

File Sub: CF/EXD/SP/1993-0034

DRAFT

Address by Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
at the  
Second International Colloquium of Mayors  
"Defenders of Children"

Mexico City, Mexico  
5 July 1993



UNICEF Alternate Inventory Label



**Item # CF/RAD/USAA/DB01/2002-01173**

**ExR/Code: CF/EXD/SP/1993-0034**

Defenders of Children Second International Colloquium of  
Date Label Printed 21-Aug-2002

cover + 8pp + Øb

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I am delighted to be here with you today... with people who are in the forefront of actions for children. I would like to take this opportunity to warmly thank the co-hosts of this second International Colloquium of Mayors, Defenders of Children: Mayor Manuel Camacho-Solis of Mexico City and Mayor Mamadou Diop of Dakar, Senegal. Both have played key roles in building and promoting this innovative and promising worldwide movement of mayors. Both have impressive records as municipal leaders who have accomplished a great deal for their children and poor communities. We owe thanks to Mr. Aldo Farina, President of the Italian National Committee for UNICEF, whose work with Italian mayors planted the seeds of this global mayors' initiative for children. Recognition is also due many others who are with us today -- too many distinguished friends and colleagues to name individually.

We all know that the problems and needs of the children and families in your cities are quite staggering. You are all familiar with them; you know them because you grapple with them every day. You, the mayors and governors of metropolitan areas, are on the front line.

Faced with such an array of problems; under public pressure to come up with solutions; caught in the crossfire of conflicting interest groups and the demands of diverse power centres; and constrained by shrinking municipal budgets and dwindling support from central governments, local officials often feel their hands are tied. The problems they face are so many, so diverse and of such a magnitude that the temptation is to improvise and run around putting out fires, to resort to band-aids instead of lasting solutions, to cater to the powerful while paying lip-service to the needs of the poor. As a result, public opinion polls show that dissatisfaction with municipal leadership runs high in both the industrialized and developing worlds; voters are throwing long-entrenched politicians out of office; urban apathy and extremism conspire to undermine democracy.

Fortunately, the recent global trend toward democratization that accompanied the end of the Cold War is working against these common dilemmas of urban politics. All of us are feeling and

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democracies, where voters have a chance of holding politicians to their promises, leaders are coming to understand that making children a high priority is not only morally right, it is smart politics and good for the future development of the city as well.

In September 1990, the winds of change brought 71 heads of state or government -- and high-level representatives of 88 other countries -- to UN headquarters in New York for the World Summit for Children. Mexico's President Salinas de Gortari was one of its six initiators and he has, ever since, served as a role model of how to keep the promise of that historic event, which so increased the priority given to children in the world, provided a tremendous impetus and acceleration to the Convention of the Rights of the Child, now with 142 ratifications, the most universal human rights convention, and set 27 quantified goals to be achieved by the year 2000.

I believe that historians of the next century will look back at the World Summit for Children and say that a major new approach to development had its origins there.

For the first time since the dawn of history, humankind is massively engaged in planning for its young. More than 85 countries, developing and industrialized alike, have issued the National Programmes of Action (NPAs) they promised to prepare. Thirty others have issued drafts of their National Programmes of Action and another 30 are actively working on them. We calculate that about 89 per cent of the world's children now live in countries with NPAs either finalized or in draft form. Think about it ... this is something new, something quite revolutionary ... NPAs for children in the vast majority of countries would have been unthinkable only five years ago.

What else is new and revolutionary about the NPAs? Goal-setting and deadline-setting, for one thing. For the first time on such a scale, national leaders and governments are making social policy by setting precise goals and saying exactly when and how they propose to reach them. In many of the NPAs -- not enough of them yet, but many -- there is an indication of how much it will all cost and where the money will come from. Another thing is the breadth of involvement in both the preparation and the implementation of the NPAs. A wide range of actors participate: not just the social sector ministries (traditionally the only ones concerned with children) but ministries of finance, planning, agriculture and environment as well; not just government entities but also private enterprise, religious groups, civic organizations and NGOs. Instead of high-tech, the social interventions and programmes described in the NPAs are overwhelmingly no-tech or low-tech, are geared toward preventing rather than merely reacting to problems, and are based on low-cost but high-impact technologies and know-how. And rather than a traditional top-down, central bureaucracy-driven approach, most of the NPAs envision a

decentralized process that allows for local initiative and flexibility and depends ultimately on community participation for success.

