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CF_Item_One_BC5-Top-Sign

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Date 1/9/2004
Time 3:00:20 PM
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CF/RAI/USAA/DB01/HS/1995-0022

Full Item Register Number [auto] **CF/RAI/USAA/DB01/HS/1995-0022**

ExRef: Document Series/Year/Number **CF/NYH/SEB/HST/1995-0022 ; CF/HST/INT/CRC/GRA**

Record Item Title

Board resltns, NGOs, Credit, K Gamble, 'Core of believers', 'Only so many first priorities' No UNICEF position, Convntn & CSDR, Third Wld, SAARC Summit

Date Created / on Item 11/4/1989 Date Registered 11/7/1995 Date Closed/Superceeded

Primary Contact
Owner Location Strategic Information Section = 6090
Home Location Strategic Information Section = 6090
Current Location History Related Records =60909132

Fd1: Type: IN, OUT, INTERNAL?
Fd2: Lang ?Sender Ref or Cross Ref CF/HST/INT/CRC/GRA
F3: Format CF/HST/INT/CRC/GRA

Container Record
Container Record (Title)

N1: Numb of pages 0 N2: Doc Year 1995 N3: Doc Number 22

Full GCG Code Plan Number

Da1:Date Published Da2:Date Received 10/30/1989 Date 3 10/30/1989 Priority

If Doc Series?: CF/RA/DS/USAA/DB01/2001-0001

Record Type A02a Item Hist Corr - CF/RAI/USAA/DB01/HS

Electronic Details No Document DOS File Name

Alt Bar code = RAMP-TRIM Record Numb : **CF/RAI/USAA/DB01/HS/1995-0022**

Notes

Archive Code Valid Date: 10/30/1989
Conv. & Western Values, RightsRatification, Role of UNICEF,Pitfalls, Broad themes, PublicExpctns, Child. First, Sudan
WU_Staff:

Print Name of Person Submit Images

Signature of Person Submit

Number of images without cover

JOHN MANFREDI

John Manfredi

1

JAMES GRANT
Executive Director
UNICEF
New York
(Saturday noon interview)

4 November 1989

PHS: What is our timing, now?

JG: I think we can have the next 45 minutes, is that enough?

PHS: Excellent. Let's see, you came to UNICEF after the draft of the Convention had already been submitted in the Commission on Human Rights. Did you hear about it before you came to UNICEF?

JG: Oh yes, I was the leader of the...I was the US representative on the Executive Board of UNICEF for three years before becoming ExDir. So it was at the May 1979 meeting of the ExBd in Mexico City that I first became fully aware of the proposal. It was stressed at that ExBd meeting by the Polish rep to the ExBd.

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And I can remember thinking then that this was highly unlikely to come into being in my working lifetime.

PHS: I think many people felt the same way, that it was an aspiration that would..

JG: Yes, I knew of the long-established reluctance of the US to sign conventions, and one that is felt by a number of other industrial countries on the basis that these aspirational conventions are easy to be aspirational, but very hard to be actually held to. And the US traditionally has been very reluctant. So I thought this was the general attitude in enough countries that I thought the Convention would not progress very far in the immediate future.

PHS: And was that view generally shared by the delegations on the ExBd at that time?

JG: I would say that this view, that the Convention was unlikely to materialize within a matter of a few years, was widely held, not only in the Board but by the UNICEF staff. This explains in part why in the early years, the early 80s, UNICEF basically monitored the process of work on the Convention, and even that rather lightly, and did not make a major significant contribution to its formulation then.

PHS: Then there clearly was an evolution in UNICEF's attitude and involvement with the Convention. When did that start?

JG: I think it came in, three things happened. First, those who were the dedicated proponents of the Convention, which included the NGOs, some governments including the Polish govt...were able to achieve more progress on the Convention than most people had thought likely. And by the mid-1980s, 84-85, one could visualize really for the first time how, with a concerted effort, this might be brought to adoption and ratification.

3 reasons
for
change
in U.
attitude