaming of gender concepts from the Beijing Plan of Action. Draft guidelines now exist for the common country assessment, a common data base and situation analysis by the JCGP organizations. The first prototype assessment was prepared in Ghana, and two more are scheduled for completion by the end of August. And we now have common guidelines for field-level monitoring and evaluation.

It is in this spirit of accomplishment that we have entered into discussions on the prospective wider reform of the United Nations funds and programmes. We recognize the need for closer collaboration and coordination with our sister agencies, for greater coherence in planning, programming and implementation - and we are involved in energetic discussions on how to make that happen.

In this process, we are guided by the belief that our strongest support should go to reforms that enhance our capacity to promote the protection of children's rights, and to work for the survival and full development of children.

As you know, the Secretary-General has established four Executive Committees to serve as policy development and management instruments to strengthen the overall management of the United Nations system and to support the strategic planning process in each of the participating organizations. These Committees also represent the main paths along which reform will advance in the upcoming period. UNICEF is represented on two of them: the Committee on Development Operations and the Committee on Humanitarian Affairs.

We have asked to join the Committees on Economic and Social Affairs and on Peace and Security - and while we are not now represented on them, we nevertheless expect to be invited to join their deliberations whenever issues of direct relevance to UNICEF are raised.

I am also a member of the Policy Coordination Group - often referred to as the Secretary-General's Cabinet - that meets every other week and where reform issues are discussed regularly. In the five months of its existence, the Policy Coordination Group has also addressed issues as diverse as the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and gender issues in the United Nations, the Special Session of the General Assembly to Review and Appraise the Implementation of Agenda 21, as well as budgets, staffing, and oversight.

The Secretary-General has also created a Steering Committee on Reform, chaired by his Executive Coordinator for United Nations reform, Maurice Strong. While UNICEF is not a member of this panel, we have made our presence felt - most recently at a key meeting I attended on 9 May at which the main topic was the reform of the development operations bodies. The experience was a good one and provided an opportunity for me to express some of UNICEF's views and concerns. We understand that UNICEF will be a participant in all future meetings.

Up to now, the reform groups in which UNICEF has participated have been focusing on the so-called Track One proposals. As you are no doubt aware, these are the proposals for action announced on 17 March that the Secretary-General considers within his power and prerogative, and which can be implemented quickly. The main objective, which we entirely share with the Secretary-General, is to reduce administrative costs, streamline Secretariat functions, and better integrate United Nations activities at the country level.

This last category - country level operations - is obviously of greatest relevance to UNICEF.

Let me bring you up to date on where we stand with Track One:

At the country level, the Secretary-General has announced reforms in four areas. First, he intends to strengthen the role of the Resident Coordinator. Second, he will ask that the United Nations funds and programmes involved in development work prepare a common Development Assistance Framework. Third, he will step up the drive for common premises and services. And fourth, he will request that the heads of the funds and programmes ensure that their country staffs be headed by leaders who will meet the needs and requirements of developing countries.

These are significant measures, aimed at making operations more effective, particularly at the country level. The Development Assistance Framework, for example, is designed to provide the context for all United Nations activities in a country and to promote the harmonized development of individual country programmes. UNICEF is the chair of the subgroup that has taken the lead in developing this Framework. It will be prepared in consultation with Governments and outline the major themes and sectors for achieving goals set out at past United Nations conferences.

The concept of an overall framework was recently put to the test in Ghana. Here, the JCGP partners at country level, with support from other United Nations agencies, prepared a common country assessment identifying social and economic trends and highlighting key issues that the agencies jointly consider vital to the United Nations efforts to support Ghana's social development programme.

On the strengthening of the role of the Resident Coordinator, we want to benefit from the experiences of the past to develop a strengthened and more effective system. Through the Executive Committee on Development Operations, we are designing a management model for the Resident Coordinator system that remains based on current arrangements - namely funding and management links to UNDP. However, there will be major improvements aimed at meeting the concerns of partner funds and programmes.

Coordinators would generally come from an operational agency and would normally also serve as UNDP Resident Representative. Issues concerning the Resident Coordinator's authority, as well as reporting lines and accountability, are currently being addressed.

At present, two UNICEF staff members are serving as Resident Coordinators and two more will soon assume posts. UNICEF has increased the numbers of staff nominated for Resident Coordinator posts - and we have seconded a senior officer to work with UNDP's Office of United Nations System Support and Service, which is responsible for the Headquarters servicing of the Resident Coordinator system.

