

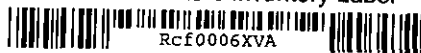
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Address by Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
at the  
Opening of the Special Session of the Executive Board  
on the World Summit for Children

New York  
6 September 1990



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1990 Session

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First, Madame Chairperson, may I say how appropriate it is that you who endorsed, and put your personal weight behind, the idea of the Summit even in its earliest stages, should now be presiding over this special session of the Executive Board. I look forward to an especially close co-operation with you in the coming year, and assure you of the UNICEF Secretariat's full support to you and your colleagues in the extraordinary tasks ahead of us all. Your own knowledge of UNICEF, both as Chairperson of the Swedish National Committee and in your Executive Board role - including your travels in the field - will serve us all well during this time.

Before turning to the special topic of this meeting, the World Summit for Children, I should make a brief reference to UNICEF's response to the Middle East situation and its impact on children, and to note the availability of the paper on Key Developments Relevant to UNICEF since the UNICEF Executive Board Meeting in April 1990.

While attention in the current mid-East crisis has focussed on the political/diplomatic/military situation, as always, women and children are among the first to suffer. UNICEF is already providing hundreds of thousands of dollars in essential drugs and medical supplies, shelter, mattresses and bedding, water and sanitation equipment, and milk; and as part of the overall

UN-relief effort has appealed for more than \$1(US) million. A multi-million dollar UNICEF appeal should be issued later this week. UNICEF assistance has already helped establish a camp near Madaba in Jordan where some 5,000 women and children are being sheltered. With the governments, UNICEF and UNWRA has distributed 40 per cent high-protein biscuits.

We will be hearing shortly about the Summit in greater detail from Ambassador Yves Fortier on behalf of the Planning Committee, Ambassador Noumou Diakete on behalf of Minister Abdoulaye Diallo, Chairman of the Working-group on Format and from Ambassador Hans Dahlgren, Chairman of the Working-group on the Declaration and Plan of Action. The role of the Executive Board is advisory on the Draft Declaration and Plan of Action for the World Summit and on its format, and required for authorizing budgets for the World Summit, and for the support of mobilization activities associated with the Summit as well as increasing awareness and to strengthen commitment to programmes for children.

I should say at this point - some three weeks before the Summit takes place - that while numerous details remain, much has been accomplished already. It is already clear that on present indications this is going to be the largest gathering of Heads of State and Government in history - some 75 have formally accepted, more than a dozen more have indicated attendance is quite likely. Only 30 have declined and 42 have yet to be heard from. This number substantially exceeds any expectation which might have seemed reasonable at the time of the Board meeting in April. Well over half of the Heads of State or Government of the Executive Board have indicated their intention to participate and more than one-third of the countries of the UNICEF Executive Board have participated in the work of the Planning Committee. A comprehensive, and if I may be permitted to say, excellent Draft Declaration and Plan of Action is before you after what is probably the most extensive participation ever in a Summit Declaration with only details yet to be agreed upon.

The Progress Report on Preparations for the World Summit for Children, Document E/ICEF/1990/16, provides some idea of the breadth and depth of the effort and action which already has resulted from this extraordinary initiative. I would like to highlight here two of the beneficial results already achieved:

First, the Convention on the Rights of the Child entered into force last Sunday, 10 months after its endorsement by the General Assembly. This is the most expeditious entering into force of any human rights convention - the first ever in less than one year. There is no question but that the focus on children's issues which the Summit has provided at the highest levels of government has helped accelerate the process. So far 105 countries have signed the Convention and 31 have ratified it.

A second effect has been the additional boost given in many countries to the final drive toward the achievement of universal child immunization (UCI) by the end of this year. It is clear from UNICEF country office reports that UCI - and consequently millions of children - has been one of the major beneficiaries of mobilization around the objectives of the World Summit for Children. These efforts have sought both to raise public awareness and to

generate additional mobilization and resources - particularly governmental, non-governmental and religious.

At the policy-making level, these affects are interconnected and mutually-reinforcing, not only in themselves but with the goals for children and development in the 1990s, which in turn are showing how the World Summit for Children is already beginning to have its effects on the future.

That future is the concern of the Draft Declaration and Plan of Action for the World Summit for Children which are now before you. These are, as you can see, anchored upon, and providing a powerful boost to, those same goals for Children and Development in the 1990s, approved by the Executive Board at its April 1990 session. As noted earlier, more than one-third of the member countries of the Executive Board have participated in the Planning Committee responsible for their drafting.

The Draft Declaration seeks support for the Plan of Action, not only from the United Nations system, regional and other international bodies, national governments and non-governmental organizations, but from children themselves - as partners in the challenge to action.

The Draft Plan of Action is intended as a follow-up implementation guide for national governments, international organizations, bilateral aid agencies, non-governmental organizations, and indeed all sectors of society. And it stresses at the outset that progress for children should be not only a key goal of overall national development but also an integral part of the broader international development strategy for a fourth United Nations Development Decade. The Draft Plan indeed sets out broad lines for "concerted national action and international co-operation" towards the goals for survival, protection and development of children by the year 2,000.