This is why your role, mayors and governors, is so important. In translating your countries' National Programmes of Action into municipal plans of action, you too will be embarking on a new approach to development. The synergy between well-designed municipal, provincial and national plans of action can activate the very fabric of your societies to accelerate social progress. I urge all of you to follow Mexico City's example and develop action plans for your municipalities. This will not only enable you to take advantage of national and state plans of action, but also to mobilize your own city.

I am certain every one of you is well-informed about the year 2000 goals set by the world's leaders in 1990. A list of them has been included in your conference packets. What you may not be as aware of is the set of mid-decade targets agreed upon by governments and a variety of development partners over the past year, in a series of important high level regional meetings. I have just come from the African Summit Meeting in Cairo with 52 countries participating, including 32 heads of state and government, where they endorsed the 1995 goals for Africa. These goals naturally vary from region to region, but a core of them -- with potential for universal application -- has now been endorsed by the governing bodies of the World Health Organization and UNICEF. We consider them doable -- not "easy", exactly, but quite feasible -- in the short run and at very low cost. Nations and cities taking up this new challenge will see real, visible, measurable, remarkable results in only two to two-and-a-half years! Achieving these goals by 1995 -- year of the UN's 50th anniversary and of the World Summit on Social Development -- will greatly facilitate and accelerate efforts toward reaching the full range of year 2000 goals.

As I describe some of these mid-decade targets, I hope you will mentally travel back home and imagine what their impact would be among your constituents.

1. **Immunization** -- the world reached the extraordinary immunization goal of 80 per cent coverage in 1990. But immunization isn't something that's done once and never again; every child needs to get four or five immunizations by their first birthday. Our challenge is to build health systems and immunization networks that can sustain high levels of coverage, particularly in urban areas with their dense populations in which communicable diseases spread so rapidly. The world's minimum standard is now 80 per cent, going up to 90 per cent by the year 2000. But in the case of measles -- the most lethal of vaccine-preventable diseases -- and

tetanus toxoid for women of child-bearing age, 90 per cent coverage is the mid-decade goal. It will take high-profile campaigns and special efforts to reach the measles and tetanus targets by 1995, particularly in the city slum areas where epidemics spread faster and the young are more vulnerable. Savings in hospitalization will more than pay the costs. And with sustained high coverage with polio vaccine, whole countries and several regions can be made "polio-free" by 1995. With your personal leadership, it can be done in your city and country.

2. **Oral rehydration therapy (ORT)** -- most of you have seen me wave this little packet around before; forgive me for suggesting it, but if you also started carrying and showing it around, awareness of this life-saving miracle costing a few pennies would skyrocket in your municipality. Providing this simple mixture of salts and sugar in fluids can save more lives than any other single action. Doubling current ORT usage rates to 80 per cent by 1995 is our mid-decade goal. This alone would save the lives of an additional 3,000 children a day by December 1995. It also provides the best first line of defense against cholera as has been so effectively demonstrated in Peru. Here in Mexico City you can hear public service announcements on radio and television educating people that "**esta es la solucion**" (this is the solution) -- and deaths due to diarrhoea have reportedly dropped an amazing 50 per cent, following the pattern we have seen in so many other cities, such as Calcutta, Djakarta and Cairo. There is no single intervention which can save more lives at lower cost - and can be marvelous politics as well.

3. **Iodization of salt** -- Iodine deficiency is the single largest cause of preventable mental retardation and underdevelopment in the world. You could boost IQs, school performance and future productivity at an extraordinarily low cost by seeing to it that your constituents consume iodized salt. You could lobby your national governments and legislatures to pass laws requiring that all salt be iodized. Many can enact such regulations through urban health authorities - insisting that health inspectors include spot checks for iodized salt in their regular rounds. By 1995 iodine deficiencies can be virtually eliminated.