On another matter, we strongly support the Secretary-General's initiative to accelerate the drive for common premises and services. As chair of a subgroup on this issue within the Joint Consultative Group on Policy, UNICEF has endorsed a "fast track" approach.

UNICEF, on behalf of the JCGP agencies, is developing a collective data base to track and monitor field office operations more effectively. A presentation of the proposed system's capabilities was made to representatives from UNDP, UNFPA and WFP approximately six weeks ago. They were enthusiastic in their response and all are committed to getting the new data base up and running.

We think that each case for common premises should be examined in terms of cost-effectiveness - and if there are additional costs, they should be clearly identified.

UNICEF already benefits from government-provided premises in many areas - and the most desirable option, of course, would be for Governments to offer common premises in all locations.

Overall, Track One is proceeding at a good pace and all outstanding matters appear well on the way to resolution. We are confident the reforms will improve UNICEF's working relationships with the other funds and programmes, and will lead to more cost-effective programme delivery.

The Track Two initiatives are to be announced toward the middle of July - and UNICEF will help advance these more far-reaching reforms. The details of the Track Two proposals are still being developed, and as part of the consultative process leading to more specific ideas, I would like share with you my views on the nature of these broader reform proposals - and to pose several key questions.

There are two key areas of reform currently under discussion with direct relevance to UNICEF - development operations and humanitarian affairs. Let me deal first with humanitarian affairs.

The options under discussion include alternatives as far-reaching as the creation of a new humanitarian affairs agency into which the agencies handling emergencies would be consolidated. This would include UNICEF, the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and possibly, WFP.

In this scenario, UNHCR would effectively become the United Nations humanitarian organization, with wider powers than it currently has.

UNICEF, as you know, has already set out a strategic framework for strengthened inter-agency coordination in humanitarian operations, and we have been actively engaged in discussions to work out the possible inter-relationships between agencies under any new arrangement.

Besides basic child survival, development and protection imperatives that arise in humanitarian crises, UNICEF works for the care and protection of unaccompanied children; recuperation of child combatants; the reintegration of child soldiers into society; the maintenance of basic education for children in time of war; peace education; and trauma counseling.

We must ensure that these and other aspects of the child care and protection remain high on the humanitarian agenda, and that UNICEF, with its special developmental perspective, continue to be recognized as the leading advocate of "first call for children".

To this end, we are urging that measures be taken to guarantee the effectiveness and impartiality of the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, and that efforts continue to assure a stronger decision-making and consultative role for the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. UNICEF, meantime, will continue to solidify its support for the Coordinator by seconding experienced UNICEF personnel to senior headquarters and field positions.

Now let me turn to development operations, where we have a number of concerns - concerns that grow out of UNICEF's 50 years of experience in the field.

First, I can say without reservation that we in UNICEF enjoy working with our Executive Board as presently constituted. Our discussions are frank, substantive and knowledgeable. The level of mutual confidence and trust is high.

No doubt you have heard suggestions for the consolidation of several existing Executive Boards into a single Board that would operate in a manner similar to that of the World Bank. It is our hope that we can maintain the same degree of specialized knowledge, support and non-political dialogue in any future structure.

But what most concerns UNICEF is what happens in the field, because what we do at the country level is the paramount reason for this organization's existence.

In order to fulfil our mandate as set out in our Mission Statement - to be an advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential - UNICEF needs continued access to the senior political leadership of the countries in which we work. UNICEF's voice must remain strong and identifiable in the social and economic dialogue and in the planning process.

It is not an overstatement to say that our progress in ensuring the development and well-being of children and women, and in building support for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, will continue to depend on UNICEF's independent identity and voice.

Nor is it an overstatement to say that UNICEF's capacity for independent dialogue is the key factor that made possible Adjustment With a Human Face; the campaign for Universal Child Immunization; the convening of the World Summit for Children; the rapid near-universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the institution of "Days of Tranquility" and "Corridors of Peace" - and the Graca Machel report, the most comprehensive evaluation ever made of the effects of armed conflict on children.

In order to carry out its mandate, UNICEF must be able to continue its country programme. This means working in partnership with Governments and civil society, with collaborative input from the United Nations system. It means that UNICEF representatives, who are answerable to the Executive Director, must remain responsible for development and implementation of the country programme.