Part III of the Plan of Action in paragraphs 33 thru 36, spells out proposals for follow-up action at the national level and action at the international level, including a specific request that UNICEF "prepare, in close collaboration with the relevant specialized agencies and other United Nations organs, a consolidated analysis of the plans and actions undertaken by individual countries and the international community in support of the child-related development goals for the 1990s." It provides that "the governing bodies of the relevant specialized agencies and United Nations organs are requested to include a periodic review of the implementation of the Declaration and this Plan of Action at their regular sessions and to keep the General Assembly of the United Nations, through the Economic and Social Council, fully informed of progress to date and additional action required during the decade ahead." It requests the Secretary General of the United Nations to arrange for a mid-decade review, at all appropriate levels, of the progress being made towards implementing the commitments of the Declaration and Plan of Action.

I have already noted the extraordinary and positive reaction to the World Summit for Children evidenced by the number of Heads of State and Government who have decided to attend. This unexpectedly large response - virtually double the informal estimates made at the time of the April Board session - has inevitable financial implications for the Summit budget.

The request before you is to raise the ceiling for the Summit meeting from \$1,500,000 to \$2,994,762 and the ceiling for mobilization activities from \$2,000,000 to \$2,139,683. On the basis of the encouraging experience to-date in fund raising for the Summit and for mobilization activities associated with the Summit, and with the continued active support of the Executive Board, I am confident that the approximately \$1.5 million in additional voluntary contributions can be raised. Contributions can be received after as well as before the actual date of the Summit.

Virtually all the increased costs for the Summit meeting are based on an upward revision of the cost of services and facilities to be provided by the United Nations, including the rearrangement of various rooms to properly accommodate such a number of attending Heads of Government and State. Even at this increased level the Summit is by far the lowest cost of any major summit ever.

The increase in mobilization activities reflects the larger-than-projected demand for materials, some of which had to be expanded to include additional information. Some also had to be reprinted at short notice.

The cost of contracting, to the United Nations Secretariat or to others, the specialized functions which are not part of UNICEF's work and mandate is, of course, both necessary and simple commonsense. Mobilization of course is an every day part of our regular work. The past decade has amply demonstrated its value both for specific programmes of action at country level and for international support and reinforcement provided to that country level action.

In the context of the World Summit for Children, I will cite just two more examples of this kind of benefit for our work in addition to the accelerated progress cited earlier on the Convention and on Universal Child Immunization:

- In Sierra Leone, where the programme mobilization strategy is based on structures of the community and the society, nearly 200 mini-summits have been and are being held in the country's 150 chiefdoms and 12 district capitals, involving more than 17,000 decision makers. Other mini-summits will involve teachers, health professionals and non-governmental workers. These will feed into a national summit for children immediately preceding the President's departure for the World Summit for Children. The plan is for the national summit to reconvene upon his return in order to draw up workplans for national and local action.

- As the Draft Declaration points out, the participation of children is a particular objective of the Summit. Two weeks ago in Ecuador, I was presented with the results of a remarkable example of children's participation in a national poll on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Some 180,000 children took part in 25 cities, using the regular electoral machinery of Ecuador. They chose among rights grouped into 14 broad areas. In voting for the right most important to them, they chose not the right to play, but the right to protection from drugs, sexual abuse and all forms of violence. Their second preference was the right to be informed by the Government, school and

parents of what their rights were. The ballots listing 14 categories of rights were cast in official election ballot boxes at electoral district centres. The poll was sponsored by the Ecuadorian Supreme Electoral Tribunal, the Central Bank of Ecuador's Working Children Programme, Defence for Children International and UNICEF. As an exercise in raising not only children's consciousness but that of their parents and communities, the impact of this initiative was enormous. By the time it was concluded, a public opinion poll in urban areas showed that over 80 per cent of both Ecuadorian adults and children in the 6 to 14 year age bracket were aware of the Convention. I might note, parenthetically, that the President of Ecuador plans to include two children in his delegation to the Summit.

Assuming the Draft Declaration and Plan of Action are adopted, the Summit will generate its own national and international follow-up - encompassing both the nature of, and a process for, continuing action. On 28 and 29 September, even before the Summit meets, the Child Survival Task Force and the Tidewater Group of ministers and development agency heads, respectively, will be meeting to consider follow-up action. This is action which should reinforce and accelerate an international tide that is already turning for children. We have already had the adoption and early ratification of the Convention, the deliberations and declaration of commitment to the goals of basic education at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, in March; and the agreement on goals for child health emerging from the Child Survival Task Force and the WHO-UNICEF Joint Committee on Health Policy which were then accepted by the World Health Assembly, and by this Executive Board in April. And we will shortly have what I am sure will be complementary conclusions from the International Water and Sanitation Conference in New Delhi.

These international commitments have been echoed in the last few months by influential reports from two key international agencies in the field of development assistance - the World Bank and UNDP - which have concluded with UNICEF that development begins with people - and that the well-being of the child is not only a principal objective of people-centred development, but also a major means of achieving that development.

In short, a remarkable consensus is emerging in international thinking on development. And it is a consensus to which the World Summit for Children is in part a tribute and, in another sense, a capstone...crowning the dedicated work of thousands of people at every level - in governments, non-governmental organizations, and international agencies - involved in the work which has led to the articulation of this agenda for children for the 1990s.

Finally, let me suggest that when history considers this period it will conclude that a deep debt of gratitude is owed to the Initiating Heads of State and Government and their Personal Representatives and to the Planning Committee for the decision to hold this Summit and for all their creativity and many hours of work which have gone into making it a reality. And I believe the UNICEF Executive Board and Secretariat can be proud of their contribution towards this historically unprecedented World Summit for Children.