4. **Vitamin A** -- lack of this vital micronutrient found in green and yellow vegetables is the leading cause of blindness among children and it also contributes to up to a third of all child deaths. You can see to it that a single capsule costing pennies is provided to every child

twice a year -- starting at six months of age -- virtually wiping out the deficiency by 1995. And you can popularize the eating of green leaves and yellow vegetables by young children - many will remember "have a carrot to improve your vision".

**5. Breastfeeding** -- More than a million babies would not have died last year if only their mothers had effectively breastfed them for the first several months of their lives. And most of these deaths occurred in cities where low-income mothers by the millions have shifted to infant formula in the very areas where sanitation and clean water is at its worst and where babies most need the protection against so many diseases protected against by the immunities provided through mothers' milk. You can help reverse the harmful trend toward bottle-feeding by immediately requiring all hospitals to support mothers in breastfeeding their newborns; by putting a halt to the distribution of free samples of formula through hospitals and maternity centres; by promoting establishment of day-care centres in your cities, with priority for working mothers; and by a massive health education campaign, particularly in slum areas where every mother has the right to know the terrible dangers for her and her children of infant formula. Cost-free breastmilk saves babies' lives, protects their health, and spurs physical and intellectual development.

**6. Basic education** -- the key year 2000 goals are to ensure that all children have access to primary education; that 80 per cent of those who enroll graduate; and that the gender gap is reduced at the primary level. By 1995, we should narrow by one third the gaps in these three vital areas: enrollment, retention and gender disparity. You have the schools, double session if necessary. Kids in school are off the streets, kids in school are out of the overcrowded labour market; and they have a future in urban employment. Cities can only thrive with an educated population; people in cities much more so than in rural areas, can only thrive with basic education.

**7. Water and sanitation** -- Talk about low cost solutions even in cities - deep tube wells and communal latrines (well designed) at one tenth the cost of piped water and sewage systems. The Karachi slum of ORANGI provides a good example: 500,000 people made their own household latrines and drains to the street - the government provided the large system hook-up and disposal capacity. You could say the whole city organized around latrines. Here again, the World Summit called for universal access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation by

decade's end. The mid-decade goals are to narrow the gaps in water supply by one fourth, and in sanitation, by one tenth. Solid waste disposal is an especially critical problem in peri-urban communities, deserving greater attention from municipal authorities.

learn from each other: cities like Karachi, Izmir and many others have sound multi-year temporary solution that cost only a small fraction of traditional programmes.

**8. Children in especially difficult circumstances** -- although there is no quantifiable mid-decade goal in this area, there is still an urgent need to continue and step up actions for children forced by poverty or abuse into the streets and into sweatshops; for children and youth who are subject to sexual exploitation and substance abuse; for children who are traumatized by violence and conflict. This is overwhelmingly an urban - a city - challenge. Many cities and NGOs -- especially religious organizations -- have developed successful programmes that can serve as models. A major focus needs to be placed on children's rights, and here I'd urge all of you to use the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a vehicle for educating and mobilizing your communities to respect the rights of the young.

These are the main mid-decade goals for children. You'll find a full list in your conference packets. If you and your nations achieve the goals, then by the end of 1995 the lives of another **5,000 children a day, 2 million a year** will be saved, and your children will be stronger and healthier, better equipped to learn and contribute to the brighter future each of you is trying to build.

Achievement of these goals will begin to weaken poverty's grip on communities, families and individuals. That is because frequent illness, malnutrition, poor growth, illiteracy, high birth rates and gender bias are not only among poverty's worst symptoms, they are also some of its most fundamental causes. The new approach I am describing enables poor families and communities to give the first vulnerable months and years of a child's life something of the protection and nurturing which is given as a matter of course to children fortunate enough to be born into affluence. Strong local and national leadership, and increased international cooperation, that can make the difference between slow and dramatic progress in combatting poverty.