And it means retention of the capacity and authority to raise funds for UNICEF - for it is also not an overstatement to say that the existence of a discrete and unique UNICEF programme is the reason for our successful National Committee structure, a network that is now established in nearly 40 countries.

UNICEF programmes are the basis for our consistently high public recognition. They explain why, for over half a century, we have enjoyed the support of an unbroken string of Goodwill Ambassadors, from Danny Kaye to Audrey Hepburn, Peter Ustinov, Roger Moore, Harry Belafonte, Liv Ullman, Tetsuko Kuroyanagi, and of the broader community, including religious leaders, parliamentarians and representatives of many other non-governmental organizations.

But if UNICEF is obliged to seek permission or clearance before acting for children - let us say from an integrated field office, through which we would have to clear everything via a higher authority at the country level, a matter quite distinct from coordination and collaboration - then this organization would be a markedly different UNICEF.

We believe that within any collaborative and coordinated framework, it remains vital that we retain our capacity and authority to speak directly for children everywhere, to develop and implement discrete country programmes under your guidance, and to carry out our own fund raising. Those capabilities are at the heart of what we do.

In fact, it was just a few weeks ago that Mr. Strong wrote a letter to us asking for an outline of UNICEF's core functions. We provided one, in a formal reply on 30 April that we have shared with you. We told him that the varied facets of UNICEF's role - as an advocate for children's rights, as a provider of children's basic needs, and as a facilitator to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential - all grow out of our distinct organizational identity.

We said that UNICEF's singular focus on the well-being of the "whole child" involves an integrated approach to programming that no amalgamation of agencies could reasonably be expected to duplicate. This all-embracing strategy - combined with our "brand name", if you will - has allowed UNICEF to act as a moral force for children the world over. It has won us not only the support of Governments, but of a public constituency worldwide.

We said that UNICEF's concept of children as "citizens", with the same enduring spectrum of basic rights as adults, implies an approach to development

that no other United Nations agency is likely to employ. We said that no other United Nations agency can concentrate on issues of adolescence and youth with the clarity that the Convention on the Rights of the Child gives us.

We also pointed out that no other United Nations agency has the mandate UNICEF can claim in upholding the self-reinforcing principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

And all of this, we said, has enabled UNICEF to increase its private-sector fund raising to more than \$300 million a year, a blessing that helps sustain a worldwide structure of National Committees supported by hundreds of thousands of community volunteers. This, in turn, has made it possible to mobilize literally millions of people in the service of the UNICEF mandate - and by extension, the mandate of the whole United Nations system.

It is self-evident that no other United Nations agency speaks directly for children, day in and day out, globally and locally. If that voice is muted or even stilled, there is a real and present danger that children will become a lesser priority. They will drop down on the list of development and human rights concerns in country after country just as surely as night follows day. It is as grave and simple a matter as that.

We ask you, therefore, to consider the Track Two reform proposals, whatever their ultimate form, in light of a number of considerations.

Let me try to express these considerations forthrightly, but in a spirit of genuine respect and inquiry.

What effect will the Track Two proposals have on the nature and role of UNICEF? How would they work in detail? Will they improve operations in the field? Will they help mobilize additional resources for basic social services? Will they improve governance? And, most importantly, how will they serve the needs and rights of children?

I admit it sounds rather stark to put it this way. But I do so in the knowledge that UNICEF, from the very beginning, has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to reinvent itself as needed to confront the shifting challenges of the global environment. We will surely do so again.

You have seen and reaffirmed what we have been able to achieve internally at UNICEF. We eat, drink and sleep reform. But reform requires careful thought and reflection on all of its possible consequences, intended or unintended.

Above all, we must protect the things that work. That is part of my mandate as Executive Director.

I have been in this post for a little over two years now, and I must tell you that I still feel exactly the way I felt on my very first day: that I have the best job in the world.

Thirty-seven years ago, Henry Labouisse accepted the Nobel Peace Prize for UNICEF. It was a moment that summed up everything that UNICEF had become - and everything that it is still working to achieve.

The most important meaning of the Prize, Labouisse told his audience in Oslo, was "the solemn recognition that the welfare of today's children is inseparably linked with the peace of tomorrow's world".

That truth of that observation has not changed, nor has UNICEF's central and leading role as a strong and independent voice for children the world over.

I hope, personally, that you will not mind my speaking in so frank and open a fashion. The Secretary-General appointed me to this post. I feel that I do his bidding when I speak in support of UNICEF as an agency that attempts to bring honour to the United Nations family.

Thank you.
