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Statement by Mr. James P. Grant, Executive Director of UNICEF (1993: 30 September), at the Roundtable Marking the Third Anniversary of the World Summit for Children

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Statement by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
Roundtable Marking the Third Anniversary
of the World Summit for Children

United Nations - 30 September 1993

We have before us the Secretary-General's comprehensive report on follow-up to the World Summit for Children. It describes what is happening globally and regionally, and what individual countries and international agencies are doing to implement the World Summit Plan of Action. It is an encouraging report, reflecting real progress in a majority of countries. It deserves wide readership.

To date, 154 countries -- including five here this week -- have now signed the Summit Declaration and Plan of Action. The great majority of these countries have issued, or have drafted, National Programmes of Action to reach the World Summit goals. Indeed, today nine out of ten children worldwide live in countries that have such programmes, putting the goals for the year 2000 into action. UNICEF urges that all countries be encouraged to sign the Summit Declaration and to complete National Programmes of Action during the coming year.

Also, a growing number of countries, such as Mexico, are decentralizing their efforts, drawing up action plans at the provincial and municipal levels to ensure community participation and effective monitoring of progress. More, particularly the larger, countries should find this decentralization useful.

To date, 148 countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child -- more than for any other human rights treaty. The challenge now is not only to achieve universal ratification by 1995, but of course to make sure that the Convention begins to have substance everywhere. Normally this is a process that takes many years, but we already have encouraging illustrations from a growing number of countries of the start of meaningful implementation. The National Programmes of Action are a practical demonstration of this. The 24 countries that have

not yet taken action on the Convention, identified in the Secretary-General's Report, should be encouraged to take early action on ratification, and certainly by 1995, as called for by the Vienna Conference on Human Rights.

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It is noteworthy that over the last year regional groupings of countries have identified mid-decade goals whose achievement would -- as we have heard here today -- result in saving the lives of an additional two million children a year by 1996, and in removing the single largest cause of preventable mental impairment in the world. This commendable initiative of so many developing countries to commit themselves to mid-decade goals deserves every encouragement from donors and international financial institutions.

The most critical test of this process will come over the next year, when we will see the extent to which the industrial countries provide the increased resource support that they pledged at the World Summit for Children. U.S. President Bill Clinton told the General Assembly this week: "We are compelled to do better by the world's children... It's the best investment we'll ever make."

At the OAU-sponsored meeting in Dakar last November, attended by 44 African ministerial delegations and 18 delegations from donor countries and institutions, the donors -- responding to the initiatives of African countries -- pledged to "increase and sustain the share of ODA commitment to social priority sectors by 1995... bearing in mind the level of 20 per cent of total ODA for these sectors, recommended in the UNDP's Human Development Report for 1992." It was encouraging to hear Prime Minister Gro Brundtland of Norway reiterate this week that 20 per cent of ODA should be allocated to "helping the poor meet their needs for food, water, sanitation, basic health care, family planning and education for their children." She said Norway would treat this percentage as a "minimum requirement" and urged other donors to do so as well.

If successful, our sprint toward the mid-decade goals would do more for the well-being of children, in a shorter period of time, and at lower cost, than any other undertaking in history. What better gift could we give our children -- the future of all our countries -- on the 50th anniversary of the United Nations!