Many of you have already undertaken impressive programmes in your cities -- permit me to mention a few:

\* Governor Algawsaky of Alexandria began as early as 1988 -- following up on President Mubarak's proclamation

of the Egyptian Decade of the Child -- to develop the first integrated programme in Egypt for poor urban children, providing health, education and a range of other basic services.

\* When she took office as the U.S. capital's first woman mayor, Sharon Pratt Kelly found Washington, D.C. lagging far behind most of the Third World in levels of immunization. She immediately took action to catch up. Now when a child is born, Mayor Kelly sends a letter to the parents congratulating them and reminding them of the importance of immunization, how and where to get it done, and other measures that will help them care for their child's health. There is a tracking system for following up. A good start has been made; much remains to be done.

\* We at UNICEF were proud to present this year's Maurice Pate Award to the people and State of Ceará, located in Brazil's poverty-stricken Northeast. Governor Ciro Gomes was unable to be with us today, but we will be hearing from his associate on all that the Governor and the people of Ceará have accomplished. Working together, and mainly through the mobilization of thousands of grassroots health workers, Ceará was able to reduce infant mortality by one third in only three years!

\* We are glad to have Mayor Lim of Manila and Mayor Gordon of Olangapo City with us today. They are sponsors of some of the most successful urban basic services programmes for children and youth in the Philippines. Programmes address the whole gamut of human need in poor urban settings. Here again, participation by communities is proving fundamental.

\* We are very pleased to have four mayors of major cities in Bangladesh here. They have all formulated local plans of action aimed at achieving the goals for the 1990s. Their plans have reached my desk and are impressive indeed. I was especially fascinated by their special efforts aimed at getting girls from poor urban communities to enroll and stay in school.

\* I have already mentioned some of Mexico City's achievements. You will be seeing some of them with your own eyes this week. Mayor Camacho-Solis has performed miracles in immunization and oral rehydration therapy; has helped street children immeasurably; has promoted the Baby Friendly Hospital campaign with great success, and has taken energetic and increasingly effective measures against environmental pollution. He has formulated a detailed and innovative municipal plan of action in the framework of Mexico's NPA.

I am sure you are going to have much to talk about, many ideas to exchange over the next two days. Each city is different, but there are common urban problems crying out for affordable, bold and creative solutions. I believe that provincial and municipal plans of action, closely integrated with your countries' NPAs, can provide a new way of dealing with many of them.

I still remember how moving and exhilarating it was to see Dakar's Mayor Diop -- as it was in November last year -- solemnly raise his right hand and pledge to serve as a "Defender of Children". He did this in a public ceremony before the entire municipal council, with scores of the city's children as witnesses. I would hope it's something all of you plan to do -- and plan to ask your colleagues from other cities in your country to do. This "Mayors, Defenders of Children" initiative has the potential to become a powerful global movement.

Let me suggest, at the risk of sounding somewhat frivolous, that we follow the example set by an obscure high-jumper right here in Mexico City, at the 1968 Olympics. Dick Fosbury jumped 7 feet 4 inches and won the gold medal that year by making a seemingly small -- but in fact, quite radical -- modification in traditional highjump style: instead of going over the bar face- and belly-downward, as was customary, he twisted in mid-air and went over face-upward, gaining extra inches and revolutionizing the sport. His feat came to be known among high-jumpers as the "Fosbury flop."

I think you have just such an opportunity today -- to make a "Fosbury flop" of your own where, by changing the traditional style of municipal governing and the way in which children's needs are met, tremendous "Olympic Gold Medal" types of success can be achieved at no significant additional cost. The Child Survival and Development Revolution of the last decade, which has saved about 20 million child lives already, will give you momentum for your leap. Your personal leadership, the municipal plan of action and the package of interventions I've described can be the "twist" you need. And yes, the favorable winds of change I mentioned earlier -- democratization, decentralization and community empowerment -- they, too, can help you over the bar ... at a height you never dreamed possible.

Thank you and best of luck in your deliberations.